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THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORITY:
FRANZ KAFKA AND NAGIB MAHFUZ

by
Richard Kenneth Myers

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the
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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the conception of a universal structure in the short fiction of Franz Kafka and Nagib Mahfuz. Their representations of problems in authority define their concepts. The authority theme is central to Kafka and Mahfuz, the literal interpretations culminating in a figurative model of the world. Their existential questions consider the personal, relational (Kafka) and political (Mahfuz) levels of authority. The metaphorical conclusion to the dilemma of authority is the problem of God. Each author, with an acute sense of order, finally recognizes that justice and mercy are products of an order and power that only an omnipotent force can possess. In their yearnings for justice (Mahfuz) and mercy (Kafka), these writers suggest a sense of hope in an unnamed God.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Why Franz Kafka and Nagib Mahfuz ? At first glance, they would seem to be too different for this type of juxtaposition. One is of European-Judaic culture, while the other has lived within the Arab-Islamic realm. Where Mahfuz is primarily a sociopolitical writer, Kafka is psychological and introverted. Yet, there is common ground.

The two meet within the context of twentieth century existentialism. They attempt to analyze man's existence. Because they are scrupulous in this attempt, cultural precedent is not admitted into their inquiries. They limit themselves to a deductive process on mankind. Lacking a historical or conventional point of departure, the two writers have decided on the same starting point: the idea of order. Each is committed to an ordered world, where order reflects the inherent good of the universe. This position separates Kafka and Mahfuz from those existentialists whose premise is atheism, nihilism or an established faith, such as Christianity, Judaism or Islam.

The idea of order is inevitably fixed on the point of authority. Someone or something must establish and perpetuate a system of order. It is the enforcing power of an authority that

allows one order to prevail, as opposed to another. This enforcing agent can be chaos, in a de facto and negative way; it can be God, as an omnipotent being; it can be man, competing for power. The point is that the world as we see it involves the struggle for power. Whether, in the final analysis, the true power is random, or rests with God, or is under the limited control of man is the question which Kafka and Mahfuz ask themselves. In the seventeenth century, John Milton attempted to justify the ways of God; in the twentieth, Kafka and Mahfuz have continued the pursuit for the idea of order.

This paper is structured in such a way as to reveal the problems of authority on every level. Using representative short stories by each author, the argument is made for the symbolic designs that each writer ascribes to the universe. At the same time, the human dilemmas are not treated solely as allegory, but as literary dimensions of their own. The political, psychological and social nature of these stories merits discussion at these levels. The metaphor develops the figurative meaning, and, in turn, is enhanced as a literal statement. So, Kafka and Mahfuz are symbolic writers whose symbolism adds force to the literal level of their works.

The stories have been chosen as a focus for each chapter. Kafka's "The Bucket Rider" and Mahfuz's "A Dream" are analyzed in the first chapter on the problem of authority. The works and the criticism, along with general literary remarks postulate

the central issue in this thesis, that of authority. Chapter Two looks at the personal level of authority. Decision and responsibility by individuals define this arena in the network of power. " In the Penal Colony," by Kafka, and " The Black Cat Tavern," by Mahfuz, serve to illustrate the conflicts of personal authority. As the process continues, the next stage is the problem of relational authority.

The battle for control and dominance between and among people characterizes this chapter. Kafka's " The Judgment" and Mahfuz's " The Heart Doctor's Ghost" develop the scenario of the power contest. The points of the first chapters are not left behind, but add to the growing dilemma that the search for order has become. The overriding and unclear fact of man's existence, coupled with the moral ambiguities of personal authority are not lost at the competitive level. The questions escalate, bringing more and more into doubt. Authority is increasingly subject to questions and increasingly unable to meet the demand for legitimation.

Chapter Four reaches the political problem. Society is a human structure for the sake of order. But the components of society, human individuals in relational contests and personal uncertainty, militate against the smooth operation of a social order. The underlying mystery of existence provides a constant destabilizing factor for every human endeavor; personal, relational or political. The stories "Josephine the Singer," by Kafka, and "Under the Bus Shelter," by Mahfuz, complete the fiction under direct analysis in this thesis. They apply to the chapter on political

authority.

Chapter Five addresses the problem of universal authority. With the constant breakdown of order every other step of the way, this chapter discusses the transcendent nature of order. Kafka and Mahfuz detail the unwillingness, inability and abuse in the exercise of power by human authorities. Their indictments demand resolution. In that the sensibilities of their writings call for justice and mercy, transcendentalism provides the only recourse. An order beyond recognition is the final hope to solve the condition of human chaos. Likewise, it is this unseen order, locked into the force of an unknown authority, which holds the answers to the fundamental questions of existence and the experience of man.

Neither Franz Kafka nor Nagib Mahfuz is an existentialist after the fashion of Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre begins with human existence and works from the premise of this fact. So do Kafka and Mahfuz. As such, they belong to the existentialist genre of literature. Their break from Sartre regards the nature of the world. To Sartre, order is the task of man, deriving from a meaning that he creates. Kafka and Mahfuz are uneasy writers, constantly in quest of a preexistent, albeit elusive, universal meaning. But in that they take a hard, analytical look at man's existence, theirs belongs to the 'literature of ideas' which has fallen under the general heading of existentialism.

Several points are important in the formulation of this paper. The study is committed to the literature of ideas. It is the thinking of the two writers that draws the attention of this

paper. In particular, their thinking on certain issues is central. Authority, with meaning and order as attendant matters, represents the thematic core. All of this is surrounded by existentialism, partly as a method, but mostly as a category for the literary product of Kafka and Mahfuz. In any case, existentialism is a loose classification, where thought is a necessary adjunct to pathos; and it is in this vein that the writings of Kafka and Mahfuz are examined here.

Short fiction comprises the direct statements of Kafka and Mahfuz in this paper. In the case of Kafka, the short story is the major vehicle of his literary output. His novels are few and incomplete, though this does not detract from their stature. His letters, parables and observations, lacking plot, defy narrative analysis. For the purposes of uniformity, only plot-line fiction, which characterizes Mahfuz, is treated here. Mahfuz is a major novelist who has produced a sizeable volume of short works. In recent years, he has turned to the exploration of existentialist themes. Given the convergence of their themes in the short story, Kafka and Mahfuz are analyzed as writers of short fiction, with particular pieces as showcase pieces.

The principles of New Criticism guide the analysis of these works. Interpretation is confined to textual evidence. Tracing psychological and historical factors behind the writing of these works is a legitimate, but unwieldy approach. More important, the literature of ideas should be subject to an assessment of its ideas. The 'philosophy' of existentialism is in the dramatic

tension of the literary work. It is not to be found in explanations and histories, at least not for its truth. So the formalist approach is the critical rationale of this paper.

CHAPTER 2

THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORITY

Authority comes into question when someone notices that something is wrong. This will happen on the simple level but it can also apply to the conditions of existence. Once it becomes apparent that a sense of wrongdoing is pervasive, then all things are called into question until nothing has been left out. The individual who reaches these disturbing conclusions is to be found in the more recent works of Nagib Mahfuz. Trevor Le Gassick describes Mahfuz's principal subject as "lost and unhappy, unsure of himself and unaware of what course to follow."¹ Predictably, this quasi-desperado character throws out everything, holding nothing as sacred. Ibrahim Fathi puts it this way: "The intellectual level of Nagib Mahfuz's narrative assumes that the deep-rooted foundations which were fixed in the past have gone, never to return, and with them has gone the narrative of blind faith "(my translation).² The universe and the powers that run it are subject to reexamination.

