

THE SINS OF THE SONS:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GUILT, ATONEMENT AND REDEMPTION
IN KAFKA'S *DIE VERWANDLUNG* AND THOMAS MANN'S *DER ERWÄHLTE*
WITH REFERENCE TO HARTMANN VON AUE'S *GREGORIUS*

by

HELEN ELIZABETH HUNTER

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Department of German Studies
College of Arts and Law
The University of Birmingham
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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a comparative analysis of Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* and Thomas Mann's *Der Erwählte*, two texts linked by their respective relationships to Hartmann von Aue's *Gregorius*. Bearing in mind this background source, it seeks to illuminate the complex issues of guilt, atonement and redemption addressed in both texts, through their consideration within a familial context. Like Hartmann's 'good sinner', Kafka and Mann's protagonists occupy a curious position between guilt and innocence, suffering for sins for which they are, at most, partially culpable. Examining the origins of guilt in each text, it becomes clear that their predicament is inseparable from their filial roles: since a crisis of role distinctions within the family in each case predates and motivates the son's actions, he appears caught in a chain of transgressions, and burdened with inherited guilt as with original sin. The protagonist's ordeal may thus be read as a representative act of atonement, whereby the son removes in his person the communal guilt he bears, liberating the family. Ultimately, however, each author presents a very different familial redeemer: while Mann's filial saviour is resurrected and reintegrated, Kafka's protagonist is a true scapegoat, irrevocably excluded in death.

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INTRODUCTION

Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*, written in 1912, and Thomas Mann's *Der Erwählte*, first published in 1951, are two works with a little-explored connection: Hartmann von Aue's *Gregorius*, the main medieval source on which Mann's late novel is based, has also been identified as a potential influence on Kafka's much earlier novella.¹ Indeed, while the themes of guilt, atonement and redemption central to Hartmann's legend are more explicitly addressed in Mann's reworking than in Kafka's more distantly related text,² the figure of Gregorius, as a son unwittingly incurring guilt and ultimately redeeming his family through an isolated ordeal, is undoubtedly related to Kafka's Gregor Samsa in more than name alone. Kafka and Mann's works, are, however, not merely associated via this shared medieval connection, but, intriguingly, by common ground extending beyond this link, as both authors introduce elements of Oedipal psychology and radical metamorphosis to their presentation of the protagonist's fate.³

Using Hartmann's *Gregorius* as a primary point of reference, this thesis will undertake a comparative analysis of *Die Verwandlung* and *Der Erwählte*, seeking to address two fundamental problems facing the reader of both works: what is the nature of 'Schuld' (meaning alternately guilt and debt), if it oppresses a protagonist whose culpability is highly questionable? And what is the significance of the radical isolation and transformation this

¹ Brief references to this potential link are made by Holland and Politzer and are later expanded on by Weinberg and Köhnke. See: Norman N. Holland, 'Realism and Unrealism: Kafka's *Metamorphosis*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 4 (1958), 143-150 (p. 149); Heinz Politzer, *Franz Kafka: Parable and Paradox* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1962), p. 77; Kurt Weinberg, *Kafkas Dichtungen: Die Travestien des Mythos* (Berne: Francke, 1963), pp. 237-242; Klaus Köhnke, 'Kafka's "guoter sündare": Zu der Erzählung *Die Verwandlung*', *Acta Germanica*, 6 (1971), 107-20.

² For this reason it will generally be most useful in the course of comparison to discuss *Der Erwählte* first, despite its later date of publication.

³ Despite this, direct comparison is rare, the notable exception being Sean Ireton, 'Die Transformation zweier Gregors: Thomas Manns *Der Erwählte* and Kafkas *Die Verwandlung*', *Monatshefte*, 90 (1998), 34-48.

character endures? I will propose that the paradox of the son's atonement for a guilt not rationally attributable to him may be illuminated by its consideration within a familial framework. Indeed, the nature of the protagonist as a filial character is of vital importance both to the incurring of and the liberation from guilt in each case, as familial crisis is manifested in filial guilt, and filial sacrifice facilitates familial redemption. By investigating these twin processes, and so establishing how, in each text, the cycle of guilt, atonement and redemption relates to the role of the son within the family, I intend to determine more closely the meaning of these concepts in Kafka and Mann's individual works and to ascertain the extent of the similarity between their respective 'Gregors'.

CHAPTER ONE
 FILIAL GUILT IN FAMILIAL CONTEXT:
 THE NATURE AND ORIGINS OF GUILT

The guilt of the son in both *Die Verwandlung* and *Der Erwählte* is a concept closely bound up with familial structures. In both cases we are presented with a family in extreme disorder: a series of crises leads to confusion within the family unit, as roles conflict and combine, implicitly or explicitly implicating the son in a web or, more accurately, a chain of guilt. To understand his predicament, therefore, and the significance of his act of atonement, we must first examine these familial mechanisms. In this chapter I will consider the peculiar position of the son within the family in crisis, in order to establish how filial guilt in each case springs from, or manifests itself in disordered family relationships.

Since the confusion of family roles is explicitly thematised in Mann's presentation of double incest, I will start by analysing the position of the son in *Der Erwählte*. Here, we are in fact presented with two filial characters, not only Gregorius, but also his father Wiligis, from whose transgression the former stems, and whose transgression he ultimately repeats. Wiligis' actions are thus the root of subsequent disorder; examined closely, however, they are themselves born of an existing familial crisis. Since the birth of the twins, Wiligis and Sibylla, causes the death of their mother, the anticipated completion of Herzog Grimald's family becomes its fatal destabilisation.¹ This disturbance of order results in a peculiar self-perception on the part of the twins and an altered paternal relationship, leading to a manifestation of familial confusion in sibling incest.

¹ Thomas Mann, *Der Erwählte*, in *Gesammelte Werke in dreizehn Bänden* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1990), VII, pp. 9-261 (p. 19). Henceforth references to this edition will be given in parentheses in the text proper, using the abbreviation E, followed by the page number, e.g. (E 19).

Wiligis' comments to his sister prior to this first instance of incest clearly indicate the link between the experience of his mother's death and a strong sense of shared exceptionality: 'unser beider ist niemand wert', he claims, 'sondern wert ist eines nur des anderen, da wir völlig exceptionelle Kinder sind, von Gebürte hoch [...] und zusammen aus dem Tode geboren mit unseren vertieften Zeichen ein jedes auf seiner Stirn' (DE 28). Through the circumstances of their birth, the twins are thus associated with a kind of decadent exceptionality, a noble, yet ominous, 'Ausnahmenatur', that relates them to many of Thomas Mann protagonists.² As in *Tonio Kröger*, this sense of being 'marked out' is exemplified not only by the motif of 'adlig-zigeunerischen Aussehen',³ but specifically by the mark on the protagonists' foreheads.⁴ The twins' 'Zeichen', however, differ from Tonio's tragically isolating mark of Cain, not only due to the ironic concession that they hail 'zwar nur von den Windpocken' (E 28), but in their function as a hallmark exemplifying the twins' status as 'Gegenstücke' (E 27), their shared exceptionality.

This shared experience of isolation based on a common fateful origin and manifested in shared physical exceptionality, clearly results in an esoteric fixation on one another, which associates the pair in fact most closely with the twins Siegmund and Sieglinde of Mann's short story *Wälsungenblut* (1905), who, in Weigand's view, enjoy literary 'reincarnation' in *Der Erwählte*.⁵ Indeed, the Wagnerian influence on these earlier characters, whose exclusive relationship culminates in incest inspired by *Die Walküre*, is also apparent in *Der Erwählte*, as

² Hugo Kuhn, 'Der gute Sünder – Der Erwählte?', in Hartmann von Aue, *Gregorius, der gute Sünder* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1963), pp. 235-246 (p. 239). This 'Ausnahmenatur' characterises Mann's protagonists from Paulo Hofmann of *Der Wille zum Glück* (1896), Hanno Buddenbrook (1901), and Tonio Kröger (1903) to Gustav Aschenbach of *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912) – to name but a few.

³ Kuhn, p. 239.

⁴ See Thomas Mann, *Tonio Kröger*, in *Gesammelte Werke in dreizehn Bänden* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1990), VIII, pp. 271-338. (pp. 290, 297).

⁵ Thomas Mann, *Wälsungenblut*, in *Gesammelte Werke in dreizehn Bänden* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1990), VIII, pp. 380-403. Hermann J. Weigand, 'Thomas Mann's *Gregorius IV-V*', *Germanic Review*, 27:2 (1952), 83-95 (p. 88).

Wiligis' words to Sibylla, 'aus dem Tode [...] sind wir geboren [...] In ihm, du süße Braut, ergib dich dem Todesbrüder' (E 37), associate their incest with a kind of Wagnerian mysticism. Furthermore, the narcissism so clearly expressed in the incest of *Wälsungenblut* is echoed in Wiligis' association of his attraction to his sister with her similarity to himself. As the phrase 'Schwester-Herzogin, mein süßes Neben-Ich, Geliebte' (E 37) demonstrates, the hybrid role he ascribes to Sibylla blurs the lines both between sibling and spouse and between self and other.

Particularly in the light of Mann's comment on the novel to Walter Riller that 'man sich nicht wundern darf, wenn Gleich und Gleich sich liebt',⁶ this effective 'Selbstliebe'⁷ has been linked by several critics to homoerotic attraction, which, like incest and narcissism, may be seen as an inability to engage with that which is genuinely 'other'.⁸ While it is undoubtedly interesting that Mann's conclusion of the novel coincided with a late homoerotic infatuation, which sparked some identification with his own characters,⁹ in the novel's medieval setting, the narcissistic love of the similar is above all linked to a concept of aristocracy. Wiligis' attitude, later recognised as 'Hochmut' (E 41), constitutes a perverse sense of hierarchy that equates all difference with incompatible inferiority: 'Die anderen sind fremde Stücke, mir nicht ebenbürtig wie du, die mit mir geboren.' (E 27) Through its semantic link to the concept

⁶ Thomas Mann, *Selbstkommentare: 'Der Erwählte'*, ed. by Hans Wysling (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1989), p. 47.

⁷ Renate Böschstein, 'Der Erwählte – Thomas Manns postmoderner Ödipus?', *Colloquium Helveticum*, 26 (1997), 71-101 (p. 99).

⁸ Cf. Böschstein, p. 84; Marcel Reich-Ranicki, 'Über den *Erwählten* von Thomas Mann', *Thomas-Mann-Jahrbuch*, 4 (1991), 99-108 (p. 106); Karl Stackmann, 'Der *Erwählte*: Thomas Manns Mittelalter-Parodie', *Euphorion*, 53 (1959), 60-74 (p. 72).

⁹ Mann's diary entries documenting his crush on the waiter Franz Westermeier, encountered in a Zurich hotel in summer 1950, are collected in Hermann Kurzke, *Thomas Mann: Das Leben als Kunstwerk* (Munich: Beck, 1999), pp. 566-576. On 18th July, Mann quotes from 'Sibyllas Gebet', 'gern Fraue, das ist wahr, küßt ich ihn auf das Haar, und gäb er Freude kund, dann auf den Mund!' (E 156); the emphasis of his identification with Sibylla is, however, arguably on the age gap between admirer and admired, rather than on any parallel between incestuous and homoerotic attraction.

of 'Ebenbürtigkeit', the twins' peculiar birth thus emerges as the root cause of the narcissistic and incestuous confusion distorting their relationship.

This explanation of incest goes significantly beyond Hartmann's *Gregorius*, in which the transgression is a consequence of increased familiarity between a son and unmarried daughter, orphaned as children.¹⁰ In the expanded interval Mann presents between the deaths of mother and father, he demonstrates, moreover, how maternal absence causes a dangerous transfer of attachment: as Lawson argues, the twins' fixation on one another may be read not merely as an exceptionality complex, but also as a response to the loss of maternal contact, which is substituted through their incessant hand-holding (E 22) – disturbed only by their father (E 31) – and later, more completely, through their incest, once, as teenagers, they perceive in their sexual difference (their only 'Unterschiede' (E 26-27)) a 'tool for reunification'.¹¹

This development is further promoted by another instance of transferred attachment. Grimald's attitude to his daughter, consistently described as 'zärtlich' (E 20), becomes increasingly tender, and indeed gallant ('galanter' (E 24)), to the point where his courtly behaviour ('er [...] corteisierte sie' (E 30)) appears uncomfortably like 'courting', casting the parent in the role of suitor. His maturing daughter is thus associated with the role of his absent wife; indeed Grimald claims that Sibylla has an obligation to compensate him for the loss of his spouse resulting from her birth, indicating her status as replacement (E 30). Though, unlike Wiligis, Grimald does not confuse roles to the point of incest, his jealous hold on his daughter places him in a competitive relationship with his son, whom he treats with the same

¹⁰ Hartmann von Aue, *Gregorius*, ed. by Friedrich Neumann (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1963), lines 183-412. Henceforth references to this edition will be given in parentheses in the text proper, using the abbreviation G, followed by the line number, e.g. (G 183).

¹¹ Lewis A. Lawson, *A Gorgon's Mask: The Mother in Thomas Mann's Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), pp. 688-689.

hostility as Sibylla's potential (legitimate) suitors (E 31), expelling him from her presence by enforcing his own superior status. The significance of this habit, 'den Junker mit starken Worten zu vertreiben und allein mit dem Jungfräulein zu kosen' (E 29), becomes clear as Wiligis later defers some responsibility for his incestuous actions to Grimald: 'weil er gar zu ritterlich zu dir [Sibylla] war [...] und mich eifernd oft von deiner Seite trieb – das trieb mich zu dir ins Bette' (E 41).

Power, jealousy and competition within the family are thus central to the twins' incest, which is founded on hubris; both in terms of their esoteric superiority complex, and of the son's wish to supplant his father. The perverse nature of this intra-familial competition is explained by Plate as a 'verschobener Ödipus-Komplex' due to the mother's death.¹² The figure of Oedipus indeed looms large in *Der Erwählte*, as, in accordance with Mann's interest in the combination of 'myth' and 'psychology',¹³ similarities are evident not only between the structure of the Gregorius legend and the original Greek myth, but also between Mann's modern rationalisation of incest and Freud's appropriation of myth to explain the filial psyche.

The combination of jealous desire and hostility in Wiligis' case are indicative of Oedipal attachment in this Freudian sense: as, in Freud's theory, the son's infantile desire for exclusive possession of his mother results in sexual jealousy and a hostility towards the father (viewed as 'störende[r] Mitbewerber'), which, repressed in the adult mind, manifests itself in dreams,¹⁴ Wiligis sees his father as a barrier to union with his sister and as a threatening force,

¹² Bernward Plate, 'Hartmann von Aue, Thomas Mann und die 'Tiefenpsychologie'', *Euphorion*, 78 (1984), 31-59 (p. 44).

¹³ See André von Gronicka, "'Myth Plus Psychology": A Style Analysis of *Death in Venice*, *Germanic Review*, 31 (1956), 191-205 (p. 191).

¹⁴ See Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, 18 vols (London: Imago, 1942), II/III, pp. 2-642 (pp. 264, 267-269); Simon Bennett and Rachel B. Blass, 'The development and

who swells to towering proportions in his recurring ‘Schreckenstraum’. This nightmarish vision of a vengeful – if simultaneously comical – aggressor provides a neat parody of the projection of Oedipal hostility in the perception of the father: ‘Ihm träumte, sein Vater schwebe über ihm [...] in den Lüften, kupferrot angelaufen vor Wut das Antlitz [...], und bedrohe ihn stumm mit beiden Fäusten, so als wolle er ihm stracks damit an die Kehle fahren.’ (E 31-32)

Freud’s separation of dream and reality in his ‘Oedipus-complex’ is, however, subverted in Mann’s interpretation. In *Der Erwählte*, Wiligis’ hostility and incestuous desire are not permanently repressed, but rather are allowed to erupt, when the death of Grimald removes the threat and the sexually inhibiting presence represented by the father, resulting in the son’s arousal (Wiligis is ‘erregt von seines Vaters Tode und dem eigenen Leben’ (E 35)) and his seizure of the sudden opportunity to effect sexual union with Sibylla, the object of Oedipal desire. Wiligis thus enters the realm of the mythical Oedipus through an authentic incestuous act.

This is arguably the realm subsequently inhabited by his son Gregorius, a character whose life echoes in both broad structure and in certain details the fate of the doomed Theban king, cast out at birth and returned home heroically to unwitting maternal incest.¹⁵ Unlike Oedipus, however, Gregorius is both product and perpetrator of incest; his incestuous act is born of his incestuous origins.¹⁶ Wiligis’ transgression, provoked by a crisis causing the displacement of familial structures,¹⁷ is itself the ultimate expression of ‘category

vicissitudes of Freud’s ideas on the Oedipus complex’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Freud*, ed. by Jerome Neu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 161-174.

¹⁵ See Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, rev. edn, 2 vols (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), II, pp. 9-15.

¹⁶ Oedipus’ fate also differs significantly from Gregorius’ in its inclusion of the crime of patricide and its tragic conclusion, as the discovery of their transgression leads mother and son to kill and blind themselves respectively. See *Ibid.*

¹⁷ A ‘Verschiebung’ – to adopt Plate’s phrase (See note 16 above).

confusion’,¹⁸ cementing disorder and manifesting it in the life of his son. Indeed, while Hartmann’s text notes briefly the conflation of the roles of mother and aunt, father and uncle (G 735-737) in Gregorius’ family, Mann places particular emphasis on these tangled relationships, suggesting their drastic social impact. Thus, the twins’ adviser, Herr Eisengrein, reprimands them in horror – though perhaps also with perverse delight in this genealogical puzzle – ‘ihr [...] habt eueren seligen Vater euch beiderseits zum Schwiegerherrn gemacht’, and describes Gregorius as a ‘drittes Geschwister’, who is at once their ‘Nefflein oder Nichtlein’, before concluding: ‘Größte Unordnung habt ihr angerichtet und eine Stockung der Natur’ (E 44).

The initial act of incest causing Gregorius’ conception thus causes conflict with social conceptions of nature’s ‘Richtung, Zeit und Zeugung’ (E 161), as the failure of generational progression within the accepted order is perceived as effecting a kind of standstill. This crisis is augmented by Gregorius’ own maternal incest, which is described as causing, not only a standstill, but a reversal of this natural order: Gregorius ‘[zeugt] nicht vorwärts [...] in der Zeit, sondern zurück in den Mutterschoß’ (E 161), as indeed is foretold in the pregnant Sibylla’s dream, which distorts a motif most famously found in Herzeloide’s premonition of her abandonment by her son Parzival, conceived as a dragon who flies away after breaking painfully out of her womb.¹⁹ Mann modifies the scenario to predict a return of the dragon-son,

¹⁸ Elizabeth Archibald, ‘Incest in Medieval Literature and Society’, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 25 (1989), 1-15 (p. 6); compare also Peter Strohschneider, who describes incest as the ultimate threat to social order in its damaging of stable role-distinctions: ‘Inzest-Heiligkeit: Krise und Aufhebung der Unterschiede in Hartmanns *Gregorius*’, in *Geistliches in weltlicher und Weltliches in geistlicher Literatur des Mittelalters*, ed. by Christoph Huber, Burghart Wachinger and Hans-Joachim Ziegeler (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), pp. 105-133 (p. 117).

¹⁹ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, ed. by Karl Lachmann, 2 vols (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981), 1, 104,10-16: ‘si dûhte wunderlîcher site, | wie si wære eins wurmes amme, | der sît zervuorte ir wamme, | und wie ein trache ir brüste süge, | und daz der gâhes von ir vlüge | sô daz si in nimmer mêr gesach. | daz herze er ir ûz dem lîbe brach’.

who ‘drängte sich zu ihrem noch größeren Schmerze in den zerissenen Mutterschoß zurück’ (E 52).

This catastrophic return is clearly motivated at a subconscious level by Gregorius’ disordered origins. Like his parents, Gregorius suffers birth out of a crisis and maternal estrangement, which here allows for a lack of conscious recognition between mother and son while simultaneously motivating their attraction. Indeed, as the narrator laments on their marriage a ‘Mißkennung und Versetzung dessen, was den einen zum andern zog’ (E 159-160), it becomes clear that the narrator is proposing a splitting of the protagonists’ consciousness which owes much to Freud’s differentiation of the rational mind (the ego or ‘Ich’) from its irrational, amoral and instinctual domain (the id or ‘Es’); and the un- or subconscious contents of the psyche from the conscious.²⁰

In line with these theories, the protagonist is steered by motives which are beneath the level of his own conscious awareness, but are nevertheless very real, as a cocktail of sexual and infantile drives draws him to Sibylla. With dramatic irony, simultaneously indicative of these subconscious motivations, Sibylla takes on an expressly maternal role on meeting Gregor (E 133), and the latter, recognising and admiring this quality (E 138), responds to his new wife with both ‘kindliche Ehrfurcht’ and ‘Mannesentzücken’: ‘an ihrer sanften Brust genoß er vollkommene Seligkeit, die süße Geborgenheit des Brustkindes zugleich mit mannbar mächtiger Lust’ (E 164). In sexual union, the outcast child thus restores, albeit

²⁰ Mann’s interest in these theories is demonstrated in his essays, *Die Stellung Freuds in der modernen Geistesgeschichte* (1929), and *Freud und die Zukunft* (1936). See *Gesammelte Werke in dreizehn Bänden* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1990), X, pp. 256-280 (p. 272); IX, pp. 478-501 (pp. 484-485). Specific reference is made to Sigmund Freud, *Die Zerlegung der psychischen Persönlichkeit*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1961), XV: *Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in der Psychoanalyse*, pp. 62-86 (pp. 78-83).

perversely, its lost maternal connection; the disorder of estrangement motivates the disorder of incest.²¹

In Sibylla's case, her marriage to Gregor is marked by the same key motivations as her initial incest; indeed her use of Wiligis' name as she cries after the departing Gregorius is a telling Freudian slip (E 181). The view expressed in her pre-marital prayer that Gregor is the only suitor who is sufficiently 'würdig' and 'ebenbürtig' stresses here, too, the key role of the concept of 'Ebenbürtigkeit' (E 157), and, moreover, Gregor's physical similarity to his father (and thus also to Sibylla herself) is clearly instrumental in their marriage. Not only does Sibylla's prayer imply her perception of marriage to Gregor as a repetition of her union with Wiligis; this function is consciously expressed in her later admission to her husband with respect to his father: 'in dir fand ich ihn wieder' (E 177). The son is thus doubly bound to parental guilt: his transgression is both the consequence of his father's crime – part of a progression which begins with an original family crisis, continues in Wiligis' resultant incest, and culminates in Gregorius' own role confusion – and the repetition of this same crime. As disorder breeds worse disorder from one generation to the next, he is inextricably implicated.

It is this concept of familial disorder which provides an initial link between the son's experience of guilt in *Der Erwählte* and *Die Verwandlung*. Kafka's text may appear quite different, in that it presents the reader with no such clearly definable crime as the incest of *Der Erwählte*; instead, Gregor Samsa's status as a bearer of guilt is retrospectively implied by his transformation and death, which logically demand a preceding transgression.²² It is illuminating, however, if, rather than searching for a transgression in a moral sense, a 'sin'

²¹ Compare Lawson's comments on maternal estrangement, pp. 7-12.

²² Kafka considered publishing *Die Verwandlung* not only in a series entitled *Die Söhne* (with *Das Urteil* and *Der Heizer*), but also in one entitled *Strafen* (with *Das Urteil* and *In der Strafkolonie*) See Andrew Webber, 'Kafka, *Die Verwandlung*', in *Landmarks of German Short Prose*, ed. by Peter Hutchinson (Oxford: Lang, 2003), pp. 175-190 (p. 175).

which renders Gregor worthy of punishment, we consider this text too in terms of social transgression – the overstepping of boundaries and confusion of categories – and its consequences. *Die Verwandlung* equally presents a son at the centre of a family in which roles are upset and hierarchies inverted, producing hostility and confusion. As in Mann's novel, moreover, it is apparent that familial disorder springs from a series of crises, beginning not with Gregor's transformation, but with the financial ruin of the father in the narrative's pre-history. Both crises disturb role distinctions and power structures within the family, and their connection demonstrates here, too, the son's implication in a chain of transgressions.

The first of these crises causes an inversion of filial and paternal roles, as the father, forced into premature retirement, is usurped by a son who becomes the family's main provider. Even after his metamorphosis, the son's pride in this role is evident in the pleasure he takes in remembering 'daß er seinen Eltern und seine Schwester ein solches Leben [...] hatte verschaffen können'.²³ This pride, however, appears tempered by a sense of burden, as the narrator recalls that '[Gregor] den Aufwand der ganzen Familie zu tragen imstande war und auch trug' (V 152). Indeed, the son's thoughts betray the weight of the compulsion to pay off the family debt, which prevents him from quitting a detested job and causes panic at the prospect of redundancy (V 117). Gregor is, in fact, trapped in a relationship of servility to his domineering boss – his father's creditor – (V 117-118), and in a state of isolation from the family he provides for, as, either travelling or locked away in his room (V 120), and with 'nichts im Kopf als das Geschäft' (V 116), he is cut off from meaningful human exchange (V 116).

²³ Franz Kafka, *Die Verwandlung*, in Franz Kafka, *Drucke zu Lebzeiten (Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. by Jürgen Born and others) (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1994), pp. 113-200. (p. 144). Henceforth references to this edition will be given in parentheses in the text proper, using the abbreviation V, followed by the page number, e.g. (V 144).

If the inversion of roles is detrimental to Gregor, it is equally damaging to his father. While Wiligis' seizure of paternal power followed Grimald's death, here Gregor assumes the father's position while he is still alive and potentially capable, merely displaced through financial crisis. Bereft of an active role in his own household while his son is busy with its upkeep, the exaggerated decline of Herr Samsa, who languishes in his nightshirt, barely able to stand, let alone walk unaided (V 168-169), is a potent symbol of familial disorder. Indeed, not only does Gregor complain that the family's acceptance of his efforts ultimately lacked a certain warmth (V 152), but there is a suggestion of latent aggression in the father's attitude towards him: the clenched fist, which, as in Wiligis' dream, exemplifies paternal hostility (e.g. V 134), is already in use before Gregor's metamorphosis is revealed, as the impatient father knocks on his son's door 'schwach, aber mit der Faust' (V 120).

This potential for paternal aggression is fully realised on Gregor's metamorphosis and the re-establishment of the father's hegemony in the household. Again, roles are inverted: the father, previously a dependant, reasserts independent economic control of family affairs (V 151), as is stressed by the revelation of funds unknown to Gregor (V 153-154); while the son is forced to abandon independence and responsibility. As power changes hands the father also regains physical superiority, swapping his invalid's 'Krückstock' (V 169) for the clerk's stick (V 140), which he wields as a weapon, forcing his son out of the family domain. Here in a much stronger sense than in *Der Erwählte*, the verb '(ver)treiben' associates the father with the act of expulsion; he is a force driving the son out of his – perhaps wrongly assumed – position within the family. The apparent crisis of Gregor's metamorphosis may thus be read as a reinstatement of proper familial roles; potentially through the rebellious withdrawal of the

burdened son who ‘avenge[s] himself on his family’s parasitism by turning parasite himself’,²⁴ but more perceptibly through his expulsion as hubristic usurper.

The latter scenario is certainly suggested by parallels to Kafka’s short story *Das Urteil*, written earlier in 1912, in which a father similarly sidelined at work and home enjoys a surprising resurgence – indeed, a near resurrection – casting off an innocuous, childlike aspect to rise up and condemn his horrified son: ‘Du wolltest mich zudecken, das weiß ich, mein Früchtchen, aber zugedeckt bin ich noch nicht.’²⁵ This premature ‘Zudecken’ is echoed by descriptions of the usurped father in *Die Verwandlung*, who is described alternately as ‘eingepackt’, passive and childlike, in his overcoat, and ‘im Bett vergraben’ (V 168-169), implicitly consigned to death. That he has been wrongly discounted as an active authority figure through Gregor’s accession to power is demonstrated by the stark contrast between his appearance pre- and post-metamorphosis. Echoing Georg’s experience of the towering ‘Schreckbild seines Vaters’ in *Das Urteil* (U 56), but also recalling Wiligis’ dream of the towering Grimald, Gregor’s father grows into a dynamic and aggressive figure (now standing ‘recht gut aufgerichtet (V 169)), who seems godlike as the son cowers, waiting to be smitten by ‘[der tödliche Schlag] von dem Stock in des Vaters Hand.’ (V 140)

It thus appears that Gregor’s perception of his father is marked by elements of the same Oedipal hostility evident in *Der Erwählte*. Indeed Kaiser suggests the presentation of

²⁴ Walter H. Sokel, *Franz Kafka* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 8. Kafka does portray family relationships in terms of parasitism in *Brief an den Vater* (1919). Assuming the paternal perspective, the filial narrator deems the son a blood-sucking creature, referring to a ‘Kampf des Ungeziefers’: *Brief an den Vater*, in *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente*, ed. by Jost Schillemeit (*Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. by Jürgen Born and others) (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1992), pp. 143-217 (p. 215).

²⁵ Franz Kafka, *Das Urteil*, in *Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, ed. by Wolf Kittler, Hans-Gerd Koch and Gerhard Neumann (*Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe* as above) (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1994), pp. 41-61 (p. 56). Henceforth references to this edition will be given in parentheses in the text proper, using the abbreviation U, followed by the page number, e.g. (U 56).

Herr Samsa as vengeful father is a projection based on the son's 'Ödipushass'.²⁶ Unlike in Wiligis' case, however, the threat from the father is not a temporary illusion, but becomes a reality, as Gregor is repeatedly cast out and wounded by Herr Samsa. The latter's towering presence, moreover, is not merely metaphorical, but has a literal basis, as Gregor's transformation creates an authentic worm's eye view of a figure whose stamping actions pose a pointed threat to the insect-son (V 140); the observation 'immerhin hob er die Füße ungewöhnlich hoch, und Gregor staunte über die Riesengröße seiner Stiefelsohlen' (V 169-170) thus conveys with more than symbolic significance the resurgence of patriarchal force, poised to crush the filial pretender underfoot.

While this violent exchange of roles is based primarily on masculine competition in terms of strength and economic status, a sexual element is also evident. The transfer of patriarchal authority in each instance affects relationships with both mother and sister, who, as in *Der Erwählte*, are objects of Oedipal competition. While the spectacle of mother and father 'in gänzlicher Vereinigung' at the end of Part II (V 171) – a symbolic return to an implicitly sexual union²⁷ – definitively demonstrates the father's regained masculine authority and Gregor's corresponding exclusion, it is the sister who is the key contested object, described by Sokel as 'die Schachfigur im Machtkampf Gregors mit seinem Vater.'²⁸ Indeed, in a fascinating parallel to *Der Erwählte*, Kaiser suggests that Gregor's attitude to his sister constitutes a 'Verschiebung der der Mutter geltenden Eifersucht der Ödipussituation.'²⁹

²⁶Hellmuth Kaiser, *Franz Kafkas Inferno: Eine psychologische Deutung seiner Strafphantasie* (Vienna: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1931), p. 18.

²⁷Note the repetition of 'eindringen' (V 171). The incident has been interpreted by certain critics as a recall of 'primal scene': see Kaiser, pp. 21 f.; Webber, p. 87.

²⁸Walter H. Sokel, *Franz Kafka – Tragik und Ironie: Zur Struktur seiner Kunst* (Munich: Langen, 1964).

²⁹Kaiser, p. 17.

The protagonist's fantasy of luring his sister into his room, impressing her with his former plans for her and – most disturbingly – kissing her exposed neck (V 186), certainly suggests incestuous longings. The fact that such desires are not explicitly expressed in a narrative which is at this stage bound to Gregor's perspective makes this, as Köhnke argues, a very modern variant of the incest of Hartmann's Gregorius – less unwitting act than subconscious desire, as Kafka presents a character 'dessen Ich nicht weiß, was das Es begehrt',³⁰ and whose experience, I would add, is thus close to that of Mann's Gregor, driven to incest by subconscious drives.

Though no actual incest occurs, Gregor's plans for his sister – both his original wish for her musical education and his more extreme vision of her captivity – indicate, in true Oedipal style, a jealous guarding of her and an assertion of his own influence over her at the expense of his father's. His initial plan, based on his new economic position in the household, constitutes a seizure of decision-making power,³¹ and, since his parents' vision of Grete's future clearly involves marriage (V 200), may also be seen as an attempt motivated by incestuous desires to prevent this course 'durch die Bindung an einen künstlerischen Beruf'.³² This same desire for simultaneous possession of his sister and opposition of his father is evident in a stronger, more primitive form in Gregor's later fantasy. As Sokel notes, Gregor envisages himself here much like a dragon guarding its horde, focusing on his defence of the entrances to his room, where he will 'den Angreifern entgegenfauchen' (V 186).³³ Since these doors are, above all, the site of confrontation with his father, this is a convincing indication

³⁰ Köhnke, p. 114.

³¹ Cf. Urs Ruf, *Franz Kafka: Das Dilemma der Söhne: Das Ringen um die Versöhnung eines unlösbaren Widerspruchs in den drei Werken 'Das Urteil', 'Die Verwandlung' und 'Amerika'* (Berlin: Schmidt, 1974), p. 62.

³² Kaiser, p. 17.

³³ Sokel, *Tragik und Ironie*, p. 90.

that, in his fantasy of possession, it is primarily ‘die Auflehnung gegen den Vater, die die Grundlage der Erotik bildet.’³⁴

The confusion of paternal and filial roles thus emerges as a source of wider familial disorder in the form of incestuous ‘category confusion’.³⁵ Furthermore, as Gregor’s fantasy demonstrates, this confusion is not ended by his transformation, the apparent signal for the restoration of paternal authority. As in *Der Erwählte*, the family, in fact, seems trapped in a chain of crises and confusions. The initial failure of the father draws the son into a conflict which appears to be radically transformed but not actually resolved by his metamorphosis. Instead, as we have seen, this transformation brings a heightening of Oedipal hostilities and jealousies and thus arguably constitutes a second, more violent crisis, an eruption of the familial disorder within which the son is embroiled.

We may conclude, therefore, that there are definite structural and thematic parallels between *Der Erwählte* and *Die Verwandlung* in their presentation of familial guilt. In neither case is the son guilty of a wholly independent transgression; rather he is caught up in a series of events born of an initial destabilising crisis – in Mann’s case the death of the mother, and in Kafka’s the financial failure of the father. The son’s transgression must therefore be seen in the context of wider familial disorder. While this disorder is made explicit by Mann, who details the increasing confusion and conflation of roles through incestuous relations, within the nuclear Samsa family Kafka suggests role confusion more implicitly through father-son conflict and the repeated inversion of familial hierarchies, a process within which Gregor’s metamorphosis is the tipping point. In both cases, Oedipal structures are manipulated to present a conflict-ridden overlap of paternal and filial roles, a possessive power struggle which results in confused relations to female family members. In this sense, the crises in the

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ See note 26 above.

parental generation which originally destabilise family roles, encouraging 'category confusion' on the part of the son, are clearly and causally related to his later transgressions, literally 'oversteppings' of familial role boundaries, which cement the existing disorder in a new level of family crisis.