When Kafka looks at the discrepancy of existence, he calls it absurd. His writings are patient portrayals of the absurd. All authority is either an embarrassment to itself or is playing the role of an absolute fool. His discussion of the theme is strong: Maja Goth refers to Albert Camus's comparison of Kafka and Dostoyevsky as "the only writers who dared envisage the problem of the absurd."³ The characters of Kafka's fiction are agitated

beings, whose very presence begs the existential question. Like Mahfuz's characters, they are pawns. Something is very wrong in their lives, and the question is both what and why.

Authority is implicated in the existential question. The unhappiness of Mahfuz's literary figures and the absurd lives of Kafka's personnel cry out for a scapegoat. The search for a scapegoat is the operative element of human nature in these characters' stories. 'What has gone wrong and who is to blame?' stands out from these pages. But Kafka and Mahfuz leave the question unanswered. Their subtlety avoids a formulaic solution. Instead, a general indictment stands, under which some force is acknowledged as the perpetrator of wrong.

However, the force can still be anything. It is mysterious and powerful, and the authors never manage to name it. To Jean-Paul Sartre, the force is mankind. In what he calls the first principle of existentialism, Sartre states that "[m]an is nothing else but what he makes of himself."⁴ Kafka and Mahfuz will not go this far. They speak of the problem of existence, the sense of emptiness; and they search for its source. But that which they convict they also vindicate.

The authority -power- in the universe is not the object of scorn by either Kafka or Mahfuz. Rather, it is the object of confusion. The problem is one of reconciliation. Unable to solve the metaphysical question of evil, the two writers willingly suspend judgment. If there is reason to believe that evil is not contrived, then Kafka and Mahfuz will accept it. The rationale,

though, for evil and absurdity is hard to find. So, the ordered universe is a difficult proposition; and Kafka and Mahfuz cannot begin by endorsing it. They are not, however, writers of diatribe or condemnation. Their quest is open-ended.

They search through the circumstances of human existence for a possible way out. The circumstances they find and write about are consequences of the diffidence that runs through humanity. The existential question, when taken to the limit, bogs life down in the quest for a *raison d'etre*. Oftentimes, the failed quest will assume spiritual and emotional consequences. Le Gassick remarks that, in Mahfuz, we find "an all-pervading atmosphere of hopelessness and depression."⁵ Such human conditions are the ironic elements of a quixotic ideal. They are the natural by-products of a search that expects to find more.

With reference to Albert Camus, John Cruickshank has said, "Intellectual awareness of the absurd is the experience of a person who has expected... a rationally ordered cosmos, but who finds instead... a chaos impervious to reason."⁶ The expectations are important. Both Kafka and Mahfuz expect this rational order. In not finding it, they experience the absurd, with its attendant malaise of depression. Their scenarios of the absurd and the disordered are not descriptions only. They remain part of an overall quest theme, in which a rational authority stands behind everything, even the absurdity. The road to order must pass through the manifest void of human life.

Kafka's paths depend, as Camus points out, on symbol: "A

symbol... presupposes two levels... In Kafka these two roads are those of daily life, on the one hand, and supernatural anxiety, on the other."⁷ Anxiety is a daily fact for Kafka's characters. Are Kafka and Mahfuz suggesting that man is lost to an existence of misery, ranging from depression to anxiety and covering the experience of the absurd? With their attention to the details of a lost humanity, it would seem so. Yet their statements, which act as questions toward authority and points of realism, are not complete on these terms. If they were, we could call Kafka and Mahfuz nihilists and leave it at that. There is unmistakably something more in these two writers.

That element is hope. It is not contradictory for fundamentally existentialist writings to find cause for hope. Camus, as spokesman, defends such a point of view: "... existential thought ... contrary to the common opinion, is shaped by an enormous hope - the very same which, with primitive Christianity and the annunciation of good tidings, raised the ancient world."⁸ Perhaps there is more to Kafka and Mahfuz than the pessimism that dominates the surface. A certain religiousness actually hides in the works of both writers. Quite apart from despair, they suggest possibilities, by contrast, beyond their scenarios. Theirs is an ironic quixotism.

Hope must be founded. Some power must be capable of setting everything right. In other words, hope can only end in benevolent authority. The true nature of this authority is irrelevant. The difference between hope and despair is in the possibility of deliverance

from emptiness. Again, Camus discusses Kafka: "Now, it is this which I find at the end of the vehement trial which Kafka brings against the whole universe. His incredible verdict is this hideous and overwhelming world in which the mice themselves get entangled in hope."⁹ Likewise, Mona Mikhail identifies Mahfuz with mysticism in discussing one of his characters: "A Sufi leader who is grappling with his existential surroundings, and who finally realizes that his true Sufi beliefs are identical with those of his rebellious existential son."¹⁰

Somehow the bleak existentialist picture suggests a mystical transcendence. This is not evident from a literal reading of Kafka or Mahfuz. Taken at face value, a reader might agree with the conclusion of William Hubben: "Kafka is the most existentialist among the existentialist writers employing insecurity and defeat as the fatalistic 'solution'..."¹¹ This idea equates mysticism with despair. The point here is that the apparent defeat of man's hopes is an ironic device. The abhorrence of misery and absurdity causes a reaction away from those things. The realism of Mahfuz and the expressionism of Kafka are really vehicles in a type of transcendentalism.

Whether hope finally resides in a religious authority is a difficult matter. Certainly Kafka and Mahfuz do not align themselves with established religions. Nor do they deal in attacks upon it. In an interview with Jean-Paul Sartre, an atheist, Maja Goth reports the following: "Sartre's emphasis on the religious aspect of Kafka's writings was notable during our conversation."¹² Similarly, Mahfuz's

ambiguous treatment of the subject shows, if nothing else, a preoccupation with the idea of religion. Their searches in the area of religion reveal a sensitivity to the existence of higher authority. Such authority is beyond humanism and in the vicinity of theism - but definitely an object of hope.

So far, the problem of authority has been couched in existentialism. But a general literary procedure, beyond genre, further reveals the authoritarian dilemma as perceived by Kafka and Mahfuz. The conventional analysis of literature, utilizing structure, style and context, also illuminates the dimensions of the problem. The context of the fiction by Kafka and Mahfuz clarifies their literary priorities. Of Kafka, Wolodymyr Zyla has said, "Kafka's work in general is characterized by a genuine complexity and a search for ultimate reality."¹³ Aside from the existentialist application of his work, there is a conventional quest theme operating. Where authority - with an emphasis on its power and force - contributes to a definition of reality, then Kafka's search presupposes the nature of authority in the quest.

Much is presupposed in a search for ultimate reality. The literature of search should be described as philosophical in bent. By stepping outside the nature of man - beyond characterization, tragedy and pathos - Kafka and Mahfuz approach the world as a puzzle. They are on the outside looking in. The system that orders all is the object of their writing. Abd al-Muhsin Badr says of Mahfuz, "So we encounter in him something of a searcher when

he became a writer of spirituality and the Islamic idea " (my translation)."¹⁴ The supposition that there may be an answer or a reason is already difficult ground; more so when taken, as Kafka and Mahfuz take it, to its logical conclusion.

The complexity that must then result in the fiction creates an assortment of interpretations. Maja Goth writes the following of Kafka criticism: " They [critics] have seen in him an obsession with God and total atheism, a gratuitous phenomenology and a vigorous symbolism, a cabalistic thinker and a mental patient trying to liberate himself from his anxieties."¹⁵ Mahfuz sees a world in which mysticism plays a role. The role is interpreted by Mattityahu Peled, saying,"... chasing Sufi happiness may be a colorful adventure, but can never be more than the pursuit of a dream."¹⁶ In each case, the writers and their critics are aware of the contradictions. Accepting complex structures is part of the process in dealing with uncertain worlds. Kafka's "The Judgment" and Mahfuz's " The Black Cat Tavern" are good examples of structural ambiguity.

As stylists, these writers employ poetic techniques. The image is an important device in their constructs of reality. For Kafka, the contrasting imagery of order and chaos underscores his fundamental impasse. "Kafka's style is, above all, realistic. The details are starkly clear," notes Frederick Hoffman.¹⁷ The clarity sets off the confusion; answering small questions begs the larger questions. Mahfuz generates a mood with his imagery. The mood stages an encounter with a reality beyond the immediate. Sasson

Somekh calls this "... the flair for mysticism," which, he says, "necessitated the language of poetry: symbol, connotation, ambiguity, economy and rhythm."¹⁸

The overall pattern, then, that we observe in Kafka and Mahfuz addresses reality. Structure, order and hierarchy are the elements in reality that they seek to determine. The futility of it all is reiterated by Wolodymyr Zyla: "Kafka's heroes in general try to understand the authorities by whom they are governed and try to recognize the law by which they are judged; but all of their efforts are doomed to failure."¹⁹ It is interesting to note that Menahem Milson sees a connection between Kafka and Mahfuz regarding their similar views. "It seems that in his grappling with this problem [the inherent tragedy of man's existence] Mahfuz was very much influenced by a number of European writers, most notably, Kafka, Sartre and Camus."²⁰ The similarity is more important than the influence, each writer expounding on man's great insecurity within an uncertain universe.

"The Bucket Rider"

Franz Kafka's "The Bucket Rider" is a succinct statement of his major theme: the arbitrary behavior of universal power. The first person narrator of the story is caught in the cold of winter without heat. To keep from freezing he must appeal to the coal dealer for a small supply that he must buy on credit. He knows his appeal must register as a life and death matter; so he rides off on his bucket. This, he believes, will convince the

coal dealer that his bucket is indeed empty. When he arrives and calls down to the coal dealer, it is the coal dealer's wife who comes out to see him. Inside, the coal dealer is ready to offer whatever coal the bucket rider wants. But the wife reports back to the coal dealer that she sees and hears nothing. In fact, she shakes her fist contemptuously at the bucket rider and waves her apron as a gesture for him to go away. It is over. The last line in "The Bucket Rider" is: "And with that I ascend into the regions of the ice mountains and am lost forever."²¹

The coal dealer would have helped him, but could not be reached. The bucket rider, helpless and dependent upon his mercy, perishes. The problem is the inaccessibility of authority; the magnitude of the problem is spiritual. With a power over life and death, the coal dealer represents a force in command of the material world. Of him, the bucket rider says, "... he means to me the very sun in the firmament."²² The references to light and warmth have their parallels in the spiritual search for salvation. The cold and desperate world of the bucket rider symbolizes the emptiness of his own life forces. His empty bucket is further evidence of this.

When he makes his last-chance try at saving himself, he notes the condition of the heavens: "... the sky a silver shield against anyone who looks for help from it."²³ This traditional look to the sky is seen as pointless. To whom then does he appeal? Is his venture Faustian - does he deal with demonic

forces ? The heat, the cellar, his own attitude suggest this. His means of arrival is either mysticism or black magic. The flying bucket, as a supernatural event, implies forces beyond the known, material world.

Is he saved in spite of himself? Are his ' regions of the ice mountians' the places he seeks against his knowledge ? Maybe a more inaccessible authority has seen to it that he not perish into eternal fire. Faust and Dante may be the literary allusions of Kafka, but his unmistakable point is the utter defeat of his efforts to help himself. He needs the assistance of greater powers and cannot enlist them. The coal dealer's wife plays the role of evil interceding in man's affairs. Whether evil has triumphed or has served the purposes of good, we cannot be sure. The question has been raised and hope has not been eliminated.

"A Dream"

With an explication of Nagib Mahfuz's "A Dream", another pattern involving materialism, mysticism and transcendence emerges. Again, universal authority fails to institute any coherent order. "A Dream "is two stories really, interwoven. A worker at a company and the director of the company are the main characters of the reversing plots. Briefly, the stories are rags-to-riches and riches-to-rags scenarios. The premise for them is the July Laws which confiscated foreign property and that of rich Egyptians in 1961. In Mahfuz's tale, the worker goes from Sufism to materialism in his beliefs. The director is a materialist who, upon the loss

of his riches, turns toward Buddhism.

Neither man relies on his personal life for consolation. Only money and religion truly influence their states of mind. The worker visits regularly with a shaikh who teaches him Sufism. This provides some aid for his troubles. When he hears confirmation that the July Laws have been enacted, his happiness is unreserved. This prompts the shaikh to remark, "You're beyond my reach!"²⁴ The shaikh sees that it is a quest for material wealth that leads the man on, not the desire for mystic transcendence. The director, conversely, anguishes over the loss of his fortune and is repeatedly reminded by his wife and his friend that all is in the hands of higher powers. Finally, he begins to listen, for the sake of his peace of mind, when his friend says, "His name is Gautama Buddha!"²⁵

Authority - the law - is suspended. Money becomes a game and the game becomes a free-for-all. Those winning embrace the world and its ways of greed. Those losing turn to asceticism in the form of Sufism or even Buddhism. Order is arbitrary and illusory; the true order is beyond the world, lost in the secrets of mysticism.

Mahfuz speaks of religious mysticism as an antithesis. The materialist attitude is vulnerable to the caprices of economic struggle. In the same way, any materialist view of the world, in philosophical terms, is subject to the world's imperfection. The world and the true order of the universe are separate entities. Neither encroaches on the other. So those of the world must somehow

jump to the other sphere, if they are to find anything that adheres to the concepts of order and justice.

Mahfuz treats the subject of universal authority in a straightforward manner. The issues are played out in the story, with characters assuming identities as points of view. In the jostling that occurs, the characters represent various ideologies. The characters fail or succeed at random; but the ideology of materialism always wins in the world, and on the ideology of mysticism ride the hopes of those whose concerns have turned to spiritual matters. What is clear in Mahfuz is that the world does not reflect the harmony of the universe; but people still hold to the idea of harmony.

Conclusion

The philosophical content of Kafka and Mahfuz is an outgrowth of realism. The clarity of their work assumes a stance of objectivity. Even the bizarre or supernatural falls into the narrative as though it were the commonplace. Because their narratives are straightforward, it is surprising that their philosophies are not equally simple. The objective circumstances of the stories, though, are really a means for exposing the absurd. They are optical illusions in a literary sense.

Mahfuz explains his use of realism: "The motive for writing in this way, as defined by Najib Mahfuz himself, is to give vent to 'specific thoughts and excitements which turn to reality only to use it as a means for self-expression. I give expression to ideational content through the use of a completely realistic phenomenon.'"²⁶ The

ideas are the centerpieces of Mahfuz's work as a writer. Kafka too, as an early twentieth century expressionist, adheres to the tenet of expressionism: " It attempted to express the basic reality of its subjects rather than to reproduce the mere appearance or surface..."²⁷ So both writers are operating on the level of the essential, in Aristotelean terms.