CHAPTER TWO

INHERITANCE AND THE QUESTION OF CULPABILITY

The close ties established in the previous chapter between family crisis and filial transgression lead us to consider one of the most problematic issues in both *Der Erwählte* and *Die Verwandlung*: the question of the son's culpability. Indeed the concept of the 'guoter sündære', a figure problematically combining guilt and innocence, is a central aspect of Hartmann's *Gregorius* which is taken up in modified form by Mann (whose work appeared in translation as *The Holy Sinner*), and arguably also by Kafka.¹ In the modern context the relationship between knowledge and ignorance, and guilt and innocence, is further differentiated due to a more complex understanding of levels of consciousness. In neither case, however, does the son incur guilt based wholly on personal psychological motivation; rather, his guilt is associated with a strong sense of inevitability, and the imagery used suggests a transmission or inheritance of guilt from one generation to the next, placing the son's fate more or less explicitly in the context of original sin – in German 'Erb-sünde'. In this chapter I shall therefore analyse the presentation of filial guilt in terms of conscious or deliberate transgression on the one hand and inherited sin on the other, in order to establish more closely the extent to which each Gregor is a bearer of personal or of familial guilt.

Hartmann refers to his hero, Gregorius, as 'der guote sündære' both in his prologue (G 176) and at two subsequent points in the main narrative: firstly on his birth (G 671), as a child born in sin (G 688-689), if in no way responsible for it;² and secondly just prior to discovering

¹ For an overview of the vast body of literature on Gregorius' guilt or innocence, see: Elisabeth Gössmann, 'Typus der Heilsgeschichte oder Opfer morbider Gesellschaftsordnung?: Ein Forschungsbericht zum Schuldproblem in Hartmanns *Gregorius* (1950-1971)', *Euphorion*, 68 (1974), 42-80; Will Hasty, *Adventures in Interpretation: The Works of Hartmann von Aue and their Critical Reception* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1996). On Kafka and *Gregorius*, see in particular Köhnke, whose article specifically refers to the 'guoter sündære' motif.

² 'wande ez an unser missetât | deheiner slahte schulde hât' (G 481-2).

his transgression with his mother (G 2552), a deed committed without any knowledge on his part.³ In *Der Erwählte*, Mann initially retains this paradox, as Gregorius' mother refers to her newborn son using the oxymoronic phrase 'unschuldig verdammt' (E 41); in describing the son's own transgression, however, he departs significantly from Hartmann's model of a completely unwitting transgression by introducing the possibility of a level of awareness to Gregor's action. Gregor may not be consciously aware of his crime, but – as discussed above – he does exhibit signs of subconscious recognition of Sibylla's maternal role on their introduction and marriage; their union, moreover, is marred by a sense of guilt on both sides, and, in the final scene, mother and son agree that their incest was committed 'unwissentlich-wissend' (E 254).

Wunderlich concludes from this that Mann presents a character whose conscience is justifiably troubled, thus removing the 'Grundgedanke' of *Gregorius*: '[die] in Unschuld erworbene Verschuldung'.⁴ Undeniably, the measure of personal responsibility is increased. Mann does not, however, immediately describe a knowing transgression, but rather presents a progression from subconscious awareness of guilt to a level of consciousness with retrospective insight into these deeper drives. Initially Gregor's 'knowledge' of his crime is clearly repressed, hidden even from the narrative perspective. In fact, the guilt sensed in his relationship to Sibylla is ironically ascribed to his failure to complete his quest to find his parents and the concealment of his sinful origins from his supposedly pure wife (E 164), which stresses the gaping discrepancy between conscious and subconscious knowledge. If the

³ Cf. Gregorius' meeting with his mother: 'ouch was sîn herze dar an blint | und im unkunt genouc | daz in diu selbe vrouwe trouc' (G 1936-8).

⁴ Eva C. Wunderlich, 'Zweimal Gregorius: Thomas Mann und Hanna Stephan', *German Quarterly*, 38 (1965), 640-651 (pp. 648-649).

relationship's illegitimacy is sensed, this awareness is displaced, and is manifested in a conscious awareness of other superficial failings.⁵

Gregor's ultimate confession also indicates distinct levels of consciousness. While the protagonist reasons drily that 'ein Jüngling, der auszieht, seine Mutter zu suchen, und sich ein Weib erkämpft, das [...] seine Mutter sein könnte, muß damit rechnen, daß es seine Mutter ist' (E 255), his further comments indicate that his 'recognition' of his mother in fact occurred, not at this rational level, but somewhere deeper: 'dort, wo die Seele keine Faxen macht' (E 255); or, indeed, in his blood (E 256), that key signifier of both instinct and relatedness. Plate's reference to Mann's protagonist, therefore, as 'den bewußten Ödipus-*Grigorß*', who demonstrates that life is not 'ein irrationales [...] Getriebenwerden' by fate or the id,⁶ perhaps needs some qualification. Mann's Gregorius is undoubtedly set apart from Hartmann's completely unwitting sinner, as indeed from Oedipus, and, as Stackmann claims, his ultimate attainment of self-analytical awareness may well demonstrate a triumph of *Geist* over subconscious drives in line with Mann's ideals;⁷ since Gregor's transgression is, however, not fully conscious at the time, but only in retrospect, the 'good sinner' paradox has continued relevance.

Considering the issue of personal responsibility in *Der Erwählte*, Plate also cites a comment by C. G. Jung, familiar to Mann: 'Es ist überzeugender, zu sehen, wie es mir zustößt, als zu beobachten, wie ich es mache.'⁸ The role of personal agency or of external forces in the shaping of events is an issue, both highly ambivalent, and crucial to our understanding of Gregor's transgression. Mann's choice of a medieval monk as narrator

⁵ Böschstein, p. 95.

⁶ Plate, pp. 38, 58.

⁷ Stackmann, pp. 73-74. The task of bringing subconscious motivations into the light of consciousness identified by Freud in *Die Zerlegung der psychischen Persönlichkeit* (p. 84) is recognised by Mann as an admirable process of 'Erkenntnis' in *Freud und die Zukunft*, p. 480.

⁸ Plate, p. 37.

allows him to weave into the narrative references to the influence of God, the devil and fate consistent with an archaic world view. The formulaic surrender of personal responsibility for events to divine or diabolic forces is thus opened up to a level of ironic criticism, while the existence of such outside forces, nevertheless, persists as part of the narrative reality.⁹ Thus the devil, or 'Valand', is made responsible for both instances of incest, despite the extensive psychological motivations detailed, (E 35, 37, 159-160), and God, through the wind and sea, is credited with steering Gregorius on both his journeys between Sankt Dunstan and his mother's court (E 58, 118).

The sense of inevitability which results from the assumption of this passive attitude is stressed by further narrative comments which reflect humorously on the conflicts resulting from the narrator's disinclination towards his protagonist's incest and its narrative necessity for the text's happy conclusion. As narratorial 'Allwissenheit' is equated to a share in 'der göttlichen Vorsehung' (E 137, 116), the technical necessity of Gregor's transgression to the plot is associated with an idea of divine providence as a force steering his career to a predetermined conclusion and expressly requiring his incest as a deliberate kind of *felix culpa*.¹⁰

Though the tone of such reflections is one of gentle parody, the notion of inevitability suggested in them is clearly underlined by Gregor's experience of an irresistible draw to his origins and to a repetition of the parental sin. This experience has close ties to the concept of inheritance. The young Gregor, or Grigorß, is, like Hartmann's Gregorius (G 1566-1568), presented as having an inbuilt desire and propensity for courtly pursuits which defies his non-

⁹ The resultant mingling of different modes of explanation for the novel's events is reminiscent of the narrative technique used, for example, in *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912) and *Doktor Faustus* (1947). Compare Gronicka, p. 197.

¹⁰ For a definition of this motif of evil leading to greater good see Frank J. Tobin, '*Gregorius*' and '*Der arme Heinrich*': *Hartmann's Dualistic and Gradualistic Views of Reality* (Berne and Frankfurt a.M.: Herbert Lang, 1973), p. 35.

courtly upbringing and connects him with the world of his origins and his sinful parents. Knightly combat is ‘ihm [...] kraft der Angeborenheit wohlvertraut’ (E 136) and the natural nobility stemming from his aristocratic heritage marks him out as a man before whom others are naturally inclined to bow (E 89). Perversely, the son’s removal to an alien environment augments the emergence of these hereditary features as his incongruity among fishermen and monks fosters, from a young age, a sense of difference (E 83, 88, 95), which is only confirmed by the revelation of his origins, and results in a strong desire to seek out his roots.

Gregor’s sense of difference in *Der Erwählte* is, moreover, itself an inherited feature, as Mann extends the genetic ties between the protagonist and his parents to make him heir to their aristocratic exceptionality with all its dangerous connotations. This is exemplified both by his inheritance of their unusual appearance (E 81),¹¹ and by the association between exceptionality and aristocracy in his thoughts, which clearly echoes the attitude behind the parental transgression. The young Grigorß’ inherent sense of difference is so deep-felt that the narrator suggests it verges on ‘Hochmut’ (E 88); indeed, on the discovery of his sinful origins, it reaches the point where he thinks himself set apart completely from the rest of society (E 113). That such sinful difference may inspire not only horror, but potentially pride, is confirmed by the protagonist’s earlier reflection: ‘Wo Makel ist, da ist Adel’ (E 105), which, with some irony, perhaps, but in the spirit of his parents’ aristocratic ideas, equates blemish with noble distinction.

Through the inheritance of characteristics, therefore, Gregorius’ return to the courtly world, the scene of his parents’ incest, is clearly motivated, and his propensity for a similar kind of transgression is established. Indeed, an element of his parents’ esoteric narcissism is apparent in his quest for his origins, which is expressly a ‘Fahrt nach mir selbst’ (E 109), on

¹¹ Compare Wiligis and Sybilla’s appearance (E 20-21).

which the tablet detailing his heritage acts as his guide (E 118). The manner in which Gregorius' future is bound to his past is exemplified by the association of this statement of origin with his future destiny: he refers to his fate as something written on 'meines Lebens Tafel' (E 140), while his mother, as Schork notes, is, on their initial meeting, both designated 'das vorbestimmte Ziel meiner Irrfahrt' (E 151), and linked to his tablet through her jewelled appearance and complexion of 'Helfenbein' (E 121, 57).¹²

Thus, in setting out into the world and his future, Gregorius actually embarks upon a self-reflexive journey into the past: his goal is the starting point of his existence and his recognition of his origins in the form of his mother is mistaken for the recognition of future destiny. Stackmann identifies this temporal confusion as an example of the perils of an atavistic regression into the repetition of the 'musterhaft Überlieferten', which is motivated by primitive, subconscious drives in opposition to 'der Geistesfreiheit des Ich'.¹³ Indeed, Mann, whose late work is professedly born of an interest in 'das Mythische', understood as 'das [...] Immer-Wiederkehrende, Zeitlose', the unconscious repetition of ancient patterns, defines sin elsewhere as 'gegen den Geist leben, [...] am Veralteten, Rückständigen festhalten' – that is, a failure to progress.¹⁴ If Gregor is guilty of this failure, however, his culpability is limited by an apparent inability to determine his own fate. Despite the free will the abbot insists he possesses (E 107), and the role of some, at least partly conscious and deliberate choices in his fate, Gregor's actions appear to propel him down a pre-defined path, prefigured before his

¹² R. J. Schork, 'Thomas Mann's *Der Erwählte*: A Monastic Mélange', *German Quarterly*, 58 (1985), 49-67 (p. 54).

¹³ Stackmann, pp. 70-71.

¹⁴ Thomas Mann, '*Joseph und seine Brüder*: Ein Vortrag', in *Gesammelte Werke in Dreizehn Bänden* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1990), XI, pp. 654-669 (pp. 162, 175).

birth in Sibylla's dream of the dragon's return (E 53),¹⁵ which is fulfilled as the son's inherited nature draws him back to the parental transgression which becomes his own.¹⁶

Gregor is thus trapped in a cycle of guilt strongly reminiscent of the concept of original sin, which, as the German word 'Erbsünde' more clearly demonstrates, is also a matter of inheritance, a 'birth sin', which is incurred rather than deserved,¹⁷ and which inevitably gives rise to further transgression.¹⁸ Mann clearly plays with this concept in his portrayal of the 'original' transgression of Wiligis and Sibylla, whose incest occurs at the devil's suggestion (E 35) in a bedroom adorned with snakeskin cushions recalling the serpent of Eden (E 22) and is narrated using an extract from a medieval mystery play of the Fall of Man (E 37).¹⁹ Like fallen man, as heir to Adam's transgression, Gregorius is burdened with guilt from his very conception, being 'in Sünden gezeugt und zum Sünder' (E 114). His guilt thus predates his own transgression, stemming inevitably from that of his parents, and his actions, committed with whatever degree of conscious intent, are thus rendered, to a great extent, secondary; Gregor's crime confirms his inherent sinfulness.

This, at least, is the view presented by the narrator, who refers to the 'sündige[s] Leben' (E 80) of the, logically speaking, innocent infant Gregorius, in keeping with the view

¹⁵ Note Gregor's association with the dragon motif at seminal moments in his career such as the discovery of his origins (E 113) and the duel to win Sibylla (E 138).

¹⁶ Cf. Edith Hall's comments on Sophocles' Oedipus: the hero is doomed from before his birth and, though he transgresses unwittingly, his character is itself instrumental in fulfilling the oracle ('Introduction', in Sophocles, *Antigone; Oedipus the King; Electra*, ed. by Edith Hall, trans. by H. D. F. Kitto (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. ix-xxxvi (pp. xx-xxi)).

¹⁷ Brian Murdoch, 'Sin, Sacred and Secular: Hartmann's *Gregorius*, the *Incestuous Daughter*, the *Trentalle Sancti Gregorii* and *Sir Eglamour of Artois*', in *Blütezeit: Festschrift für L. Peter Johnson zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. by Mark Chinca, Joachim Heinzle and Christopher Young (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), pp. 309-320 (p. 318); idem, 'Hartmann's Legends and the Bible', in *A Companion to the Works of Hartmann von Aue*, ed. by Francis G. Gentry (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), pp. 141-159 (p. 151).

¹⁸ For a discussion of the pessimistic conclusions drawn from original sin (particularly the Augustinian doctrine 'non posse non peccare'), see Frank Tobin, 'Hartmann's Theological Milieu', in Gentry (ed.), *A Companion to the Works of Hartmann von Aue*, pp. 9-20 (pp. 9-10); idem, 'Fallen Man and Hartmann's *Gregorius*', *Germanic Review*, 50 (1975), 85-98 (pp. 86-88).

¹⁹ Encountered by Mann in Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*. See Wysling (ed.), *Selbstkommentare*, p. 56.

of the Eisengreins, who address the newborn child as ‘arm Sünderlein’ and recommend that his tablet be inscribed with a warning of the sinful nature stemming from his birth (E 545). While the nature of the narrator makes the presentation of these views, like the assertion of divine intervention, potentially ironic, they are views which the protagonist adopts as deadly serious; indeed, the strongest expressions of inherited sinfulness occur in the narration of Gregor’s own thoughts. Even before his own incest is revealed, Gregor displays a fundamental awareness of guilt stemming from his very existence, for which he begs God’s forgiveness: ‘er [...] bat Gott um Verzeihung für sein Leben’ (E 165).

Fascinatingly, this equation of existence with guilt is a view which Mann claimed as his own in the essay *Meine Zeit* (1950), in which he claimed an affinity to Christian theology in his perception of life as ‘eine Schuld, Verschuldung, Schuldigkeit [...] als etwas, das dringend der Gutmachung, Rettung und Rechtfertigung bedarf’.²⁰ In *Der Erwählte*, however, Gregor suffers not merely from a general sense of human sinfulness, but rather experiences guilt in an extreme and concrete way as the physical inheritance of the son. Gregor’s tablet, referred to as the son’s ‘Mitgift’ and ‘Schuldbrief’ (E 234), figures as a symbolic bequest and debt passed down from his parents, a physical manifestation of inherited guilt.²¹ Gregor’s body itself is, however, also a sign of this physical transmission. The protagonist repeatedly stresses that, as a ‘Sohn der Sünde’ (E 164), he has inherited a ‘Sündenleib’ (E 138) physically made of sin: his ‘Fleisch und Bein [besteht] gänzlich aus Sünde’ (E 185).

Gregor’s own children – another important addition to Mann’s version of the Gregorius legend – are considered in similar terms. Stressing the relentless progress of guilt down the generations as material or biological inheritance, they are hyperbolically branded

²⁰ *Meine Zeit*, in *Gesammelte Werke in dreizehn Bänden* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1990), XI, pp. 302-324 (p. 302).

²¹ Murdoch, writing on Hartmann’s *Gregorius*, considers the Tafel-motif, furthermore, an expression of this guilt’s indestructibility (Murdoch, ‘Hartmann’s Legends and the Bible’, p. 153).

‘Sündenfrüchtchen [...], Samen der Erbschuld, der Schlimmheit Enkel’, to whom Gregor, in his turn, has ‘sein sündiges Blut vermacht’ (E 164-165). Sin is thus presented as something which, in Sibylla’s ironic words, is ‘furchtbar fruchtbar’ (E 41), transmitting itself organically from one generation to the next and manifesting itself in the very flesh and blood of Gregor and his offspring, who, as part of this cycle, cannot avoid guilt. The idea discussed in Chapter One, that the son’s transgression is rooted in familial disorder, is thus echoed by a concept of inheritance which makes filial guilt the fruit of parental sin: Gregor’s fate is defined by his parents’ transgression, and the element of personal guilt later incurred merely reiterates the original guilt of his conception, from which the adult son, as heir to a particular nature and destiny, appears unable to escape.

This sense of hopeless inevitability is a concept we may also identify in *Die Verwandlung*. Indeed, as Köhnke argues, Kafka’s Gregor equally earns the title ‘guoter sündære’,²² as a son whose guilt appears to exist in spite of outwardly exemplary efforts and the lack of a sense of deliberate wrongdoing. If the implication of Mann’s Gregorius in a chain of guilt is rendered inevitable by his unconscious progress along a preordained (sinful) course, Gregor Samsa’s guilt seems to be unavoidable because, in his case, there simply is no right course.