Considering the stories ("The Bucket Rider," "A Dream") and the general question of authority, what are the philosophical ramifications ? Mahfuz tends to split the two worlds - material and spiritual - while Kafka offers the material as a metaphor for the spiritual. The stories present these views as their primary meanings. There is convergence on the point of authority. The lawgiver, the force (or absence thereof) responsible for order, is a source of confusion. Mahfuz asks if there is an order we cannot perceive - at the end of the mystical road. Kafka emphasizes the unreachability of an ordered world. In both cases, the sense that the material world is inferior to the spiritual is marked. The problem is that the spiritual dimension is incapable of exerting influence on a material level.

This leaves the question wide open. If there is a fundamental dichotomy to the universe, a sort of good versus evil arrangement, the conclusive observations are difficult to make. The competing powers of good and evil would obscure the underlying truth of things, assuming such a truth exists. The confusion of Kafka and Mahfuz seems to be part of a speculation, by them, that the

universe is 'up for grabs.' They cast doubt upon the ability of any authority to control it. But the hopes of the bucket rider, the director and even the mechanic (worker) are clearly with a universe ordered on the principles of good, responsive to man's final desire for salvation.

Given these unanswered questions, what do the philosophical ramifications mean to man's existence ? What is the existential impact of confusion ? Peled hints at this in discussing Mahfuz's work: "But what is unique in the later works is that the hero's grievances, even though personal in nature and caused either by social difficulties or intellectual or emotional stresses, soon develop into a conflict between that individual and the body politic."²⁸ The manifestation of doubt is often confrontation. The typical form of confrontation in Mahfuz is political. With Kafka, it is more on the interpersonal level.

The point to be made is that worldly occurrences are instigated by an other-worldly anxiety. Mankind responds to the mysteries of the universe by engaging in struggle. This point is, of course, controversial. The Darwinian view would call it survival of the fittest. Others would put struggle into a category of practical imperative. On this issue, existentialism breaks from determinism, seeing man's struggle as an open battle and not as a staged and predictable contest. Kafka and Mahfuz line up on the side of uncertainty - unpredictable anxiety.

The coal dealer's wife in "The Bucket Rider" plays a personified and predictable antagonist. Though her character is metaphorical, the meaning is still carried in the form of one human being. She confronts the bucket rider in a one-on-one contest. Mahfuz's director in "A Dream" is pitted against society and its processes of political reform. The whole society is the metaphor for antagonism. Because the obstacles place the characters in jeopardy, the writers use them as instruments of anxiety. The tension, though, never resides in the situations per se, but always refers back to a universal source.

The question that leads back to the source is: why is this allowed to happen ? Why does the world form its own hierarchy, complete with the abuse of power ? The answer that Kafka and Mahfuz supply arrives in a mystical fog. At least it is an answer; and, as such, it tends to work against the idea of chaos. The existential plane, however, seems to operate in a chaotic manner. Frederick Hoffman has developed the mystical answer and the existential chaos into an irony: "Far more suitable to the nature of Kafka's thinking is the use of irony, or ironic comedy. For, in the eyes of Kafka's God, the strivings of man are pitiful and grotesque."²⁹

A set of circumstances that applies in one world does not apply in another. The material world, whether symbolizing the spiritual or separate from it, maintains its own quality of error. The multiplicity of error appears as chaos, but marks instead an irony. That no authority extends a coherence to the world is problematic. Mahfuz dramatizes the problem, but does not conclude

in favor of universal anarchy, preferring a mystical explanation instead. Of Kafka, Gertrude Urzidil notes, " This God [Kafka's] ... manifests his power mostly in the unpretentious and the small, in the unnoted and the despised."³⁰ The face of existence is not stamped with the mark of a universal authority; though in obscure or mystical ways it is.

CHAPTER 3

PERSONAL AUTHORITY

The dynamics of personal experience incorporate the problem of authority. Each individual faces matters of decision and responsibility which are engulfed by the general question of authority. Since the question is unresolved in Kafka and Mahfuz, then human actions rest on a shaky premise from the start. The individual's decision and his responsibility in a situation are unclear. They are unclear to him and there is no context in which they are clear. But the sense of freedom is the element that creates anxiety - from not knowing which way to turn.

Maja Goth describes the difficulty as Sartre presents it: "According to Sartre's formulation, then, man's freedom forces him continually to decide upon his being."³¹ Goth then illuminates Kafka on this point: "The tragedy of Kafka's protagonist consists in his incapacity to make the absolute choice..."³² Personal disintegration, a trademark of the Kafkaesque, derives from this impasse. The paralytic effects of indecision are echoed in Mahfuz. Francis Paz, in fact, finds a direct tie: "The morbid obsession with the self, so characteristic of the modern temperament, expresses, in Egyptian terms, a theme which can be traced back to Kafka and Dostoyevsky."³³ The processes of introspection erode the abilities of the Kafka and Mahfuz characters to live in the world.

A further observation by Goth is that "Kafka and Sartre also meet in their conception of existential freedom."³⁴ Yet, in the area of personal authority, the Kafka characters are helpless. Their choices are de facto - always reactionary and seeking only escape from burden. The Mahfuz characters are equally helpless, but usually because they have lost the will to decide, preferring apathy to involvement. The pattern is one of refusal. By refusing, through doubt, to come to a decision, the characters of Kafka and Mahfuz, in a sense, do not participate. Their freedom allows this, and they exercise their freedom not to act.

Personal authority, then, is that area over which the individual exercises control. The significant part of this authority is in the decisions he makes that define his life. His beliefs, commitments, words and actions form his response to the world. Insofar as he is free, he is in control. The tendency to abstain in the making of a choice, where Kafka and Mahfuz are concerned, is not a denial of freedom. The burden renders their characters psychologically immobile, or as James Holleston says of Kafka: "The simultaneous movement towards outward self-definition and inward fragmentation is characteristic of all Kafka's late stories."³⁵

In an essay famous for its definitive qualities, Sartre ("The Humanism of Existentialism") states that "... existentialism's first move is to make every man aware of what he is and to make the full responsibility of his existence rest on him."³⁶ This concept of responsibility brings to the area of personal authority

a great magnitude. By these precepts, man is the absolute existential authority. Not only do his actions fall under his jurisdiction, but so does the meaning of life as well. The problem, of course, is the weight of his authority - there are no scapegoats.

When the search for scapegoats produces none, then guilt is likely to intervene. Under a system of free will and assigned meaning, it is still possible to make the wrong choices. Kafka and Mahfuz reflect this aspect of existentialism in the figures of the plagued conscience. Sartre, from the same essay, elaborates on the psychological state resulting from an absolute personal authority: "The existentialists say at once that man is anguish. What that means is this: the man who involves himself and who realizes that he is not only the person he chooses to be, but also a lawmaker who is, at the same time, choosing all mankind as well as himself, can not help escape the feeling of his total and deep responsibility."³⁷ Though the characters of Kafka and Mahfuz lack a basis for their choices, they realize that they must somehow try to be right anyway. Their subsequent anguish, in a world of constant doubt, is inescapable.

Kafka and Mahfuz employ a psychological trap motif. Their characters have no idea as to what to do, and they are punished for their innocent position of ignorance. The authors acknowledge the trap, neither protesting nor affirming such a circumstance. This is in keeping with the realistic approach, which is illuminating but not didactic or edifying. Renato Poggioli puts it this way:

"In a word Kafka has transplanted Dostoyevsky's drama of conscience from the barbaric and mystic mould of orthodox Russia into the gracious flower-vase which adorns the window-sill of so many petit bourgeois apartments of our oldest Europe."³⁸ The image in Kafka speaks of psychological trial. Likewise in Mahfuz, the crisis of conscience is at the forefront.