As discussed in Chapter One, the financial crisis of the Samsa family leads Gregor to take over the father’s role. This may well amount to an usurpation which transgresses family role boundaries and is hence the son’s main crime; the same course of action, however, is simultaneously a generous and necessary act of service which saves the family financially, and costs Gregor both leisure and peace of mind, as he takes on a difficult job (V 115), and commits himself to it for as long as it takes to clear his parents’ debt (V 117-118). The

²² Köhnke, p. 114.

protagonist's actions are thus fundamentally ambivalent, making him at once 'Retter' and 'Feind' of the family,²³ and, if they damage familial structures, they are nevertheless associated with a deep-rooted concern for the family's well-being. In the opening section, it is for his parents' sake that Gregor pleads with the visiting clerk (V 130, 136), and the statement, 'Noch war Gregor hier und dachte nicht im Geringsten daran, seine Familie zu verlassen' (V 128), presents them as his continuing priority – even if, as Kurz argues, the prefix 'noch' betrays the desire to desert familial responsibility lurking beneath the surface.²⁴

This burdensome consideration defines Gregor even after his transformation, as he endeavours to practice the greatest possible 'Rücksichtnahme', minimizing the effects of his metamorphosis on the family (V 146), and, while this enthusiasm temporarily wanes as he becomes increasingly detached (V 184), it is ultimately restored in its highest form in his resolution – significantly accompanied by 'Rührung und Liebe' towards the family – to remove the hindrance he represents in a semi-voluntary death (V 193). From the narrative perspective, bound as it is to Gregor's thoughts, it would, therefore, seem ironic for him to be accused of deliberate wrongdoing.

Glimpses of outside perceptions, however, present a contrasting interpretation. The clerk, for example, accuses Gregor of the opposite of his professed intent – that is of troubling and abandoning his family: 'Sie verbarrikadieren sich [...], machen Ihren Eltern schwere, unnötige Sorgen und versäumen [...] Ihre gesellschaftlichen Pflichten' (V 128). Gregor's transformation removes him from the social duties he assumed with the role of family provider. He is rendered dependent, indeed parasitic, by his metamorphosed form, which

²³ Ruf, p. 64.

²⁴ Gerhard Kurz, *Traum-Schrecken: Kafkas literarische Existenzanalyse* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1980), p. 174.

arguably embodies the ‘Nichtsnutzigkeit’ of the ‘Aussteiger aus Beruf und Gesellschaft’.²⁵ This ‘Aussteigen’, however, is presented more as unavoidable catastrophe than as deliberate abandonment of the family. It must therefore be seen either as a development independent of Gregor’s will or control, or as a manifestation of desires beneath the level of conscious awareness, the repressed urge to withdraw.²⁶ In either case, his culpability is as questionable as that of Mann’s Gregor; here, too, the suggestion of various levels of consciousness blurs the lines between deliberate and unwilling or unwitting action, and hence between guilt and innocence.

The fact that, conceived as an act of abandonment, Gregor’s relinquishing the paternal role may be as readily construed as a transgression as his assuming of it, is, however, significant, in that it highlights the paradoxical and inescapable nature of filial guilt in Kafka’s text. As provider Gregor supports his family through the displacement of its head, creating a tension which is exemplified by the father’s incongruous dependency, and the waning of the family’s gratitude (V 152). Conversely, in surrendering this role, Gregor himself becomes dependent, forcing his burden onto a family which appears initially incapable of fulfilling this working role (V 154-155), becoming ‘abgearbeitet’ and ‘übermüdet’ (V 175). He therefore bears a two-fold guilt, stemming from opposite actions – the taking on and the abandoning of the role of provider.²⁷ If both courses entail guilt, there is surely no ‘right’ role for the son within this family situation and his predicament is unavoidable.²⁸ Consequently, as in *Der*

²⁵ Peter Beicken, *Die Verwandlung: Erläuterungen und Dokumente* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1983), p. 78.

²⁶ See, for example, Eggenschwiler, who refers to the theory that the metamorphosis is an assertion of the demands of the ‘id’. David Eggenschwiler, ‘Die Verwandlung, Freud, and the Chains of Odysseus’, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 39 (1978), 363-385. (p. 367).

²⁷ See Eggenschwiler, p. 367.

²⁸ See Helmut Kobligh, “...ohne daß er etwas Böses getan hätte...”: Zum Verständnis der Schuld in Kafkas Erzählungen *Die Verwandlung* und *Das Urteil*, *Wirkendes Wort*, 32 (1982), 391-405 (p. 395). See also Mary Ann Witt, ‘Confinement in *Die Verwandlung* and *Les Séquestrés d’Altona*’, *Comparative Literature*, 23 (1971), 32-44 (p. 38).

Erwählte, the son's freedom appears curtailed, as his intentions and decisions are subordinated to a sense of inevitable transgression. In Gregor Samsa's case, however, this is due not to providence or genetics, but to the nature of familial relations.

The nature of 'guilt' in Kafka's text thus requires closer examination. If Gregor's impossible positioning between two equally damaging courses means he is rationally culpable only in a limited way, he nevertheless perceives his guilt to be very real. Again, a parallel is evident with Mann's Gregor, who brands himself guilty, despite the complexity of his semi-conscious, semi-willing transgression. Gregor Samsa's sense of guilt, however, unlike Grigor' somewhat elitist sense of superlative sinfulness, figures as a painful sense of failure and indebtedness. Such ideas already pervade Gregor's thoughts prior to the revelation of his metamorphosis, as, considering himself responsible for the protection of his family, whom he identifies by contrast as 'unschuldig', he is racked by 'Gewissensbissen' on finding himself late for work (V 125). Indeed, the presentation of his neurotic sense of guilt verges on humour as he absurdly deigns himself in too good health to call in sick, anticipating that he will be dismissed as lazy and workshy (V 118-119).

This feeling of guilt intensifies as his condition forces him to abandon his family to support themselves: the incapacitated son becomes 'heiß vor Verschämung und Trauer' at the prospect of his sister working in his place, and suffers due to his inability to thank her for her care of him (V 155-6). Structures of responsibility and dependency thus appear to form the basis of Gregor's perception of familial guilt; his conscience is troubled as an imperfect provider, and truly inflamed as a parasitic burden on his family. In this context it is helpful to consider Kwon's assessment of the kind of 'guilt' experienced by Kafka's protagonists:

Kafkas Figuren [...] [lassen sich] im Sinne eines erkennbaren juristischen oder moralischen Vergehens nichts zuschulden kommen: sie scheinen in der Tat

eher durch Schuldempfindungen bzw. unbewusste Schuldgefühle bestimmt zu sein als durch wahrhaft schuldhaftes Verhalten.²⁹

This distinction between guilt in terms of culpability and guilt as a feeling, a subjective reality, is, indeed, evident in Kafka's work – most clearly, perhaps, in the characterisation of his own paternal relationship in *Brief an den Vater*, which, though a later text (written – though not sent – in 1919), revolves around the same issue of disturbed father-son relations as stories such as *Die Verwandlung* and *Das Urteil*.³⁰ The text portrays a paradoxical relationship in which both parties are, technically, 'schuldlos', lacking bad intentions or objective culpability for the failure of a relationship, which, nevertheless, is marred by a relentlessly growing 'Schuldbewußtsein' on the part of the son (B 168, 181, 184 etc.).³¹ As Abraham notes, it is the linguistic conflation of 'Schuld' as objective culpability and as a subjective feeling of guilt, which leads to this irresolvable paradox.³²

Applied to *Die Verwandlung*, the fact that, for Kafka, 'Schuld' may exist regardless of any deliberate wrongdoing, is, on the one hand, an argument for the son's innocence: ironically, Gregor's consciousness of guilt cannot be taken as proof of conscious – that is, deliberate – transgression. On the other hand, the way these two concepts are divorced from one another makes his situation yet more hopeless: if feelings of guilt are inescapable, even

²⁹ Hyuck Zoon Kwon, *Der Sündenfallmythos bei Franz Kafka: Der biblische Sündenfallmythos in Kafkas Denken und dessen Gestaltung in seinem Werk* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2006), p. 54.

³⁰ The background to Kafka's writing of this text and the problem of its classification as a literary or autobiographical document is outlined by Christoph Stölzl in *Kafka-Handbuch in zwei Bänden*, ed. by Hartmut Binder (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1979), II, pp. 519-539 (p. 519).

³¹ Kafka, *Brief an den Vater*, pp. 145, 205. Henceforth references to this text will be given in parentheses in the text proper, using the abbreviation B, followed by the page number, e.g. (B 145).

³² Ulf Abraham, *Der verhörte Held: Verhöre, Urteile und die Rede von Recht und Schuld im Werk Franz Kafkas* (Munich: Fink, 1985), p. 152.

where he is not culpable, Gregor has no chance of dissociating himself from 'Schuld'. In this sense, guilt may be seen as intrinsic to his nature.³³

The mounting 'Schuldbewußtsein' described in *Brief an den Vater* also highlights a further aspect of Kafka's conception of guilt relevant to Gregor's experience: Kafka's complaint to his father, 'von allen Seiten her kam ich in Deine Schuld' (B 168) presents guilt as indebtedness – an idea further suggested by his description of his life as a balance sheet of 'Schuld' and 'Gewinn', in which all is eventually consumed by an almighty 'Schuld' (B 214). Accordingly, Ireton notes that in *Die Verwandlung*, the family's financial debt, something which in German would usually be referred to using the plural form, 'Schulden', is consistently referred to in the singular form generally reserved for guilt; thus material and moral kinds of 'Schuld' are linguistically associated and allowed to overlap symbolically.³⁴

This 'Schuld' of the Samsa family is central to *Die Verwandlung*. As discussed in Chapter One, the father's financial ruin is the root of familial crisis in that it prompts the son's assumption of the role of provider, bringing him into conflict with the rightful paterfamilias. It is also clearly a burden on the son, whose existence it determines due to his keenly felt obligation to work until this family debt is paid (V 118). Structurally, we may perceive a similarity to the inheritance of guilt in *Der Erwählte*: the 'Schuld' in this instance is also expressly 'des Vaters' and hails from his own failure as head of the household (V 154); it is a burden which is, however, passed down and placed on the shoulders of the son, who did not incur it, but must suffer under the responsibility of it, and, moreover, bear its consequences, namely further guilt springing from this problematic inheritance. Through the symbolism of the family debt as a physical inheritance with moral connotations, Gregor Samsa is thus also presented as an heir to familial 'Schuld'.

³³ Compare Witt, who sees *Die Verwandlung* as an expression of man's 'ontological' guilt (p. 38).

³⁴ Ireton, p. 38.

Though less explicitly than Mann, Kafka, too, presents this process of inheritance in the context of 'Erbünde'. The very difficulty of positively identifying conscious or deliberate wrongdoing on the part of Kafka's protagonist, combined with his helpless sense of guilt or indebtedness, particularly encourages conclusions about the inherent sinfulness of man, deriving not from specific actions, but from his very nature.³⁵ In addition to this, Kafka presents particular structures and images which suggest the Fall as an interpretative framework. Gregor's violent encounter with the father at the end of the novella's second section, during which the son is pelted with apples and driven out of the family domain (V 170-171) has clear overtones of the expulsion of Adam from Eden by a vengeful father-god, and thus places Gregor, like Wiligis in *Der Erwählte*, in the role of the original fallen man. Indeed, as Köhnke notes, Gregor's usurping of his father arguably mirrors the hubris of Adam and Eve in eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge in order to be like their father, God,³⁶ and the son's banishment thus follows logically according to the example of the biblical story.

Gregor's suffering due to the apple lodged in his back may also be seen in the light of the consequences of the Fall. Remaining as a 'sichtbares Andenken' in the flesh, the apple acts, yet more radically than the tablet borne by Gregorius, as a physical reminder of guilt incurred, as it is made physically integral to Gregor, causing pain which intensifies at the thought of his abandoned responsibilities,³⁷ and a heightened sense of physical frailty – indeed, of the mortality to which fallen man is heir, as Gregor's wounded back is covered in a symbolically suggestive layer of dust (V 184).³⁸ The other key effect of Adam's transgression,

³⁵ See, for example, Witt, p. 39; Kwon, p. 16.

³⁶ Köhnke, p. 116.

³⁷ Sparked by the sight of his work-worn mother and sister (V 176).

³⁸ Kwon (p. 101) also proposes a link to the 'Pfahl ins Fleisch' in II Corinthians 12.7 (Luther's version): 'Und auf daß ich mich nicht der hohen Offenbarung überhebe, ist mir gegeben ein Pfahl ins Fleisch, nämlich des Satans Engel, der mich mit Fäusten schlage'.

the compulsion to work,³⁹ does not, however, follow in the order which this biblical model would suggest. In Gregor's case, this state is not the result of his expulsion by the father, but rather predates it, and, in fact, stems from a paternal failing. Gregor's role within this symbolic framework is therefore not definitively that of the original sinner himself; he figures also – like Mann's Gregorius – as an heir to paternal guilt.

The father's vital role in the son's experience of guilt is, furthermore, indicated by another striking difference between Kafka's expulsion scene and the biblical scenario: the apple, signifier of original sin, is, in this case, not consumed voluntarily by the son; instead he is 'directly mortified by it' at the hand of the father.⁴⁰ Guilt thus appears, symbolically, as something thrust forcibly upon the helpless son by a father who, in throwing the apple, is himself directly implicated.⁴¹ This transfer from father to son structurally echoes the transfer of the paternal debt to Gregor, reinforcing the sense of the transmission of a burden of 'Schuld', of one kind or another, from one generation to the next. Here, as in *Der Erwählte*, the physical transfer of a representative object thus suggests, at a symbolic level, a cycle of guilt within the family;⁴² independently of his personal intentions or his objective culpability, the son is subject to a burden of guilt which, as an inherent or inherited feature, appears inseparable from his nature and his filial role.

The inseparability of filial and familial guilt suggested in the preceding chapter is thus confirmed. In both *Der Erwählte* and *Die Verwandlung* the son's personal culpability is a matter of profound ambiguity: Gregor Samsa's guilt stands in ironic contrast to superficially

³⁹ Both Kwon (p. 47) and Weinberg (p. 239) associate Gregor's labour with man's expulsion from paradise. Cf. Genesis 3.19: 'Im Schweiß deines Angesichts sollst du dein Brot essen, bis daß du wieder zu Erde werdest, davon du genommen bist.'

⁴⁰ Webber, p. 185.

⁴¹ See Iris Bruce, 'Kafka's *Metamorphosis*: Folklore, Hasidism, and the Jewish Tradition', *Journal of the Kafka Society of America*, 11 (1987), 9-27 (p. 17).

⁴² Cf. *Ibid.*

exemplary intentions, while that of Mann's Gregor appears complicated rather than clarified by the introduction of modern psychological motivations splitting the conscious and subconscious self. The protagonists' freedom to incur or avoid guilt also appears in each case seriously curtailed, as paradoxical circumstances, fate or an inherited nature introduce into the texts a strong sense of inevitability.

Since, despite this doubtful blameworthiness, each son is nevertheless presented as suffering from a sense of guilt, the conclusion is suggested that his guilt is something independent of personal actions or intentions and instead inherent to the protagonists' sonship. Both Kafka and Mann associate this innate familial guilt more or less explicitly with the concept of original sin through a system of imagery which presents guilt as a physical inheritance. In Mann's case, Gregorius' tablet and the body he perceives as inherently sinful exemplify the progress of guilt down the generations, while in *Die Verwandlung* the transmission of guilt from the father is indicated implicitly through the transfer of the paternal debt and the symbolic apple, which imply a burdening of the son in both a material and a moral sense. If guilt is thus the product of an inevitable cycle of inheritance, the son appears, in both cases, paradoxically guilty and innocent, a true 'guote sündære': a guilt which the son is heir to simply by virtue of his family role is both inseparable from his nature and beyond his responsibility or control.

CHAPTER THREE

REPRESENTATION, ISOLATION AND THE CONCEPT OF ATONEMENT

The preceding chapters have focused on the nature of the son's guilt. They have established its removal from conventional ideas of culpability, and the son's position as one inevitably implicated in a chain of transgressions and bearing existential or 'original' guilt as a (physical) familial inheritance. The significance of this close interrelation of filial and familial guilt is further clarified if, turning to the concept of atonement, we examine the mechanisms by which, in each text, the family is freed from the cycle of guilt, and the sense of burden removed. In both *Der Erwählte* and *Die Verwandlung* the resolution of familial crisis is achieved through an ordeal endured by the son. In each case, moreover, this ordeal is characterised by a radical form of isolation; physically burdened with guilt, the son is either willingly removed or forcibly expelled from both society and humanity. These structures would seem to imply the role of the son as scapegoat or sacrificial victim, through whose isolation and suffering the family guilt is cast out and atoned for. In this chapter I will therefore analyse the processes by which each protagonist is set apart from the family whose guilt he bears, and investigate how this ordeal may be read as a representative act – willing or unwilling – for the liberation of the guilt-ridden community.

The representative role of the son is made most explicit in *Der Erwählte*. On Gregorius' birth, his midwife, Frau Eisengrein, recommends that the tablet sent with him to sea be inscribed with instructions to dedicate his life to atoning for his parents' guilt, so securing their redemption ('in einem frommen Leben seiner Eltern Missetat also abbüßen, daß ihr alle drei zu Gott gelangt' (E 56)) – a plea later more simply expressed in Sibylla's appeal, 'mach es gut bei Gott' (E 57). Gregor's carrying of this tablet is therefore on two counts a

physical sign of the burdening of the son: firstly with the familial ‘Urschuld’¹ of his incestuous conception; and, secondly, with the responsibility to redeem the whole family – to whose guilt he is bound – through his individual actions. Though, as indicated above,² Gregor’s obsessive re-reading of the tablet’s inscription ‘zum hundertsten und aberhundertsten Mal’ (E 137) implies a narcissistic fixation on his own origins and existence (‘er [...] hielt sich sein Dasein vor Augen’) (E 165), his actions also demonstrate his identification with this task of atonement.

Indeed, the two stages of Gregor’s quest represent two distinct attempts to fulfil his mission of reparation, firstly through deeds of chivalry and later through ascetic penance. It is a peculiarity of Mann’s text that the tablet’s inscription – which in Hartmann’s version has even been interpreted as a call to religious orders³ – contains the specific instruction to atone for familial sin through knightly activity (E 57). Indeed, the act of fighting for and romantically pursuing ‘ander Blut’ (E 57) may logically be expected to cancel out the transgression marring Gregor’s origins, the incestuous violation of blood-relationships (‘Blutschande’), committed ‘in blutiger Ebenbürtigkeitswonne’ (E 253). Gregor’s blood, the element which transmits his sinful inheritance, may in fact draw him to his mother,⁴ meaning that his apparent adherence to the tablet’s command actually leads to the doubling of guilt; the messianic echoes of Sibylla’s reference to ‘das Blut, das Ihr für uns vergosset’ (E 149), however, though undoubtedly ironic in the context of an incestuous romance, indicate the proper role of the blood motif within the process of atonement. In spilling his blood in battle,

¹ Ireton, p. 45.

² See p. 22, above.

³ This argument was admittedly taken too far by some critics, in an attempt to establish Gregor’s pursuit of knighthood as the basis of his guilt. The theory of his obligation to religious life, and the evidence which disproves it, is outlined in Christoph Cormeau and Wilhelm Störmer, *Hartmann von Aue: Epoche – Werk – Wirkung*, 2nd rev. edn (Munich: Beck, 1993), p. 118.

⁴ See pp. 20 and 26 above.

Gregor lays his life on the line for Sibylla's liberation and his release from the burden of inherited guilt in an act of sacrifice which, though imperfect, prefigures the image of the bleeding Lamb of God, the perfect example of filial sacrifice, which later heralds familial redemption (E 199).

Fascinatingly in the light of the links between guilt and debt apparent in *Die Verwandlung*, Gregor's sacrifice is conceived as an attempt 'vor Gott ein wenig abzugleichen von unsrer Sündenschuld' (E 150), rendering guilt a kind of debt to be settled with God through knightly endeavour. This method of atonement appears to affiliate Gregor with heroes of medieval Romance such as Iwein and Parzival, whose knightly 'âventiuren' form a gradual path to redemption. Mann's protagonist, however, hopes to settle his score with God once and for all through a single duel with Sibylla's suitor, which is presented as a gamble whereby his 'gänzlich aus Sünde bestehenden jungen Leib' is offered up for obliteration in defeat or – he hopes – justification in victory (E 138). Indeed, the fact that his opponent is described as a dragon (E 138) not only allows illustrious associations with dragon-slaying heroes such as Tristan and Siegfried,⁵ but, in relating to Gregor's perception of himself as the incarnation of familial guilt ('Ich bin ein Scheusal, ein Monster, ein Drache, ein Basilisk!' (E 113)), implies that his ultimate opponent is his own nature, the monstrosity of which he hopes to overcome through readiness to sacrifice himself in combat.

While this unsuccessful attempt at atonement follows the recommendations of, and is enacted in the social sphere of Gregor's mother, the latter, successful attempt removes Gregor from familial contact, but simultaneously is undertaken more explicitly on behalf of the family. Gregor asserts his responsibility, or indeed his right, to take on the bulk of the penance for the guilt he shares with his mother (E 186), and his assumption of this burden is

⁵ See Ruprecht Wimmer, 'Der sehr große Papst: Mythos und Religion im *Erwählten*', *Thomas-Mann-Jahrbuch*, 11 (1998), 91-107 (p. 96).

stressed as he sets out bearing his tablet, the familial ‘Schuldbrief’ (E 234), against his skin (E 181). Familial guilt thus appears symbolically carried outside the community by the filial representative, and, on the completion of Gregor’s penance, is visibly cancelled out, as the tablet is balanced in his hands against a new symbolic prop, the key denoting his papal ‘Schlüsselgewalt’ to free from sin (E 234). This symbolic function of the key is particularly stressed in Mann’s text through the removal of its practical function of releasing Gregor from his shackles: the son is already free, and it is his parents’ liberation which concerns him. Indeed, his almost humorously eager response to his appointment as Pope, which contrasts starkly with the reluctance of Hartmann’s Gregorius (G 3505-3515), is clearly founded on his desire for the power to deliver his parents from their (original) guilt: “‘Holde Eltern”, sprach er, “ich will euch lösen”” (E 229).

Although Gregor’s embroilment in familial guilt means his penance relates also to his own redemption, there are messianic overtones to the sense of representative sacrifice inherent in his assumption and removal of collective or original guilt through an individual ordeal. This is particularly suggested by images such as his carrying of the ladder used to climb to his place of penance like Christ carrying his cross (E 188) – a far more concrete comparison than the formulaic reference to Wiligis taking up his cross in penitential pilgrimage (E 45). By comparison with Hartmann’s *Gregorius*, however,⁶ Mann’s presentation of Gregor’s penance represents a move away from the imagery of *imitatio Christi*. Hartmann’s hero endures a Passion in a genuine biblical sense, becoming a ‘living martyr’ (‘lebende[r] marterære’ (G 3378)), suffering from eternally fresh wounds from his shackles (G 3451-3456), and wasting away until his bones can be counted through skin,

⁶ For interpretations stressing Gregorius’ Christ-like qualities see for example: Hasty, p. 65; Murdoch, ‘Hartmann’s Legends and the Bible’, pp. 154-5; Alois Wolf, ‘Gnade und Mythos: Zur Gregoriuslegende bei Hartmann von Aue und Thomas Mann’, *Wirkendes Wort*, 12 (1962), 193-209 (pp. 197, 202).

which, in a double allusion to the Way of the Cross, is compared to a cloth stretched over thorns, (G 3443-3448, 3459-3465).

In reimagining this penance Mann interprets Hartmann's description of Gregorius' thinness ('er was sô gelîche *kleine* | an beinen unde an armen' (G 3445-48) my italics HH) as smallness – perhaps, as Ireton argues, inspired by the recurrence of the term 'verwandelt' in Hartmann's text (G 3466-3468, 3558-3559) to present a literal interpretation of a linguistic image after the manner of Kafka.⁷ Gregor's is indeed a genuine metamorphosis: instead of becoming emaciated due to lack of nourishment – which, in this case, is sufficiently provided (E 192-193) – the protagonist shrinks via an accelerated process of animal adaptation into a dwarf-like creature. This allows his penitential shackles to slip off (E 229), reduces the impact of the elements to the point where the description of him as 'erbarmungslos preisgegeben' is rendered openly ironic (E 193), and lessens his sense of the duration of his ordeal by allowing him to enter a kind of hibernation ('zeitlosem Murmelschlaf') reminiscent of the empty 'Winterschlaf' of asceticism criticized by Nietzsche (E 193-194).⁸ As some critics complain, and Mann himself admitted,⁹ the severity of Gregor's ordeal is drastically reduced.¹⁰

In another respect, however, his experience is made yet more extreme. While Mann explained his adaptation in terms of 'realism' – saying of the medieval Gregorius' miraculous survival, 'das handgreiflich Unmögliche konnte ich bei meiner Realisierung der Geschichte

⁷ See Ireton, p. 41.

⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral: Eine Streitschrift* (Leipzig: C. G. Neumann, 1887), in *Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke und Briefe* (based on *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967-)), ed. by Paolo D'Iorio, III <<http://www.nietzschesource.org/texts/eKGWB/GM-III>> [accessed 24 June 2010], §§ 1, 17.

⁹ See Mann, 'Bemerkungen zu dem Roman *Der Erwählte*', in *Gesammelte Werke in Dreizehn Bänden* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1990), XI, pp. 687-691 (pp. 261-262).

¹⁰ The authenticity of Gregor's penance is questioned by Reich-Ranicki (pp. 105-106) and in Andreas Urs Sommer, 'Neutralisierung religiöser Zumutungen: Zur Aufklärungsträchtigkeit von Thomas Manns Roman *Der Erwählte*', in *Traces of Transcendancy: Religious Motifs in German Literature and Thought*, ed. by Rüdiger Görner (Munich: Iudicium, 2001), pp. 215-233 (p. 225). See also Wolf, who brands *Der Erwählte* 'nichtchristlich' in this respect (p. 206).

nicht brauchen. Ich mußte es mit einer Art von Schein-Möglichkeit umkleiden'¹¹ – his version of events does not increase their verisimilitude, but rather replaces one kind of supernatural logic with another. By presenting a more mythical interpretation of Gregor's penance, he allows the protagonist's isolation to be radicalised, as he is not only spatially removed from society on his rock surrounded by water and wilderness, but also physically removed from humanity itself: Gregor may consider himself 'ein Mensch, wenn auch außer der Menschheit' (E 227); the narrator and the Roman delegates, however, dehumanize him, referring to him as a 'Ding', a 'Wesen' and a 'Creatur' (E 195, 224). Gregor's nature is thus rendered indeterminate, no longer fully human, yet associated definitively with no one animal species. As the description of him as 'ein filzig-borstiges, mit Moos bewachsenes Naturding' demonstrates, he is situated ambiguously between various animal (and potentially also plant or mineral) identities (E 195).¹²

Ireton therefore rightly deems Gregor 'ein Weder-Noch, ein Zwischending'¹³ who is thus, as we shall see, closely related to the metamorphosed Gregor Samsa, a similarly indefinable being. This nature makes Gregorius not only a comical but, like Kafka's protagonist, a disturbing figure, outside conventional human experience. Indeed, Ireton argues further that his transformation constitutes an outer manifestation of the inner monstrosity ('Monstertum') experienced by Gregor on the revelation of his incestuous origins (E 114).¹⁴ His indefinable form may certainly be seen as a physical expression of the category-confusion established in Chapter One as the basis of familial guilt, and indeed of the son's nature as a character in opposition to the accepted social or natural order.

¹¹ Mann, 'Bemerkungen zu dem Roman *Der Erwählte*', pp. 261-262.

¹² Though Gregor's association with a hedgehog is often cited, Mann makes this comparison only in terms of approximate size (E 195). Compare Holland's summary of the Gregorius legend, which allegedly involves the hero's reduction to 'an ugly little hedgehog-like creature' (p. 149).

¹³ Ireton, p. 42.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 40. See E 113, quoted p. 37, above.

Gregor's incestuous conception makes him an outsider from before his birth, an 'unstatthafte und stättenlose Kind' for whom there is no place in the world – and who, moreover, endangers his parents' place in its order (E 40). The contrast between his origins and upbringing, which positions him, like Mann's Tonio Kröger, between two worlds,¹⁵ results, furthermore, in a dual nature, which angers his adoptive brother as an offence against 'die Ordnung': 'du bringst die Welt durcheinander und verwirrst die Unterscheidungen' (E 98). Gregor's penance is thus significant in that it radically manifests in him the monstrosity and confusion which are his inheritance as the product of incest and removes them, in him, from a society in which they are fundamentally unacceptable. As Strohschneider argues, the incestuous confusion of social categories demands an act of re-differentiation in the form of expulsion.¹⁶

Gregor's atonement for familial guilt thus entails not only deliberate sacrificial representation, but also a process of scapegoating. Indeed, as Hartwich's analysis of the Old Testament shows, both the desert – here paralleled by the wilderness sought out by the penitent Gregor – and water – which twice separates him from society – represent realms into which representatives of communal sin were ritually cast for the purpose of atonement.¹⁷ Neither incidence of expulsion in the text, however, follows this model precisely. The casting out of the newborn Gregorius as a child whose existence threatens the social order may follow mythical patterns, again recalling the fate of Oedipus, and initially appears to liberate his parents, as social crisis is averted; the ritual, however, remains incomplete due to Gregorius'

¹⁵ The description of Gregor as 'ein heimlich Fremder so hier wie dort' echoes Tonio's complaint: 'Ich stehe zwischen zwei Welten, bin in keiner daheim.' *Tonio Kröger*, p. 337.

¹⁶ Though Strohschneider's comments refer to Hartmann's *Gregorius*, they echo Mann's reference to confused 'Unterscheidungen' p. 125.

¹⁷ Wolf-Daniel Hartwich, 'Böser Trieb, Märtyrer und Sündenbock: Religiöse Metaphorik in Franz Kafkas *Urteil*', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 67 (1993), 521-540 (p. 528).

survival, which allows the scapegoat's disastrous return. His later 'expulsion', while successfully bringing atonement, is by contrast a voluntary act, a 'Selbstausstoßung',¹⁸ in which Gregorius, not unlike Gregor Samsa in his final moments, designates himself the principal representative of familial guilt and removes himself as a willing scapegoat.

At times, in fact, 'willing' appears something of an understatement as Gregor is presented as a penitent eager to the point of irony. Considering that the 'original' sin in *Der Erwählte* springs from 'Hochmut' (E 41) founded on exceptionality, Gregor's penitence is rendered problematic by his competitive insistence on 'der Großteil der Buße' in opposition to his mother's claim to be 'die Hauptschuldige' (E 179), and by his determination to undertake an 'extraordinary' ('außerordentlichen') penance to match his extraordinary guilt: 'denn einen Menschen, dermaßen in Sünde getaucht wie mich, gab es auf Erden nie oder ganz selten' – the retrospective assurance '- Ich sage es ohne Überheblichkeit' only serves to confirm the reader's contrary suspicions (E 180). While it is logical that Gregor's penance match the extent of his guilt, the correlation between crime and punishment is extraordinary here, in that the manner of atonement perpetuates, indeed intensifies, the attitude originally responsible for guilt.

At the text's conclusion, however, the concept of exceptionality associated with this extraordinary guilt appears to be reinterpreted as a positive sign of 'chosenness' (Erwähltheit). Gregor's superlative references to himself as 'Gottes größten Sünder' and the one 'den Gott sich erwählt hat zum untersten, äußersten Sünder' (E 226) convey the sense of a perverse accolade, while the narrator's closing statement, 'klug ist es freilich, im Sünder den Erwählten zu ahnen' (E 260), indicates that Gregor is 'chosen' prior to his election as Pope – by virtue of his exceptional sinfulness. Kuhn argues that 'die Sünde trägt bei ihm schon das Zeichen der

¹⁸ Burghart Wachinger, 'Einleitung', in *Geistliches in weltlicher und Weltliches in geistlicher Literatur des Mittelalters*, pp. 1-15 (p.11; with reference to *Gregorius*).

Ausnahme, und Ausnahme ist schon Erwählung.’¹⁹ The exceptionality of Gregor’s guilt and penance, however, are not so much significant for their own sake, as in their provocation of an extraordinary divine response, according to the principle of speculation discussed in *Doktor Faustus*: ‘die Anziehung der Gnade durch die Kumulation der Sünde.’²⁰

Mann’s Gregor may not consciously ‘speculate’ in this way in the process of his transgression, so avoiding the sin of presumption on God’s ultimate forgiveness (‘vürgedanc’) condemned in *Gregorius* (G 21), but an accumulation of guilt is clearly evident, as familial confusion is concentrated, and inherited guilt manifested in his person. This effect is intensified by the penance he undertakes, which, as we have seen, entails a conscious assumption of responsibility for familial guilt, and binds him more closely to his guilty inheritance by heightening his monstrosity and radicalising the sense of esoteric pride at the root of familial transgression. Thus embodying and isolating familial guilt, Gregor in effect acts as a scapegoat. In the context of *Der Erwählte*, however, the death of the filial representative is not required for the eradication of guilt; rather, the extremity of the son’s predicament prompts a correspondingly extraordinary act of forgiveness, liberating the family through the redemption of the son.

The inclusive nature of this liberation sets *Der Erwählte* apart from *Die Verwandlung*, in which the casting out of the scapegoat-son is a violent act with terminal consequences. Since his fate thus also entails extreme isolation and a kind of representation, Gregor Samsa is, however, closely comparable to Mann’s Gregor as a bringer of familial atonement.

¹⁹ Kuhn, p. 241. See also Deborah Lund, ‘Mittelalterliche Legende im 20. Jahrhundert: Hartmann von Aue und Thomas Manns Gregorius’, in *Das Weiterleben des Mittelalters in der deutschen Literatur*, ed. by James F. Poag and Gerhild Scholz-Williams (Königstein/Ts.: Athenäum, 1983), pp. 168-181 (pp. 170-172); and Wunderlich (p. 650) who presents a moral criticism of this aspect of the text.

²⁰ Mann, *Doktor Faustus: das Leben des deutschen Tonsetzers Adrian Leverkühn erzählt von einem Freunde*, in *Gesammelte Werke in dreizehn Bänden* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1990), VI, p. 666. See also Böschstein’s relation of the two novels in terms of this principle (pp. 71-72).

As in *Der Erwählte*, the son appears consistently in Kafka's text as an isolated figure, not, however, set apart by distance, but by barriers which separate him from the family in its very midst. Before his transformation, Gregor locks the doors separating his room from the family domain (V 120), and, after his metamorphosis, his isolation is compounded by the locking of these doors from the outside (V 144-145). Indeed, as they are hastily slammed, locked and bolted each time Gregor has been driven back over the threshold of his room (V 142, 192-193), these barriers connote both exclusion and, in the narrator's words, 'Gefangenschaft' (V 151).²¹ The effects of this isolation become apparent as Gregor is increasingly alienated in terms of his perception of his environment: his sense of time is disturbed, and, as his vision fails, space seems to close in²² until there appears to be nothing beyond the confines of his room but an 'Einöde' (V 155-156). In a figurative sense, therefore, Kafka's Gregor – like Mann and Hartmann's Gregorius and the biblical scapegoat²³ – is cast into the wilderness.

While Gregorius voluntarily seeks out this wilderness, however, Kafka presents the son as the passive victim of a violent exclusion enforced against his will.²⁴ The primary agent of expulsion is the father, who is characterised by an urgent desire to drive out his son from his first sighting of Gregor's metamorphosed form, and who effects this expulsion with violence, pursuing him with various weapons and missiles. Indeed, his actions and desires with regard to Gregor are associated repeatedly with the verbs 'stoßen', 'treiben' and 'drängen' (V 134, 140-142) – processes which, particularly on his bombardment of Gregor with apples, suggest parallels with man's banishment ('Verstoßung'/'Vertreibung') from Eden by an angry father-God. As Kwon notes, Kafka thus links social exclusion ('Verstoßung

²¹ See Witt, p. 35.