With Mahfuz, it is a literal concern. The dialogue includes discussion of the problem of personal authority. Remarks in the Journal of Arabic Literature echo Sartre in an assessment of Mahfuz's work: "Man ... is the one who is really responsible for what happens in his life and in the whole world."³⁹ Sometimes the psychological turmoil is guilt; other times it is dismay. Anguish, though, is never missing. A sense of anguish characterizes both Kafka and Mahfuz.

The authority and responsibility of the individual, coupled with his helplessness, leaves him in disarray. First there is the fact of responsibility; then there is choice. The reckless choose to act and leave destruction in their path. Kafka and Mahfuz reject this, but then realize that all action and inaction is reckless. They conclude one of their major themes - that of the individual's dilemma in authority - with the portrayal of anguished man. Crushed under the weight of responsibility, he grabs at the straws that tell him what to do. Failing, he is left to wonder why his burden is so great and may feel that he "... is a defenceless tormented victim from the moment of his birth to the moment of his death" (Nur Sherif on Mahfuz).⁴⁰

" In the Penal Colony"

"In the Penal Colony" presents the nightmare of personal responsibility. Kafka's story follows the main character, an explorer, through a long moment of doubt, during which he realizes an unwanted power over life and death. His sojourn has taken him to an island that has been used for some time as a penal colony. The New Commandant of the island has invited him to witness an execution, which he has accepted out of politeness. The bizarre means of execution is a machine which 'inscribes' words on a victim's body until the needles completely impale him. The words relate directly to the victim's crime, thus fitting the punishment to the crime.

In the plot, a prisoner is condemned to die for insubordination. An officer, with great pride, prepares and explains the machine to the explorer. A soldier guards the condemned man. There are no spectators, though in the old days under the Old Commandant, executions were big events. Now the officer is one of the few who remember and cherish the way things used to be. Under a progressive attitude, this form of execution has fallen into disfavor. The officer reflects back, saying, "How we all absorbed the look of transfiguration on the face of the sufferer..."⁴¹

As the explorer looks on and the moment of execution arrives, disgust overcomes him and he ponders what action he might take. He reasons that "were he to denounce this execution or actually try to stop it, they could say to him: You are a foreigner, mind your own business."⁴² So he desists from action. But when the officer

tries to enlist him in convincing the New Commandant to revitalize this form of execution, he refuses. Then the story takes a bizarre turn.

The officer sets the condemned man free. He resets the lettering pattern of the machine to read "Be Just"⁴³ and he places himself under the needles. "...[T]he explorer was determined not to lift a finger"⁴⁴ in executing the officer. The explorer becomes aware of the reverential nature of the officer's actions and then looks on with a kind of respect. The machine malfunctions, killing the officer in a gruesome way - rather than the "exquisite"⁴⁵ manner in which he had wished to die.

The explorer is led to a teahouse in the village, by the soldier and the prisoner. Here he is shown the Old Commandant's tombstone, the inscription of which reads, "There is a prophecy that after a certain number of years the Commandant will rise again and lead his adherents from this house to recover the colony. Have faith and wait !"⁴⁶ Upon reading this the explorer leaves for the harbor and a boat that will take him away. His last action is to make a threatening gesture preventing the soldier and prisoner from trying to follow him on board.

The story is highly allegorical, constantly drawing on Christian themes. Within this context of the 'theology of sin versus the new humanitarianism' (idea of Austin Warren),⁴⁷ there is the explorer's role. His presence is not as a spectator only. Reluctantly and inadvertently, he figures into the course of events. His remarks to the officer precipitate the officer's death. The soldier and prisoner see the officer's execution this way: "Apparently the

foreign explorer had given the order for it."⁴⁸ The explorer believes himself to be only a disinterested foreigner. In truth, his stance against the machine is taken seriously and results in the officer's death.

His influence and authority is a clear indication of the individual's stature. Though he is caught in the midst of a mysterious mythology, he is forced to make decisions that carry ultimate human consequences. The conflicting systems of order do not excuse the individual from his responsibility. The explorer's alienated circumstances do not, in turn, alienate him from personal authority. Kafka has described the dilemma as a gap that cannot be bridged. The explorer's departure from the island represents man's emotional reaction to it all - horror, disgust and the desire to wash one's hands of it. At the other side of the gap remains the abiding fact of man's complicity in all that takes place.

Man, in his inevitable destructiveness, shapes the world. Whether his free will serves an old order or a new order is irrelevant. As an agent of motion he cannot help but move. What he sets in motion may already be tied into the allegory of "In the Penal Colony," or it could run another course. At any rate, Kafka's tale of judgment emphasizes man in his journey - the lost navigator. Claude David puts it this way: "In the narrative, it [the machine] comes apart before our eyes; the ritual transfiguration of the dying no longer takes place. What now begins is the kingdom of the serpent,

the great seducer. And we, the rock smashers, we who pound everything to dust, are the pioneers" (my translation).⁴⁹

"The Black Cat Tavern"

Mahfuz's story for discussion in this chapter is "The Black Cat Tavern." While its symbolism appears to be political (Hamdi Sakkout: "This story appears to refer to the position of the Egyptian Government before and after the '67 defeat."⁵⁰), its implications for personal responsibility are also evident. Reading the story at the literal level does not weaken it. Its narrative, then, involves a tavern full of common people, forgetting their troubles for a while. The tavern's Greek owner and his black cat, plus the old waiter, round out the scene. Then a stranger appears at the door.

The stranger is an imposing man who, with the scowl on his face, makes everyone uncomfortable. He proceeds to announce that no one will leave until he says they may. They protest and he threatens their lives. He says they have heard his story, so he must detain them or else they will reveal it. They assure him they have heard nothing but the few unintelligible sounds he made upon his arrival. "No one will leave,"⁵¹ he concludes.

"...[N]o one dared to give him the reply he deserved."⁵² So they sat, helpless. "It was clear to them all that the situation could only be resolved by force and they hadn't any of that."⁵³ "All this time, the Greek owner of the tavern maintained his deathly silence ..."⁵⁴ Nor did the black cat have any luck. The man stamped his foot at him.

Since they can do nothing, they decide to drink. The effects of alcohol serve to mask a surreal turn in the narrative. A vague period of time passes when the tavern patrons rediscover their senses, suffering, though, from a disturbing forgetfulness. They have lost track of everything. Then someone mentions a story involving the cat. "This cat was a deity in our forefathers' time."⁵⁵ They try to unravel the story behind this remark, remembering only that the deity had once announced the secret to the story. The story, just like the man's story, remains lost in mystery.

The scene in the tavern ends with the old waiter screaming at a subordinate to start clearing tables. The bus boy turns out to be the man who had stormed in and intimidated everyone in the beginning. However, no one can remember that. Instead, someone wonders where and when they had seen him before. The description of the man now is: "He seemed to be overwhelmed by a feeling of deep sorrow, and his eyes were flowing with tears."⁵⁶

Like Kafka's story, this one uses symbolism to create something of a riddle. The tension among characters, however, provides a backdrop for the problems of personal authority. There are numerous individual choices made in the story. Only one involves action - the choice of the intimidating stranger. In the end, though, he is brought low. Basically, it is a tale of personal defeat, which may symbolize other kinds of defeat.

The situation requires a hero. If one person could lead the others, the stranger could easily be overcome. Yet no such personality

comes forward. " In spite of their numbers, they were prisoners; he was strong and powerful, while they had neither power nor resolve."⁵⁷ Lack of resolve is the key to the problem. They choose to drink and escape their misery. This choice exposes their weakness.

The stranger, powerful at the start, also is weak by the end of the story. He was full of resolution; so what point can Mahfuz be making ? It would seem that decisiveness and a sense of involvement in one's own fate also lead to defeat. The assumption of authority is a great risk, and, evidently, the stranger gambled and lost. The customers in the tavern, aware of this truth already, accept a humiliating but secure posture in weakness. The possibilities for personal authority, as with Kafka, are grim, no matter which way the individual turns.

Mahfuz recognizes the individual's responsibility. His characters are willing victims, meaning that they have surrendered their roles in their own fates. What Mahfuz establishes in view of this surrender is the debilitating force of fear. Free and responsible individuals choose defeat rather than countenance fear. Of course, they still suffer from fear, but they avoid a full confrontation with the objects of their fear. Helplessness characterizes the individual in Kafka and Mahfuz, as he encounters the fact of his authority. With Kafka, confusion is the important reason for his failures; with Mahfuz it is fear.

Conclusion

On a larger scale, the authority of man tends to affirm his existence. That an individual's decisions are of consequence raises the stature of man. His unsuitability to assume responsibility does not preclude the authoritarian nature of his existence. Nietzsche sees it simply as man's task. In the voice of Zarathustra, he says, "I teach you the overman [Übermensch]. Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?"⁵⁸ The paradox of man's authority and weakness is set against an evolutionary process in Nietzsche. For Kafka and Mahfuz, however, the paradox stands.

A philosophical problem accompanies the problem of personal authority. Man's nature is central to the dilemma of his irresponsibility. Mahfuz has turned to this question in his writing, as part of a 'new realism.' Nur Sherif points out that "[t]he emphasis has shifted from the external to the internal life."⁵⁹ This internal world has proved difficult. What emerges is a picture of man's irrationality, making an ordered version of his behavior a contradiction in terms.

Dostoyevsky has written of personal authority and the rational will in his character Raskolnikov, in the novel Crime and Punishment. A powerful alignment of decisiveness and logic make Raskolnikov a model of the authoritative individual. But, his life eventually breaks down in a crisis of conscience. Dostoyevsky says, "...he had merely become aware. Life replaced logic, and in his consciousness something

quite different now had to elaborate and articulate itself."⁶⁰

The key is the substitution of life for logic. Life and irrationality take on a synonymous meaning.

The characters of "In the Penal Colony" and "The Black Cat Tavern," because of irrational elements, represent agents of life. Just as their responsibility implies a stature, their irrationality implies a vitality. The officer in Kafka's story defies the logic of survival in sacrificing himself. Yet he gains, in the eyes of the explorer, both credibility and sympathy. Mahfuz's intimidating man evokes pity after his transformation to a weak figure. In this case, irrationality is linked to a loss of control, stemming, arguably from a loss of mental resolve. Fear and disgust, the strong points of the two stories, are outside the realm of logic.

What this means is that man's split personality is, simultaneously, a generative and a debilitating force. The combination of authority and irrationality is a hopeless, but vital mix. The problem goes unresolved, but a definition of man's existence is approached. Kafka and Mahfuz fall between Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky in their attempts to describe man. Nietzsche leans towards reliance on the rational, authoritative powers of man in solving the dilemma of freedom. Dostoyevsky rejects these for the mysteries of faith. Kafka and Mahfuz suspend judgment, staying closer to neo-realism than either form of transcendentalism (Nietzschean or Dostoyevskian).

How does man live in a state of suspended judgment, if that is the stance that Kafka and Mahfuz take? Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov

would have no part of suspended judgment: "What can be done? Smash what has to be smashed, once and for all - that's all there is to it... Freedom and power, but the main thing is power!"⁶¹ There is more to it, so the characters of Kafka and Mahfuz tend to accept their fate or escape the reality of it. Either way it is a half measure. The result is a denial of existence, not in theory, but in the matter of what, exactly, man is to do.

Freedom mocks the existence of man, presenting unreachable possibility. The intellect envisions the possibilities, but lacks a true power to enact them. The essence of man's power is destructive, causing him to work against himself. Peter Heller speaks of Faust in these terms. "Goethe ambiguously dramatized the search of an intellectual..."⁶² The quests of Kafka and Mahfuz reflect this intellectual search, but a rejection of the use of any dark or demonic power separates them from Faust. A denial of existence must follow as a means of denying the horrible.

The explorer of "In the Penal Colony" storms off the island in disgust. He walks away from it in order to preserve his sanity, or balance, with the world. His action is a conscious turning away from a part of reality. The apology for this course may be in T.S. Eliot's line: "human kind cannot bear very much reality."⁶³ Mahfuz's characters in "The Black Cat Tavern" simply drink themselves into oblivion. Their escape works - when they recover, things have changed for the better. Oblivion protects them; but it is a survival mechanism and not a vehicle for creative possibilities.

Frederick Hoffman suggests that the escape metaphor may have something to do with immortality. When immortality seems dubious, imagery is bottled up. His remark accurately describes Mahfuz's use of imagery in "The Black Cat Tavern": "Many of the modern images which specify the loss of belief in immortality emphasize this kind of space-congestion: furnished rooms, gutters, passageways, subways, et cetera."⁶⁴ The issue of immortality is not the main point here; rather, it is the sense of confinement that man feels in mortal existence. Kafka's imagery of heat, dust and barrenness in "In the Penal Colony" also represents the stifling of life. Man is a helpless giant, plagued by the scope and magnitude of his authority.

CHAPTER 4

RELATIONAL AUTHORITY

The situation of authority now moves to the relational level. All levels are present in many experiences; here they are broken into component parts, where all contribute to a whole. As for the relational, this is the area that describes conflict and tension between human beings. The symbols and hierarchies of these tensions are the material that composes the problem of relational authority. Symbol refers to the signs or indicators of one person's authority over another. The hierarchy is the pattern of influence, with legitimation as the important question.

Symbols command a response in human nature. They are relied upon to signal the truth of a situation, however inaccurate a method that might be. Matters of authority are especially dependent upon symbol, since force, ultimately in the form of violence, would be the only means to establish authority. By recognizing symbols, a great deal of violence is avoided. The problems come when false or overblown symbols present themselves as necessary figures. Then, acquiescence to their authority puts them in a position to determine existences beyond their own. The people behind the symbols have free license to extend what may in fact be evil.

Kafka is sensitive to this, often casting his characters in very subservient roles. Even when they assert themselves, they worry

continually about the authorities. As a rule, their fears are well-founded; men of power decide their fates. The symbology is generally a paternal construct. Kafka's hero is a perennial juvenile, unsuccessful in his rebellions against a paternal image. Hoffman divides the personalities this way: "In all cases where the masculine and feminine wills are in conflict over a moral issue, the masculine will overrule the feminine, and the circumstance of the hero does not permit him to question or effectively to contravene that will."⁶⁵ The child and the feminine personality are synonymous.

The uniform is an important symbol in Mahfuz. Police and military personnel are the power merchants, by virtue of the deadly force their clothes symbolize. Of course, the potential for violence is heightened, because the root of their authority is the gun. In Kafka that source is the helplessness of the child. In one way or another, the symbol must threaten survival. Whether it is blatant or instinctive, it must be effective in order to seize real authority. Sometimes Mahfuz deals with the symbol that breaks down, creating an anarchic scramble for power.