²² See Politzer, p. 69; Köhnke, p. 110.

²³ See Hartwich, p. 528.

²⁴ Gregor repeatedly attempts to re-enter the family domain (V 134, 166-167, 186).

aus einer Gemeinschaft’) with a deeper existential issue: ‘dem theologischen Problem der Vertreibung aus dem paradiesischen Zustand’.²⁵

As noted above, Gregor’s banishment from his place within the family and the expulsion from paradise do not directly correlate, since Gregor’s life pre-metamorphosis is already marked by the need to work. If man’s exile is thus a pre-existing condition, Gregor’s expulsion is merely its echo – a double banishment which excludes him from the ‘Diesseits’ as well as the ‘Jenseits’.²⁶ This repetition of man’s original expulsion has an ominous existential significance, stressing both the guilt-laden nature of Adam’s heirs, and the connection of this guilt with an ongoing process of expulsion. This expulsion, moreover, no longer follows a logical sequence of transgression and banishment as found in the biblical model. Instead, we are presented with a bizarre and sinister assault on an impotent son by a volatile and vengeful paternal authority.

The sense of horror and persecution thus created is a recurring theme in Kafka’s works, apparent also in *Brief an den Vater*, as the author recalls being banished by his father onto the family’s ‘Pawlatsche’ without any clear sense of a transgression having motivated the action (B 149); and similarly in *Der Heizer* (1913) – one of the intended components of Kafka’s ‘Söhne’ trilogy – in which the filial protagonist Karl Roßmann is dramatically expelled for a questionable offence, being ‘einfach beiseitegeschafft [...], wie man eine Katze vor die Tür wirft, wenn sie ärgert.’²⁷ Both incidents share with *Die Verwandlung* the experience of being cast out and left alone outside a closed door, a trauma exacerbated by an apparent disjunction between offence and punishment. Indeed, as noted above, Gregor Samsa

²⁵ Kwon, p. 213.

²⁶ Günther Anders comments on this peculiarity, stating that Kafka’s hero is situated ‘außerhalb, [...] “jenseits des Diesseits”’: dadurch wird das Diesseits zum Jenseits.’ *Kafka: Pro und Contra: Die Prozeß-Unterlagen* (Munich: Beck, 1951), pp. 20-21.

²⁷ *Der Verschollene*, ed. by Jost Schillemeit (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1983), p. 38. Karl’s culpability for the offence of impregnating a somewhat predatory maidservant is clearly limited.

is forcibly laden with the apple signifying guilt; and he is only marked with this sign in the act of expulsion. His fate thus appears closer to that of the Old Testament scapegoat than was true in the case of Mann's Gregor. While the latter willingly assumes his tablet, the symbol of familial guilt, and purposely isolates himself, Kafka describes the burdening and banishment of the son as an act of violence perpetrated on him by an unfathomable authority.

A similarity to *Der Erwählte* is, however, evident in the intensification of the son's isolation through his physical removal from humanity. In *Die Verwandlung* this departure is particularly stressed through the son's proximity to his horrified family; indeed, the horror Gregor's metamorphosis provokes is the immediate cause of his exclusion, meaning that the sequence of events presented by Mann appears here in reverse: Gregor Samsa's social exclusion follows his removal from humanity. Examined closely, however, the son's alienation from his human identity is, in fact, a process which continues throughout the text and is interrelated with his social isolation. Initially Gregor's consciousness is at odds with his new body to the extent that he appears imprisoned not only in his room, but in his unfamiliar form.²⁸ A disconcerting discrepancy is evident between his lucid thoughts and the incomprehensible 'Tierstimme' he emits (V 131), and between his mental and physical reactions: on the clerk's arrival, he mentally freezes ('erstarrte fast') while his legs, ironically, enter a flurry of movement ('nur desto eiliger tanzten' (V 124)).

In overcoming this split, however, Gregor only advances his alienation from humanity. The physical wellbeing experienced as he exchanges his upright, humanoid stance for a horizontal position (V 142) and his later enjoyment of crawling over walls and ceiling exemplify a rapid and largely unconscious adaptation to an animal nature. Indeed, his proximity to an absolute 'Vergessen seiner menschlichen Vergangenheit' (V 162), is only

²⁸ See Kevin W. Sweeney, 'Competing Theories of Identity in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*', *Mosaic*, 23 (1990), 23-35 (p. 23). See also Politzer, p. 68.

appreciated at the prospect of his room being converted into an empty ‘Höhle’ (V 162) such as a wild animal – though perhaps also a hermit – might inhabit. The objects embedded in the floor of Gregor’s room (V 165) visually represent his past life and activities, integral elements of his human identity, whose violent removal is suggested by the furniture’s forcible extraction.

This incident, furthermore, demonstrates the role of the family in Gregor’s removal from humanity as well as from society. His sister in particular is keen to strip his room of relics of his former life, to allow him space to indulge his animal drives. While she, however, at least still addresses him with his human name, exclaiming ‘Du, Gregor!’ (V 166), Frau Samsa clearly dissociates the metamorphosed Gregor from her human son, claiming: ‘es wäre das beste, wir suchen das Zimmer genau in dem Zustand zu erhalten, in dem es früher war, damit Gregor, wenn er wieder zu uns zurückkommt, alles unverändert findet’ (V 161-162).²⁹ This dissociation is ultimately adopted, and indeed radicalised, by Grete, who, following his last advance into the family domain denies Gregor his name, family role and even human identity, stating: ‘Du mußt bloß den Gedanken loszuwerden suchen, daß es Gregor ist’ (V 191). Referred to as ‘es’ rather than ‘er’ (V 191), Gregor is thus thoroughly objectified, eventually becoming ‘das Zeug von nebenan’ (V 198), something – like the unwanted items placed in his room (V 181) – which is simply discarded (‘weggeschafft’ (V 191)).

In fact, Grete’s comments not only dehumanize, but also demonize Gregor, as she brands him an ‘Untier’ (V 189); and her claim, ‘so aber verfolgt uns dieses Tier, vertreibt die Zimmerherren, will offenbar die ganze Wohnung einnehmen’ (V 191), goes so far as to identify Gregor, the victim of expulsion, as himself the agent of ‘Vertreibung’. As in *Der Erwählte*, however, the son’s monstrosity does have a real physical – and psychological basis.

²⁹ See Politzer, p. 172.

Like Mann's Gregorius, Gregor is associated in his own imagination with a dragon – or, as Politzer argues, with a paradoxical hybrid of knight and dragon, as, in his incestuous fantasy, he defends his sister, but simultaneously appears as the monster 'mewing and spitting flames.'³⁰ As in *Der Erwählte*, the son is rendered monstrous by his nature as a 'Zwischending',³¹ opposed to any sense of order – indeed, only on Gregor's death is 'Ordnung' restored (V 198). His indistinct nature is stressed by the manner of his description: just as Mann presents no overall image of his metamorphosed protagonist, Kafka, too describes only dislocated parts, rendering species-definition, and even visualisation impossible. Indeed, Kafka insisted: 'Das Insekt selbst kann nicht gezeichnet werden. Es kann aber nicht einmal von der Ferne aus gezeigt werden.'³²

It is thus logical that the family reacts to Gregor with fear and revulsion (V 156-157), banishing him to a realm of darkness and dirt (172, 177) out of sight and mind. As Corngold and Webber demonstrate, as an 'ungeheure[s] Ungeziefer' (V 115), a doubly negated being, Gregor embodies taboo: he is both 'unacceptable to man (*ungeheuer*)', and unacceptable to God, since 'Ungeziefer', derives from a medieval term denoting 'an unclean animal not suited for sacrifice.'³³ Indeed, his insectile form potentially associates him with the diabolic,³⁴ especially on his expulsion with apples, where parallels are evident not only with Adam, but also with the serpent, who is similarly condemned in the biblical story, and, like Gregor, doomed to crawl in the dust (V 177, 193).³⁵ Webber thus deems Gregor 'abject' in the sense proposed by Julia Kristeva, whose theories link the preservation of identity with the

³⁰ Politzer, p. 77.

³¹ Ireton, p. 42.

³² This response to the prospect of Ottomar Starke's cover illustration for *Die Verwandlung* (1915) is cited in Ireton, p. 47.

³³ Stanley Corngold, 'Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*: Metamorphosis of the Metaphor', *Mosaic*, 3 (1970), 91-106 (pp. 99, 103). See also Webber, p. 180.

³⁴ See Weinberg, p. 240.

³⁵ See Webber, p. 186.

‘abjection’, or forcible rejection, of all that ‘disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.’³⁶ In this sense, the disturbing ‘confusion of categories’³⁷ represented by Gregor’s indeterminate form and the family’s disordered relations is necessarily linked to expulsion.

If Gregor is thus ‘abjected’ for the preservation of the family, in accepting his expulsion, however, he, like Mann’s Gregor, takes on a sacrificial role – something far from diabolic. Gregor is ultimately cast as a willing victim, as he internalises and intensifies his sister’s call for his removal: ‘Seine Meinung darüber, daß er verschwinden müsse, war womöglich noch entschiedener, als die seiner Schwester’ (V 193). Although the physical cause of his demise is the wound inflicted by his father, meaning the protagonist’s will is surely less instrumental in his sacrifice here than in *Der Erwählte*, the love occupying Gregor’s last thoughts (V 193) invites the interpretation of his death as a deliberate sacrifice for the family’s liberation. It is significant that Kafka, as well as Hartmann and Mann, employs Passion imagery. Parallels with the crucifixion are implied as Gregor, struck by the apple, feels himself ‘wie festgenagelt’ (V 171), and the description of his last breath as coming at the third hour, implicitly giving up his spirit, echoes the account of Jesus’ death in John’s gospel.³⁸ Indeed, as Holland argues, the metamorphosis itself may be viewed in messianic terms, if the transformation of man to animal is viewed as analogous to that of God to man.³⁹

This curious combination of the divine and the monstrous or diabolic in Gregor’s metamorphosis and death is ironic in much the same way as is Mann’s combination of

³⁶ Webber, pp. 178, 180; Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 4.

³⁷ Webber, p. 178.

³⁸ See the juxtaposition of Kafka and John in Holland, p. 147.

³⁹ Ibid.

Gregorius' saintliness with his diminutive animal form. On a more serious level, however, it reflects the combination of two models of representational atonement: like Mann's Gregor, Gregor Samsa appears part scapegoat, part sacrificial victim. Hartwich's discussion of the Mosaic ritual of atonement is significant in this context, in that it stresses the different fates of the two goats involved in this process: one (the sacrificial victim) commended to God, and the other (the scapegoat) given over to the devil.⁴⁰ If, as sole agent of atonement, the son incorporates both of these roles, it follows that his expulsion associates him with a diabolic sphere, while the sacrificial elements of his death, apparently ironically, suggest something more divine.

This mixing of roles is especially apparent in Gregor's removal of guilt through its incorporation into his own body. On Gregor's death, Old and New Testament ideas merge, as the rotting of the apple lodged in his back (V 193) suggests the removal of original sin – a messianic function – but also stresses Gregor's physical assumption of guilt. Like Mann's Gregor, whose flesh and blood are a manifestation of sin, Gregor Samsa, 'becomes' guilt and removes it in his person.⁴¹ Indeed, Sokel sees the metamorphosis as a turning point where the son stops trying to repay familial 'Schuld' in an economic sense – an unsuccessful attempt like the early endeavours of Mann's Gregor – and begins to atone for it by physically incorporating it in a mythic sense, shifting the focus of the family's concerns from the 'Schuld' owed to Gregor's employer to the 'Unglück' represented by his monstrosity (V 175).⁴² As Eggenschwiler notes, the family's economic strife is now blamed on the metamorphosis, making its misery synonymous with the son's existence.⁴³ Concealed in a

⁴⁰ Hartwich, p. 528.

⁴¹ Walter Sokel, 'From Marx to Myth: The Structure and Function of Self-Alienation in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, *Literary Review*, 26 (1983), 485-496 (p. 491).

⁴² Sokel, 'From Marx to Myth', pp. 489-490.

⁴³ See Eggenschwiler, p. 374.

room filled with rubbish, Gregor represents all that the family is ashamed of and wishes to hide or reject (V 181); indeed, he is recognised by the lodgers as symbolising all that is wrong with the Samsas, ‘die in dieser Wohnung und Familie herrschenden widerlichen Verhältnisse’ (V 188). Kafka thus suggests a process of transfer whereby, in Gregor’s monstrous form, familial guilt is concentrated and isolated, and so can be ultimately removed.

Der Erwählte and *Die Verwandlung* are thus closely comparable in their presentation of the burdening and isolation of the son as the method by which the guilt of the disordered family is atoned for. As demonstrated in the preceding chapters, the son, who is trapped in a chain of transgressions, is heir to a guilt not entirely his own. He thus takes on a representative function, which is stressed, in each text, by imagery of burdening (with the symbolic tablet and apple) and by indications of the son’s physical incorporation of familial guilt. The expulsion of the filial protagonist presented by both Kafka and Mann thus arguably constitutes a process of scapegoating, the isolation of guilt from the family unit, in the form of a designated representative. Indeed, in the physical transformation characterising both authors’ presentations of the son’s ordeal, the concepts of representation and isolation are simultaneously highlighted: filial incorporation of familial guilt and confusion is emphasised through the son’s assumption of a monstrous and indefinable form, and his isolation is radicalised by his removal from humanity.

This concept of substitution linking the two texts is, however, complicated by the question of deliberate representation. The self-expulsion evident in the actions of the two Gregors indicates a willing assumption of the scapegoat role, which is thereby transformed into a sacrificial role, the messianic nature of which is underlined by Passion imagery. If, in their atonement on behalf of their families, Gregorius and Gregor Samsa thus both occupy a position somewhere between scapegoat and New Testament Messiah, Gregorius is, however,

far nearer to the New, and Gregor Samsa to the Old Testament end of the spectrum. For while Mann's Gregor deliberately identifies with his representative role, and finds, in voluntary isolation, a source of acclaim – indeed of personal salvation; Gregor Samsa appears a willing victim only in his last moments. For the most part his fate is forced upon him by a family which violently expels, imprisons and stigmatises him, causing the loss of his human identity, and ultimately his life. Though in the midst of his family, Kafka's Gregor thus experiences a more thorough 'abjection', becoming a scapegoat in a more tragic and primitive sense.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRANSFORMATIVE SUFFERING AND THE POSSIBILITY OF REDEMPTION

The preceding chapter considered the transformation of the filial protagonists of *Die Verwandlung* and *Der Erwählte* in terms of the casting out of the son as bearer of guilt for the purpose of familial atonement. Beyond this, however, transformation is significant in terms of the concept of redemption, the physical and spiritual rehabilitation of the disordered family. In fact, the transformation characterising the son's ordeal is only the most obvious in a series of metamorphoses. Mann's Gregor undergoes two radical physical changes, and, in both texts, physical regression is linked to spiritual development, and filial to familial transformation. If, however, both families are restored to order through the son's ordeal, Gregorius' re-transformation, which includes him in this redemption, separates him decisively from the permanently excluded Gregor Samsa. In this final chapter I will analyse the transformation(s) of son and family, in order to establish their relationship in each text, and the contexts which allow for such different conceptions of the potential for personal and familial redemption.

In *Der Erwählte*, physical and spiritual transformation are presented as related but opposite processes, apparently echoing the view expressed in Hartmann's *Gregorius* of a problematic split between body and soul: 'swaz dem lîbe sanfte tuot, | daz enist der sêle dehein guot: | swâ mite aber diu sêle ist genesen, | daz muoz des lîbes kumber wesen' (G 2659-2662). Indeed, the narrator's introduction presents 'Geist' and 'Körper' as indivisible, yet contrary entities, identifying the body as 'eine Domäne des Satans' tolerated only as the vessel for man's soul and reason ('Gottesvernunft') (E 13); and, throughout the novel, the presentation of sin as a physical inheritance promotes the idea that the flesh is sinful, and that its mortification constitutes the route to salvation. On Wiligis' death, Herr Eisengrein concludes that 'er hat Gott den Leib gegeben für seine Seele' (E 59). While Wiligis' incest is

truly a ‘sin of the flesh’, however, the identification of the body (‘den Leib [...], der wider Gott gesündigt’ (E 45)) as the guilty party, here, and in Sibylla’s reference to her sin as ‘was mein Leib verübt’ (E 178) indicates a curious dissociation; the guilty body is branded a hostile, almost alien, entity. Although Sibylla’s comments closely follow Hartmann’s *Gregorius*, ‘lîp’ is, in the medieval context, both more common and less strictly limited to the meaning ‘body’ than the word ‘Leib’, which thus produces a yet greater distancing effect.¹

Mann’s discussion of this opposition of body and soul is, therefore, no direct repetition of medieval views, but rather a somewhat parodistic manipulation of key ideas. Indeed, his distance from Hartmann’s ideal of the mortification of the flesh is apparent in his reduction of the physical discomfort entailed in Gregorius’ penance, discussed in Chapter Three. In another sense, however, the model of inverse physical and spiritual development is retained, indeed very tangibly expressed. Mann presents Gregor’s penitential transformation as a paradigm of physical regression and reduction mirrored by spiritual advance and elevation: as a penitent, he is ‘herabgesetzt [zum Murmeltier]’, and as Pope, by contrast, raised (‘erhöht’) by God above all sinners (E 257). This ‘Herabsetzung’, a reduction to semi-animal form, constitutes a kind of evolutionary regression, but also a reduction in terms of dignity, posture and size, as Gregor crawls on all fours (E 190-191), and is shrunken and deformed to the point where his ‘verzwergte Mißgestalt’ contrasts comically with his high vocation (‘[die] Hoheit des Amtes, zu dem er berufen’) (E 230).