The whys and wherefores of symbology explain the process of order between individuals. The subsequent structure of authority addresses the inevitable fact of man's responsibility and decision-making capacity. Who chooses, who decides is a function of power and symbology. Again, it is a flawed institution, borne of necessity and reflecting things the way they are. Its parameters are wide, encompassing all possible interactions of human beings. To the

extent that man is a social animal, he is a being that utilizes image, role, gesture et al to recognize authority. But the faith he is forced to invest in symbol often betrays him.

Behind symbol is legitimation. An individual who manages to establish a sort of right to his position has achieved legitimacy. Once the authority is granted, the symbol becomes more than an empty title; it carries a real power with it. Divine right, succession and sheer force are common avenues of legitimation. A demonstration of the power concludes the arrangement and confirms the legitimacy of an authority. As a relational concern, legitimation favors the heavy-handed, allowing injustice to follow in the process.

Mahfuz is particularly sensitive to this. Abuses of power take on a great importance in his fiction. The human side of this abuse, the individuals in the uniforms, are the focus of his enmity. They understand the tricks of legitimation, and they use them to their own questionable advantage. The innocent, or at least less powerful, suffer under the workings of such a system. What Zyla says about Kafka applies also to Mahfuz: "They [Kafka's characters] often protest, but they do not attempt to determine whether the persons who rule them are governed by justifiable motives."⁶⁶ This is the center of difficulty.

Why do some concede to others, only to suffer their abuse? The interpersonal machinations in legitimation hold the key. The first element in political authoritarianism is personality. Force of personality is the first state in developing a whole system of legitimation. The key, then, is that some personalities are capable

of holding a psychological reign of terror over others. This is especially true from Kafka's point of view. With Mahfuz, the dynamics are moral, meaning that the unscrupulous prevail through psychological strength.

Whereas the intimidated and morally aware are inassertive and indecisive, the integrated personalities are resolute. But resolution and integration seem to be products of evil. As Kafka and Mahfuz present the case, that is very nearly the conclusion that has to be drawn. Those persons in innocent positions are morally paralyzed; the bad trample them with very little effort. So legitimation is a formality, since the rise to authority meets no real opposition. When evils oppose, struggle and not legitimation, ensues. Might is the true symbol and legitimate authority.

To suggest that Kafka and Mahfuz are unsophisticated is not the idea. A simple good-versus-evil paradigm does not describe their work. Within each personality there is the potential for good and evil. The course of legitimation opens the way for evil, because the side of good acquiesces to symbol and authority. When two people deal with one another in any way, a predominant evil in one personality can subdue a predominant good in the other. The suggestion, then, is that Kafka and Mahfuz consider the problem to be the resigned and apathetic in human personal dynamics.

" The Judgment"

Kafka's story " The Judgment" is a tour de force of psychological literature. The realities within the story are hard to discern;

but the reality of a psycho-drama is unmistakable. The plot is simple on the surface: Georg Bendemann writes a letter to a friend in Russia informing him that he is engaged to be married. When Georg tells his father that he has decided to write to the friend, the father accuses Georg of lying - questioning the very existence of the friend. Georg protests and insists that his father needs rest. The father complies with Georg's wishes and then suddenly jumps up in bed, standing on the bed and touching the ceiling.

The father now proceeds to deliver a tirade against Georg. He admits the existence of the friend, saying that he himself had been in close communication with him all along. He claims that the friend is aligned with him against Georg. He accuses Georg of going behind his back in matters of the family business and for purposes of his upcoming marriage. In general, the father accuses Georg of having been an innocent child but a devilish human being. Upon this charge, the father sentences Georg to death by drowning. Georg runs out of the room, rushes across the road to the river, jumps in and drowns.

The drastic conclusion raises numerous questions as to the background of this confrontation. Obviously, whatever has been touched off in this relational battle is of a very serious nature. The dispute between Georg and his father is fundamental. The elements of the dispute, then, are symbols of a greater meaning. John White's interpretation of this story represents it as "a kind of externalized psycho-drama, where father, friend and Georg all represent aspects of the same person."⁶⁷ The interesting thing is that the story reflects

the psychological struggle of opposing wills, no matter how it is read.

The wills can be separate individuals clashing in a more or less objective reality; or they can be one person's inner struggle, where outside wills have been invited to compete in the same imagination. The relational contest remains at the core of it all. Georg does battle with a father figure, whether that figure is real or an imprint on Georg's memory. The literary device is that of the psychological landscape, in which the mind's images pass for objective reality. This technique emphasizes the problem of independence in the matter of relational authority. Georg has internalized outside authority to the extent that it has become part of him. In the end, his death can be termed neither suicide nor execution; these two words have become one and the same.

Georg's world is one of pure symbol. The signs and images that allow the father to dominate his son are so strong that they develop their own reality. Georg speaks of his father's giant size, his foreboding room (the father's presence): "It surprised Georg how dark his father's room was even on this sunny morning."⁶⁸ The friend is Georg's own symbol of sanctuary, as Kafka indicates in the mind of Georg: "Lost in the vastness of Russia he saw him."⁶⁹ But the power of the father appears to crush Georg's image surrealistically. In fact, it is the authority symbol crushing the fantasy symbol, all within Georg's mind.

This story occurs after the fact. The paternal authority

has long since legitimized itself in Georg's perception. Kafka refers back to the mother, two years deceased, and the ascendancy of the father's will during her lifetime. This recalls the suggestion earlier that the masculine will always triumphs over the feminine in a moral sense. As with every other character in the story, Georg's mother could represent a side of Georg - that of the more sensitive, less assertive female personality. When Georg [shrinks] into a corner, as far away from his father as possible,"⁷⁰ he is a symbol of his own meekness, as the two do battle over who is right and who is wrong. The judgment against Georg is his failure to disassociate himself from the impressive exercise of legitimation which culminates in his suicide-execution.

" The Heart Doctor's Ghost"

In Mahfuz's " The Heart Doctor's Ghost," symbols and legitimation are exposed as fraud. The system that controls the actions of society is portrayed as a conspiracy of greed. The state and religion are institutions of legitimation; but, in reality, they are man-made devices that serve the concerns of the powerful. Their symbology attempts to perpetuate and seal their grip on social behavior. The men behind the symbols, though, are no different from the people they control. The injustice is not so much in human nature - which is universally suspect - but in the symbols and institutions of legitimacy that exploit vulnerability to authority.

A young girl approaches a tomb, looking for a place to hide jewels that she has stolen. A saint character discovers the jewelry

and accuses her of theft. The warden of the tomb suggests outright that they split the loot. A policeman is necessary to the carrying out of their plot. He accuses them of an injustice and they assume he is referring to the girl. But: "'The injustice,' the policeman replied, 'is that the loot should be divided equally among us !'"⁷¹

They temporarily lock the girl inside the tomb while deciding on their plans. A young blind man comes by to pray at the tomb. He hears the girl and supposes she is the heart doctor's ghost. A crowd begins to gather in expectation. The young man manages to enter the tomb and returns to the crowd announcing the restoration of his sight and the appearance before them of the ghost. The girl emerges and the crowd believes they are witnessing a miracle. When she realizes her power over them, she uses it to get back at the three conspirators. The crowd forces them to hand over the jewels.