It also entails Gregor’s return to an infantile state, as he is rendered an ‘Erdsäugling’ (E 194), dependent on milk provided by the earth. This childlike state represents a return to Gregor’s own origins – a trend throughout the text – and, moreover, a return to the origins of

¹ See G 2681-2683: ‘mich wundert, nâch der missetât | die mir der lîp begangen hât, | daz mich diu erde geruochet tragen.’ Middle High German ‘lîp’ may denote also in a wider sense a ‘person’ or ‘life’.

mankind, as the narrator compares him to early man: ‘klein, unfertig und unerwachsen [...] habe der Mensch damals an den Brüsten der Mutter [the earth] gehangen und kindische Nahrung genossen’ (E 192). Mann’s letters state that this idea of milk from the earth – a significant departure from the water Hartmann’s Gregorius survives on (G 3123-3124) – is of Epicurean origin.² Considering Mann’s extensive borrowing from *Parzival*, however, Lesser’s relation of the idea to a passage from Wolfram’s text is also potentially valid, and suggests a significant link between the concepts of human infancy and guilt.³ The statement, ‘diu erde Adâmes muoter was: | von erden vruht Adâm genas’, may not refer to milk; it does, however, propose the idea of nourishment provided by Mother Earth, and, moreover, relates it to a state of literally virginal harmony prior to Cain’s sin.⁴ Return to this original earthly harmony may thus indicate a redemptive function, as human transgression is cancelled out.

Unity with nature is, however, a problematic concept in *Der Erwählte*, not automatically indicative of innocence or redemption. The narrator associates nature with an amoral physical world, berating it for its monstrous indifference (‘Gleichmut’) in allowing incest to flourish (E 161); and its ambivalence is further highlighted when, as the penitent Gregor merges with it, nature reflects those features denoting exceptionality, and hence guilt: the blue-black hue of the protagonists’ eyes, and the sickle shape of the twins’ distinguishing scar (E 194-195). If regression for its own sake is not unequivocally redemptive, however, the rebirth facilitated by this return to the origins surely is. While this rebirth is manifestly physical, as Gregor is raised from his undeveloped, animal- or childlike form to the stature of

² Reportedly extracted from Karl Kerényi’s *Urmensch und Mysterium*. See Wysling (ed.), *Selbstkommentare*, pp. 28-9. Further mythical and biblical uses of this motif are noted in Yoav Elstein, ‘The Gregorius Legend: Its Christian Versions and its Metamorphosis in the Hassidic Tale,’ *Fabula*, 27 (1986), 195-215 (p. 201); and Weigand, ‘Thomas Mann’s *Gregorius*, I-III’, p. 21.

³ Not only the dragon motif, but also numerous names are taken from *Parzival*. See Lesser’s summary: ‘Der Erwählte’, in Jonas Lesser, *Thomas Mann in der Epoche seiner Vollendung* (Munich: Kurt Desch, 1952), pp. 474-530 (this reference, p. 511).

⁴ *Parzival* II, 464,11-12; 13 (‘dannoch was diu erde ein magt’) and 18-20.

a grown man, bodily restoration is justified by spiritual transformation, the elevation to God's favour which counters Gregor's physical decline.

The key role played by 'Geist' is clearly expressed in the re-transformed Gregor's exclamation: 'Herr! Wie sehr bewundr' ich sie, | Deine heilige Alchimie, | Die des Fleisches Schmach und Leid | Läutert in die Geistigkeit' (E 234). Through its advance, the spirit has the power to purify the guilty flesh, bridging the divide between body and spirit and allowing redemption of the whole. This function is highlighted by the image of St. Peter's in Rome, a building made of 'heathen' stone and thus consisting 'ganz und gar aus Schmach und Schande', but redeemed by the spirit: 'geheiligt nur durch das Grab und durch den Geist, in dem man dort anbete. Auf den Geist komme es an' (E 240). The same implicitly applies to Gregor, whose body, 'ein Werk der Sünd und Schande' (E 137), is quite literally transformed through spiritual rebirth. In marked contrast to the Wolf's claims that Gregor's animal transformation reduces man to the purely biological, Stackmann thus identifies in *Der Erwählte* a 'vorbehaltlose Parteinahme für die Sache des Geistes.'⁵

Indeed, the bodily restoration accompanying Gregor's redemption arguably has divine implications. Eming notes that, in medieval saints' lives, the body is an important space for encountering the sacred, and, in extreme cases of martyrdom, remains ultimately intact as confirmation of divine power.⁶ Gregor's new body associates him, moreover, with the body of Christ, as his retransformation is referred to as a 'Wandlung', a term – as stressed by the narrator's reference to the 'Wandlungsglöcklein' in the opening chapter (E 9) – associated with the phenomenon of transubstantiation. Indeed, Gregor is transformed after receiving bread and wine, and his body, like the offertory gifts in the Mass, is physically altered through

⁵ Wolf, p. 207; Stackmann, p. 74.

⁶ Jutta Eming, 'Chopped up, Grilled and Shrunken to the size of a Hedgehog: The Bodies of Saints in Medieval Hagiography and in Thomas Mann's *Der Erwählte*', *Seminar*, 46 (2010), 146-160 (pp. 147, 149).

the imbuing of its substance with a higher spirit. His new form is subsequently likened to that of the resurrected Christ in that it both resembles his former self and is somehow transfigured. Gregor's features now appear as '[die] ernste Wiederholung von Wiligis und Sibyllas reizenden Zügen' (E 231) – the addition of seriousness implying spiritual development beyond his genetic inheritance. Through his second transformation, therefore, Gregor goes beyond the role of scapegoat to that of living saviour, whose recovery and return to society brings collective redemption. Indeed, Gregor immediately begins to grant absolution in the manner of Christ, forgiving the fisher's wife, who, as she covers his feet with tears (E 231), is cast as a penitent Magdalene.

This transformation from grotesque creature burdened with guilt to Christ-like figure facilitating redemption is shockingly – indeed comically – swift. The 'Unbegreiflichkeit' (E 235) and apparent 'Willkür' (E 239) of Gregor's elevation to Pope, however, does not merely add comic value, but exemplifies the incalculable capacity for redemption of divine grace. As Böschenstein notes, this is a religious point overlooked especially by early critics of *Der Erwählte* who focussed on the novel's ironic tone, but one consistent with the theme of speculation on the extent of grace in the more obviously serious *Doktor Faustus*, discussed in the previous chapter.⁷ Gregor's words, 'Übergebt Euch nicht der Verzweiflung [...] wenn Euer Auge nur eine Stunde naß wird von Herzensreue [...] so seid ihr gerettet' (E 179), closely echo the condemnation of doubt in God's mercy ('zwîvel') in *Gregorius* (G 2695-2706), and cast him as Adrian Leverkühn's opposite, a confident penitent, successful in securing redemption. Indeed, Mann's comments on the novel clearly display a desire to present grace

⁷ Böschenstein, pp. 81-83.

as a serious theme: ‘der verspielte Stil-Roman, die Endform der Legende, bewahrt mit reinem Ernste ihren religiösen Kern, ihr Christentum, die Idee von Sünde und Gnade.’⁸

‘Gnade’ is, in fact, a recurring theme in Mann’s writings of the time. In a letter of 1951 he wrote ‘Ich kenne die Gnade, mein Leben ist lauter Gnade, und ich bestaune sie’,⁹ and, in *Meine Zeit* the previous year, described his life as a continuous and expressly religious drive (‘religiöse Drang’) to make up for life through work – and for each work through the next – with only one ultimate source of comfort: ‘[der] Trostgedanke [...] an die Gnade, diese souveränste Macht [...] bei der allein es steht, das Schuldiggebliebene als beglichen anzurechnen.’¹⁰ Here ‘Schuld’ again appears in a simultaneously material (here, literary) and religious context, as grace is identified as a transcendent power with the ability to cancel that debt which is impossible to repay. Indeed, Gregor’s bizarre penance may constitute a rather imperfect act of reparation for familial guilt; the very nourishment which reduces its penitential credentials, however, also indicates the true source of his redemption in the ‘Ahnung von Gnade’ it provides (E 193). The Christian context of this grace is suggested as Mann introduces the Lamb of God as the symbol heralding Gregor’s redemption (E 199). As Murdoch notes on *Gregorius*, man’s pre-existing redemption through Christ’s death and resurrection renders the complete sacrifice of the hero unnecessary; saved through Christ, he may go on to save as Christ’s representative.¹¹

This transition from ‘Sündenbock-Stellvertreter’ to ‘Gottes-Stellvertreter’¹² is apparent in the redemptive transformation of the family effected, not by Gregor’s removal, but by his

⁸ ‘Bemerkungen zu dem Roman *Der Erwählte*’, p. 263.

⁹ Wysling (ed.), *Thomas Mann, Selbstkommentare*, p. 77.

¹⁰ *Meine Zeit*, p. 303.

¹¹ Brian Murdoch, ‘Adam *sub gratia*: Zur Bußszene in Hartmanns *Gregorius*, *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen*, 227 (1990), 122-126 (p. 126); idem, ‘Hartmann’s Legends and the Bible’, p. 154.

¹² Strohschneider, p. 133.

re-transformation and reunion with his family, upon which the cycle of guilt is broken. This is made especially tangible in *Der Erwählte* through the existence of Gregor's children, who stress the potential for the eternal continuation of the cycle of guilt, either through inheritance – as they are presented also as heirs to sin with no place in the world (E 178) – or through incest with their father, exponentially increasing familial confusion (E 158). Though Humilitas' appearance ('wälich blaß-bräunlich wider, mit schwarzen Augen von blauem Unterschein' (E 244)) highlights her inheritance of her parents' nature, her (new) name counters the concept of pride associated with this inheritance, her marriage of a character outside the family indicates its liberation from the narcissistic inability to engage with the 'other', and her children, as, 'fröhliche Leute, die vorwärts gezeugt waren in rechter Richtung und so auch lebten' (E 259), mark the restoration of the natural generational progression inverted by Gregor's conception of children with his mother (E 161).¹³

To some extent, existing relationships are also re-ordered. As Böschenstein notes, Gregor's union with Mother Earth provides a legitimate substitute for the lost maternal bond whose recovery motivated his incest.¹⁴ Indeed, the seventeen days spent as an infant with his mother are echoed by his seventeen years on the rock,¹⁵ and his experience of unity with nature (E 194) recalls the 'oceanic feeling' discussed by Freud in connection with suckling.¹⁶ As Gregorius' need for inappropriate attachment to Sibylla is removed, a sibling relationship is proposed to replace their maternal-cum-marital bond (E 158). In this way, Böschenstein notes further, the son instigates a (re-)legitimizing of the brother-sister relationship at the root of familial transgression.¹⁷ All traces of role-confusion are not, however, removed. The

¹³ See p. 9, above.

¹⁴ Böschenstein, p. 96.

¹⁵ See Sommer, p. 217.

¹⁶ See Lawson, p. 12.

¹⁷ Böschenstein, pp. 98-9.

narrator still revels in its perversity, identifying Pope Gregorius as ‘den Mann seiner Mutter, seines Großvaters Eidam, seines Vaters Schwäher, seiner Kinder greuliches Geschwister’ (E 235), and Gregor’s elevation to ‘Holy Father’, in fact augments this confusing plurality of roles by making him father to his wife and mother: “Mutter!” rief er. | “Vater!” rief sie. “Vater meiner Kinder, ewig geliebtes Kind!” (E 257).

This apparent paradox both lends the dénouement a farcical air, and indicates an unusual fluidity of roles which transcends normal familial order. Indeed, incestuous relationships are described throughout the novel using super-human analogies. The pregnant Sibylla is ironically compared with the Virgin Mary as, believing she has retained her virginity in sleeping only with her brother, she is apparently rendered a ‘Mutter-Jungfrau’ (E 52); and, addressing Mary in her later prayer as ‘heiligstes Weib, die so Ausnehmendstes erfuhr’ and ‘des Obersten Kind, Mutter und Braut’ (E 157), she implies a shared experience of exceptionality and familial complexity.¹⁸ If she is, at this stage, a somewhat monstrous version or inversion of the Marian ideal, an ‘ungeheuerlich gesegnete Jungfrau’ (E 42-43), to whom her son later declares ‘Unreine hab ich Euch angetan [...], Unreine der Frucht Eures Leibes’ (E 176), Gregorius’ elevation to Pope brings a more genuine sense of divinity. Explaining his identity through the Trinitarian image of the ‘Drei-Einheit [...] von Kind, Gatte und Papst’ (E 256), he echoes Sibylla’s reference to Mary as ‘des Obersten Kind, Mutter und Braut’, indicating that, once the paternal Papal role is added to that of child and spouse, the divine parallel is complete.

It is a pertinent question, therefore, whether the category-confusion at the root of familial guilt is ultimately sanctioned as a reflection of the divine. Naming Zeus and Hera and

¹⁸ Significantly, though the latter quotation is prefigured in one of Mann’s named sources for the prayer, the Vorauer Sündenklage (in Albert Waag, *Kleinere deutsche Gedichte des 11. und 12. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Werner Schröder, 2 vols (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1972), I, pp. 173-183 (lines 170-173)), the reference to ‘Ausnehmendstes’ appears to be an innovation.

Isis and Osiris as examples, Mann wrote that his narrator, ‘hat auch wohl einen Schimmer davon, daß der Inzest eigentlich ein Vorrechts-Tabu war, – Göttern und Königen erlaubt und nur dem gemeinen Haufen untersagt.’¹⁹ Indeed, Strohschneider’s analysis of *Gregorius* indicates that category-confusion which causes social crisis may be accommodated within sacred space: ‘Ist der Inzest die Krise des Gesetzes der Unterschiede, so ist die Gnade dessen Aufhebung [...] Der Raum des Heils ist derjenige, in welchem sich alle Unterschiede aufheben, auch die Ordnungen der Blutsverwandtschaft.’²⁰ Gregor’s family can thus be redeemed without dissolution of its impossibly tangled relations in – and only in – a realm transcending social order. As Gregor pithily states: ‘Kein Platz war für mich unter den Menschen. Weist mir Gottes unergründliche Gnade den Platz an über ihnen allen, so will ich ihn einnehmen voller Dank’ (E 229).

The son’s redemption body and soul and the family’s resulting liberation from stigma and guilty inheritance is thus made possible only through God’s benevolence in raising Gregor to a level where familial confusion may merge into the mysterious realms of sanctity. The potential for a less harmonious conclusion inherent in this dependence on grace is made clear in Abraham’s comment on guilt in Kafka’s work: ““Schuld” gegenüber Gott ist ja niemals von “Sünder” aus eigener Kraft gänzlich abzuarbeiten; immer bleibt ein Rest, der von der göttlichen Gnade vergeben wird – oder auch nicht.”²¹ Man is, in this view, fundamentally impotent. His guilt before God cannot, like a legal crime, be cancelled through punishment;²² rather, his fate is decided by forces beyond his control. Indeed, the primacy of grace over human effort in both texts has been identified as a concept reminiscent almost of Calvinism.²³

¹⁹ Wysling (ed.), *Selbstkommentare*, p. 93-94.

²⁰ Strohschneider, pp. 131-132.

²¹ Abraham, p. 179.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ See: Anders, pp. 108-9; Sommer, p. 232; Eming, p. 155.

If Mann's Gregor, however, is inherently 'chosen', a beneficiary of grace, Gregor Samsa's fate, a terminal physical decline redeemed only in a limited way by spiritual advance, appears marked by a lack of this necessary 'Gnade'.

His transformation, and its impact on his family, is nevertheless comparable to Gregorius' in many respects. Outwardly, it also involves extreme reduction and regression which, as Robertson notes, renders him both animal and infantile,²⁴ as he is physically lowered to crawl on the ground and made dependent on others for nourishment.²⁵ While Gregorius is gratefully sustained by the milk symbolising his redemption, however, Gregor Samsa's response to nourishment is markedly different. His initial enthusiasm for the drink – his former favourite – turns quickly to aversion (V 143), indicating a radical alienation from his past self – and indeed from life itself, as, following his mental query: 'ob sie [die Schwester] eine andere Speise hereinbringen würde, die ihm besser entsprach?' (V 146), he finds himself attracted to half-rotten leftovers which associate him with decay (V 147-148).

This sense of decadence increases as Gregor's appetite is lost completely: 'das Essen machte ihm bald nicht mehr das geringste Vergnügen' (V 159). Eating, as Holland suggests, is a sign of social communion,²⁶ and Gregor's disinclination to eat thus emphasises his exclusion from the family. Since eating is also an 'affirmation of the will-to-live',²⁷ his abstinence indicates, moreover, a radical turning away from life which renders his ordeal more genuinely ascetic than that of Mann's Gregor. This asceticism is, however, founded less on choice than on deficiency. As he watches the lodgers eat, Gregor contrasts tragically with their effortless vitalism, much as the *Hungerkünstler* of Kafka's later story (1922), unable to

²⁴ Ritchie Robertson, *Kafka: Judaism, Politics and Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 54).

²⁵ Compare Ireton, p. 43.

²⁶ Holland, p. 146.

²⁷ Michael P. Ryan, 'Samsa and Samsara: suffering, Death and Rebirth in *The Metamorphosis*, *German Quarterly*, 72 (1999), 133-152 (p. 145).

satisfy his hunger, is contrasted with men of healthy appetite and an animal whose freedom and vitality are expressed in its jaws.²⁸ The horrified Gregor is also transfixed by the men's teeth: 'Sonderbar schien es Gregor, das man [...] immer wieder ihre kauenden Zähne heraushörte, als ob damit Gregor gezeigt werden sollte, das man Zähne brauche, um zu essen [...] "Ich habe ja Appetit", sagte sich Gregor sorgenvoll, "aber nicht auf diese Dinge. Wie sich diese Zimmerherren nähren, und ich komme um!"' (V 183).

If the lodgers are reminiscent of Nietzsche's assertion: 'Ein starker und wohlgerathener Mensch verdaut seine Erlebnisse [...] wie er seine Mahlzeiten verdaut', Gregor thus appears closer to his definition of man as 'das kranke Thier', 'der Unbefriedigte, Ungesättigte'.²⁹ Gregor's unsatisfied hunger removes him from a worldly ideal of strength and health, but, simultaneously, indicates a desire for something transcending this physical world. Kafka thus suggests a spiritual awakening, which, as in *Der Erwählte*, accompanies physical decline,³⁰ and is stressed here by the protagonist's uncharacteristic attraction to music.³¹ 'War er ein Tier, da ihn Musik so ergriff? Ihm war, als zeige sich ihm der Weg zu der ersehnten unbekanntem Nahrung' (V 185). For Bruce, this development demonstrates the significance of fasting as a 'means for gaining spiritual nourishment through the divine', represented here by music.³² This would be in keeping with *Gregorius*, in which suffering and abstinence bring the penitent closer to spiritual heights. The statement, 'Ihm war, als', is,

²⁸ Kafka, *Ein Hungerkünstler*, in Franz Kafka, *Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, ed. by Wolf Kittler, Hans-Gerd Koch and Gerhard Neumann (*Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. by Jürgen Born and others) (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1994), pp. 333-349 (pp. 336, 349).

²⁹ Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral* III, §§ 16, 13. Patrick Bridgwater specifically names this section, *Was bedeuten asketische Ideale*, as one which Kafka read and was influenced by. *Kafka and Nietzsche* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1974), p. 20.

³⁰ See, for example, Ireton, p. 44.

³¹ The protagonist's previous disinterest in music is made clear earlier in the text in the statement that Grete Samsa 'zum Unterschied von Gregor Musik sehr liebte' (V 152).

³² Bruce, p. 20. Bruce considers *Die Verwandlung* in the context of the Hasidic tale – a genre of literature reportedly familiar to Kafka (p. 11).

however, far from certain, and Gregor's glimpse of the path to spiritual nourishment falls short of the success of Mann's Gregor, a less perfect ascetic who nevertheless finds sustenance which secures his salvation.³³

The transcending of earthly constraints indicated by Gregor's apparently gravity-defying crawling on the ceiling of his room is similarly limited. While physical height brings him a sense of freedom ('man atmete freier; ein leichtes Schwingen ging durch den Körper' (V 159)), this experience proves illusory as the very sense of abandon it inspires causes Gregor to let go and come crashing back to earth (V 159).³⁴ Later, too, as he is weakened by starvation, and the wound in his back restricts his mobility to the point where even re-entering his room is a tortuous task (V 189, 192), Gregor's physical frailty renders 'das Kriechen in der Höhe' impossible (V 172). Thus, while physical decline opens Gregor's eyes to the possibility of spiritual transcendence, it simultaneously holds him back from achieving the heights symbolically associated with this possibility.

As the elevation which rehabilitates Mann's Gregorius eludes Kafka's Gregor, the turning point in the Samsa family's fortunes is correspondingly marked, not by the son's re-transformation and reintegration, but by his absolute removal in death. The idea of redemption is, however, not entirely redundant. Indeed, the critical discussion of Gregor's death is littered with references to 'Erlösung' – though most frequently in the sense of a 'release'. Thus Köhnke declares that Gregor's death has no redemptive function ('keinerlei Erlösungsfunktion'), while still referring to 'die Szene eines erlösenden Hinscheidens' and the

³³ See Ireton, p. 46. The ambivalence of the possibility of transcendence through music is also indicated in Nietzsche's discussion of Schopenhauer, in whose philosophy the aesthetic appreciation of art is associated with '[das] Loskommen vom "Willen"', while, paradoxically, music is identified as 'die Sprache des Willens selbst' (Zur Genealogie der Moral, §§ 5-6).

³⁴ Gregor is perhaps fooled by the false human sense of transcendence associated with trapeze artists which is later mocked by Rotpeter in *Ein Bericht für eine Akademie* (1917) (*Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, pp. 299-313 (pp. 304-305)).

family's relief ('die anderen [fühlen sich] erlöst').³⁵ Whether or not it brings genuine redemption, however, Gregor's death undoubtedly performs the dual function of freeing the family and himself from the problem of his existence, so radically exemplified by his metamorphosed form.³⁶ Indeed, even from the filial perspective, it may be read as a peaceful event, characterised by relief from pain and burden, and an intrinsically promising experience of dawning light ('den Anfang des allgemeinen Hellerwerdens') (V 193). The rotting of the apple in Gregor's back, considered above in terms of his incorporation of guilt,³⁷ may even indicate his own release from guilt with his fading life.³⁸

Kurz therefore concludes that Gregor's death is a positive goal: 'Der Schrecken ist nicht der Tod, sondern die Existenz; der Tod [...] ist Erlösung, Befreiung, Gnade, Rückkehr ins Paradies.'³⁹ Intriguingly, this comment suggests, after all, a source of 'Gnade' in Kafka's work. That it may only be identified by equating it to death, reveals, however, a stark difference between *Die Verwandlung* and *Der Erwählte*. For Gregor there is no possibility of worldly redemption; in fact, even his death remains highly ambivalent. The subjunctives and concessive clauses in statements like 'er hatte zwar Schmerzen im ganzen Leib aber ihm war, als würden sie schwächer und schwächer und würden schließlich ganz vergehen' create an air of uncertainty; the 'Zustand leeren und friedlichen Nachdenkens' in which Gregor dies potentially indicates weary submission rather than real peace; and the dawning light accompanying his demise may be less a sign of redemption, than an ironic counterpoint highlighting the son's exclusion from the family's new dawn (V 193). This exclusion from

³⁵ Köhnke, pp. 119-120.

³⁶ Compare Sokel, 'From Marx to Myth', p. 494.

³⁷ See p. 50, above.

³⁸ See Köhnke, p. 119.

³⁹ Kurz, p. 177.

grace is, indeed, the lot of the scapegoat, as outlined by Hartwich,⁴⁰ and arguably corresponds to an essentially Jewish, rather than Christian worldview: ‘Die Welt bleibt nach Kafka unerlöst.’⁴¹

In fact, where the term ‘Gnade’ does appear in Kafka’s work, it performs an ironically negative function. Describing a scene reminiscent of Gregor’s climactic confrontation with Herr Samsa, Kafka writes of his own father:

Schrecklich war es auch, wenn Du schreiend um den Tisch herumlieftest, um einen zu fassen, offenbar gar nicht fassen wolltest, aber doch so tatest und die Mutter einen schließlich scheinbar rettete. Wieder hatte man einmal [...] das Leben durch Deine Gnade behalten und trug es als Dein unverdientes Geschenk weiter. (B 161)

Mercy is thus a tool of authority used to entrench the burden of guilt through a growing sense of indebtedness: ‘Von allen Seiten her kam ich in Deine Schuld’ (B 168). As Abraham notes, pardon (‘Straferlaß’) withholds the reduction of guilt and rebalancing of relationships entailed in punishment itself, and is, in this respect, the more repressive form of discipline.⁴² If then, in Kafka’s thinking, even ‘Gnade’ is linked to the accumulation of ‘Schuld’, death, the ultimate dissolution of guilt-inducing relationships, does appear the only means of escape.

Indeed, on Gregor’s death familial restoration and reordering indicate, as in *Der Erwählte*, the breaking of the cycle of guilt. Perversely, Gregor himself appears reconciled with the family. As Sweeney notes, Grete’s declaration, ‘wenn es Gregor wäre, er [...] wäre freiwillig fortgegangen’ (V 191), offers him the possibility of performing, through self-removal, a ‘*brotherly* act, fulfilling a role while at the same time dissolving it.’⁴³ Thus, in death, the son returns to fond thoughts of his family (V 193) and it returns to a recognition of his identity, as the impersonal ‘es’, still present in the cleaner’s ‘es ist krepirt’, is replaced in

⁴⁰ Hartwich, p. 528.

⁴¹ Ibid. Similarly: Kwon, p. 32; Bruce, p. 20; Koblighk, p. 396.

⁴² Abraham, p. 151.

⁴³ Sweeney, p. 32.

the family's speech by the more sympathetic 'er' (V 194-195). Far removed from Mann's vision of earthly salvation, *Die Verwandlung* thus presents reconciliation as something predicated on death.⁴⁴

The worldly redemption which is denied Gregor is, however, evident in his family's (re-)transformation. While, as discussed in Chapter One, the metamorphosed Gregor's incapacitation re-empowers the displaced father, this is only a partial transformation, marred by worry and exhaustion (V 175),⁴⁵ and exemplified by the paradoxical combination of authority and servility suggested by his 'Dieneruniform' (V 173).⁴⁶ The family only appears fully restored and reconfigured on Gregor's demise. Freed of his son, the father also appears freed from all troubles and inhibitions, and reasserts his authority by confronting the lodgers. He does so, moreover, in a formation suggesting absolute order and unity. With his wife on one arm and his daughter on the other, he reclaims a central position, in which – as the leader of a 'united primal horde'⁴⁷ – he enjoys undisputed authority and undivided female attention (V 199).

The seemingly unspectacular, but unprecedented statement, 'Dann verließen alle drei gemeinschaftlich die Wohnung' (V 199) also stresses this sense of renewed community, and, moreover, heralds a new freedom. Indeed, the Samsas appear relieved on several counts: 'erleichtert' by the lodgers' departure, they also cast off the obligation to work; and their 'Entschuldigungsbriefe' (V 198) symbolically suggest their release from familial guilt,⁴⁸ especially as they are written at the end of March – potentially the redemptive Easter season.

⁴⁴ Indeed, in Kafka's connection of death elsewhere with the terms 'Rückkehr zum Vater. Großer Versöhnungstag', Hartwich identifies '[eine] negative Eschatologie' which 'steht gegen die Heilsangebote der Kirche und des Zionismus, das Reich Gottes in dieser Welt zu verwirklichen.' Hartwich, pp. 535-536.

⁴⁵ See Eggenschwiler, p. 374.

⁴⁶ Compare Witt, p. 38.

⁴⁷ Eggenschwiler, p. 377.

⁴⁸ See Ireton, p. 39.

Their emancipation is also spatially expressed, as their excursion ‘ins Freie vor die Stadt’ suddenly relieves the claustrophobia of a text until now confined to the interior of their flat, and their plans to move house indicate a final dissociation from the domain connected with Gregor and the history of guilt (V 199-200). As Pascal notes, the claustrophobia of the narrative is similarly relieved through its liberation from Gregor’s perspective.⁴⁹

The temporal perspective, too, is opened up, as the family’s thoughts turn to their hopes for the future, manifested in the image of Grete’s emergent womanhood. While her transformation is a natural and ordinary development, it appears to exemplify familial redemption almost in the manner of Gregorius’ ‘Wandlung’, in that it constitutes the opposite development to the son’s regressive transformation: Grete, ‘zu einem schönen und üppigen Mädchen aufgeblüht’ (V 200), has undergone a transformation towards physical beauty and vitality which counters Gregor’s decadent regression to repulsive beast. Indeed, Ireton deems this ‘eine wahre Metamorphose im Sinne eines Schmetterlings, der aus der Larve ausbricht’ – an image suggested by her stretching, as if of a new body (V 200)⁵⁰ – and thus links it to the rebirth of Mann’s Gregor, who also develops from ‘Larve’ (E 228) ‘zum vollkommenen Menschen’.⁵¹ The motif of redemptive transformation is thus evident in both texts; while in *Der Erwählte*, however, the son himself undergoes both regressive and restorative transformations, in *Die Verwandlung* this second, positive metamorphosis applies to the family, which is rejuvenated on his demise.

This familial rebirth is further stressed by the parents’ conclusion that Grete, now free of her monstrous charge and his incestuous desires, is ripe for marriage. Through the son’s

⁴⁹ Roy Pascal, *Kafka’s Narrators: A Study of his Stories and Sketches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 66.

⁵⁰ Gregor’s parents are delighted when ‘am Ziele ihrer Fahrt die Tochter als erste sich erhob und ihren jungen Körper dehnte.’

⁵¹ Ireton, p. 39, 42.

sacrifice, the family's continuation in line with traditional patriarchal order seems secured. The promise of Grete's fertility is, however, no such conclusive evidence of familial re-ordering and redemption as the marriage of Mann's *Humilitas*. What Bruce sees as evidence of continuity through procreation, the positive side of original sin and the earthly reflection of eternal life,⁵² Ryan interprets as the perpetuation of the cursed worldly existence which it was Gregor's goal to escape.⁵³ For the family, too, the reality of redemption is thus less clear-cut than in Mann's *Erwählte*; though their immediate problems dissolve with Gregor's demise, it is unclear if they have been permanently resolved, or if the destructive system of familial guilt and disorder is poised to start afresh. Even if familial liberation is a reality, however, the stark difference remains that Gregor Samsa, unlike Gregorius, is no Christ-like living saviour, but one whose death is exchanged for familial rebirth. This is an altogether grimmer and more ambivalent fate determined by a far less inclusive concept of salvation.

While many shared symbols and structures are evident in *Die Verwandlung* and *Der Erwählte*, as personal and familial redemption are linked to physical and spiritual transformations, the two texts thus appear essentially opposed in their conceptions of the nature and extent of redemption. Both authors present a filial metamorphosis which links physical reduction and regression to spiritual advance and transcendence, echoing to some extent the model of penance in Hartmann's *Gregorius*. Ironically, however, Gregor Samsa, the more genuine ascetic, ultimately is less successful in attaining spiritual heights than Mann's Gregor, whose ordeal is eased by nourishment from a benevolent nature. This redemption in spite of imperfect penance underlines the importance of grace in *Der Erwählte*. Indeed, both authors present situations in which familial re-ordering and redemption appear beyond human capabilities. Whereas, in *Der Erwählte*, however, confidence in divine mercy

⁵² Bruce, p. 16.

⁵³ Ryan, p. 149.

allows miraculous redemption despite familial confusion, Kafka's text allows no such intervention, and thus presents the dissolution of disorder through the son's death as the only solution.

Indeed, Mann's text assumes a possibility of worldly redemption which seems lacking in *Die Verwandlung*. Whether out of piety or irony – or a curious if characteristic combination of the two – Mann uses the Christian model of the resurrected saviour to present a protagonist who is physically reborn, and whose rebirth, moreover, is the key to familial redemption. Though both families ultimately appear to some extent renewed and free to progress without the burden of disorder, the relationship between filial and familial transformation in the two texts is thus fundamentally different. While, in *Der Erwählte*, filial reintegration prompts familial restoration, allowing the holistic redemptive transformation of son and family, the less certain redemption of *Die Verwandlung* is based on their separation – indeed, liberation – from one another, as the son's death sparks familial rebirth. The concept of redemption in Kafka's text is thus fundamentally limited; unlike Mann's Gregor, Gregor Samsa cannot be redeemed body and soul, since his destruction is the condition for his family's positive metamorphosis.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is clear that the relationship between son and family provides a context within which the apparently inexplicable fate of the protagonist in *Die Verwandlung* and *Der Erwählte* acquires a certain logic. Both Kafka and Mann present sons who apparently suffer for their sins, but whose guilt defies definition using traditional concepts of culpability. In each case, however, we are presented, not with an entirely personal guilt, but with one rooted in the familial context. This guilt is the product of social transgression, the confusion of roles within the family unit leading to familial crisis. Since, moreover, disorder breeds further disorder, it is a guilt which expands, ensnaring the son in a chain of transgressions, stemming not from personal, but, in the first instance, from parental actions.

In a sense, therefore, the son appears an innocent victim. Indeed, it is highly questionable whether either protagonist enjoys free will to incur guilt or otherwise: the path followed by Mann's Gregor is preordained; while Gregor Samsa appears trapped between two equally wrong courses, making guilt inevitable. The paradox of inevitable guilt is exemplified, moreover, in both texts by imagery relating to original sin, highlighting the progress of guilt down the generations. The guilt of the son thus appears inherent – or inherited. Indeed, it is presented as integral to both protagonists, as Gregorius' flesh and blood is branded the manifestation of familial guilt, and the symbolic apple is lodged in Gregor Samsa's back. Though we may perceive him as a 'good' sinner, familial guilt is thrust on the son so that he becomes physically identical with it.

This transfer of guilt from family to son is central to the method of atonement employed in both texts. If the son is burdened with familial guilt to the point where he physically incorporates it, his expulsion constitutes a casting out of guilt in his representative form. This process of burdening and expulsion follows Old Testament patterns, as is

suggested by the symbols of apple and tablet and references to the expulsion from Eden. New and Old Testament merge, however, as the son, to a greater or lesser extent, identifies with his representative function, so approaching the role of self-sacrificing saviour.

It is in *Der Erwählte* that this development is most pronounced. While Kafka's Gregor may experience a more genuine Passion than Mann's, any messianic parallels are rendered ultimately incomplete, indeed ironic, as his ordeal ends in death without resurrection. His is thus the more tragic fate of a scapegoat or victim whose personal sacrifice liberates the community; only on his removal is familial order restored. Mann's text, however, draws more freely on a Christian model of redemption. Whether due to Mann's greater indebtedness to Hartmann, his views on grace, or indeed his comic impulse, it presents familial liberation by a living saviour. The son's regressive transformation, which echoes the fate of Kafka's Gregor, is thus reversed by a positive metamorphosis, the result of a spiritual elevation which redeems the whole self along with the family, halting the progress of disorder and legitimizing existing confusion.

The son's fate in the two texts is thus determined by very different responses to the problem of apparently irresolvable familial confusion: while, in *Die Verwandlung*, the offending relationships are simply dissolved through the death of the son, in *Der Erwählte* they are raised above the norms of social order, becoming a sign of transcendent exceptionality. Kafka and Mann, however, equally present the son as bearer of familial guilt and bringer of familial redemption. It is, in both cases, a fateful role, whose biblical proportions are expressed in a fascinating combination of Old and New Testament imagery, and which, in this respect, undoubtedly invites further investigation.

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