The girl then gives the jewels to the crowd. Next, the true owner of the jewels happens by and points to the girl as the thief. The crowd sets upon him. The girl then authorizes the crowd to rob him of whatever else he is carrying, which they gladly do. The man looks at the policeman in disbelief and says, "I'm being robbed of my money in your presence !" ⁷² Then the girl orders the four locked up in the tomb. She tells the crowd to go home and tells the young man she will send him a girl to marry who will bear her likeness.

The four manage to break out of the tomb and recapture

the girl. Then they plan to stage a performance the following day. This time the girl, under threats, tells the crowd they misunderstood her words and they must return the bounty of the previous day. They begin to do this reluctantly when the young man sees her not as the ghost but as the girl that would be sent to him. When he voices this, the crowd capitalizes on the confusion. Some attack the girl; others defend her. The last line of the story is this: "The battle went on, becoming increasingly vicious and brutal."⁷³

Considering the individuals in the story, their relational prowess is based very much on their symbolic presence. The girl, with the full force of religion behind her, controls the mob. When doubted, though, she faces the crowd's anger. The institution of religion holds legitimacy and those who seek power must somehow become identified with it. The policeman's identification with the societal institution is undermined when he betrays the force that has legitimized his authority. In other words, the power is vested in faceless concepts; relative authority for individuals is directly proportional to their association with the symbols of these concepts.

Conclusion

If the symbols link individuals to some higher authority, what exactly is this authority? Peter Heller defines it this way for Kafka: "He yearns for the absolute safety and haven provided by a Ghetto god of mysterious and total deliverance..."⁷⁴ The inevitable defeat that Kafka portrays is reversed at the other end of the

symbolology. Failure in relation to human beings is requisite to arrival on another plane. Hoffman explains the process in the human mind: " By a recognition of his impotence and a willing suspension of his rational judgment and scorn, man achieves a knowledge of divine authority."⁷⁵ In the struggle for relational authority, the individuals who command the symbols of authority are instruments of greater authority.

The innocent lose out in the power plays of the world, but remain pure for a deliverance beyond the world. That can be Kafka's only hope for Georg Bendemann, led as he is to suicide. Conversely, the exercise of power taints the practitioner. After the various characters in "The Heart Doctor's Ghost" have seized an opportunity to abuse power, the whole situation deteriorates into a fist fight. Authority at the human level results in evil - under the systems of Kafka and Mahfuz. While this theme is familiar, Kafka and Mahfuz avoid the also familiar didacticism that accompanies it. Instead, conclusions are of death and escalating evil.

Just as apathy and escape mark the experience of personal authority in Kafka and Mahfuz, passivity defines their approach to the relational. It is not so much a prescribed behavior as a de facto situation. The sensitive will is cornered by the aggressive. In an immediate sense, the actions of the aggressive will promote evil; in an ultimate view, the natural authority vested in them may contribute to some kind of balance. The indication that their authority is flawed suggests that their real power is illusory. If

the mild personalities know this intuitively, then the stronger ones prove it to themselves and others. Finally the problem engulfs humanity, since any redoubling of efforts in authority simply adds fuel to the fire.

Once again the grand design is threatened by a *fait accompli*. The limits on man's possibilities are so narrow (though theoretically so wide) that his fate appears sealed. He cannot believe, act or know without certain failure. Yet his freedom calls him on and on to repeat his failure. Should the universe then be classified as fatalistic, under the precepts of nihilism? In that the failure motif of Kafka and Mahfuz derives from difficulty - of insight into truth - then it is only a problem of great magnitude and not the final word. Humanism cannot survive the indictment of Kafka and Mahfuz, for the problems inherent in relational authority; but nihilism is not their philosophical refuge.

Insofar as man must deal in relational matters, what are the alternatives? Camus considers an absolute approach: "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide."⁷⁶ "The Judgment" ends in suicide, which raises the question of Kafka's stance on the subject. Of course, the suicide is the culmination of a sequence of events, and not an answer to a philosophical problem. There is, in Mahfuz, an incident of a rationally conceived suicide - that in a story called "The Window on the Thirty-fifth Floor." This action, then, receives attention from both writers, although it is less a solution than a form of demise.

Aside from accepting a state of demise, what would the options

be ? " The Heart Doctor's Ghost " ends in a melee. On the individual level, this may be avoidable. The symbology requires a facelessness to operate properly. When this anonymity is broken down by communication, the myth of authority cannot survive. If anything, Kafka and Mahfuz expose relational authority as myth, in that it is a poor human replica of some true authority. So what do they think about communication, particularly between individuals ?

Kafka's work in general is marked by silence. Great 'dialogues' take place in character's thoughts, but the actual talk between characters is limited and rarely revelatory. Understanding between people is non-existent. Mahfuz's characters, on the other hand, are verbose, and still fail to understand one another. They maintain their secret motives, and bar any kind of trust from developing. A comment in the Journal of Arabic Literature addresses a special aspect of this in Mahfuz: " As to the problem of generations, it is shown that there is no real understanding between them."⁷⁷ Perhaps communication is one more item in a growing list of impossibilities.

It would appear that Kafka and Mahfuz intend to close off the avenue of communication. They do not admit it as a relational device between people. Instead, they focus on the power struggle that utilizes the themes and images of intimidation. They emphasize primal conditions in a modern world. In so doing, they continue to deny any recourse to a confused, helpless, violent humanity. Their expressionism and realism indulge the images of defeat. The defeat at the relational level is to be expected.

Authority in human interaction adds to the misery of existence. Its necessity for social purposes guarantees a permanent milieu of abuse and aggression. Kafka and Mahfuz are aware of both this and the inability to escape it. They document it, though, as further example of the imperfection of the world. Their bleak presentations serve to discredit the material world. Their statements on the problems of relational authority indicate a lack of faith in the hierarchy of personalities.

CHAPTER 5

POLITICAL AUTHORITY

Man's largest experiment with authority is the establishment of political systems. Rules and precepts govern the workings of a political system. Of course, it is human beings who enforce the rules and otherwise act as agents of the status quo. Associated with the political structure is a social order, also operating on a set of rules, most of which are either understood or felt by pressure. The two sides of the question in sociopolitical authority are the individual and the state. The state then also refers to the nature of the society, for purposes of defining the social matrix.

The rights and restrictions of the individual versus those of the state make up an area of dispute within political systems. The spectrum runs from anarchy to totalitarianism. The dispute is theoretical - in the designing of systems - and practical in the actions of individuals. Control - by state and society - both protects individuals and encroaches on their rights. Kafka and Mahfuz often portray the dilemma of individuals mistreated by their societies. Kafka views it from the angle of totalitarianism, while Mahfuz explores the question in terms of anarchy.

The Reader's Companion to World Literature makes this remark: Kafka's work deals with an incomprehensible world and authority, as when the hero finds himself inexplicably arrested. "⁷⁸ The reference is to The Trial, which describes a bizarre totalitarian nightmare. Mahfuz, on the other hand, develops the theme of social predicament

through an emphasis on rebellion and anarchy. Peled states that " ... there is a greater readiness to appreciate the motives of the individual rebel in his conflict with society, regardless of his inevitable defeat."⁷⁹ Both Kafka and Mahfuz see the rights of the individual threatened by an authoritarian state. Where Kafka writes of a very tight social order, Mahfuz sometimes considers the absence of order. In such a case, the rights of society are threatened.

Insofar as society is the aggregate human dimension, then of course it, too, represents individuals. Kafka and Mahfuz do not argue for one political system or another - they are neither anarchists nor totalitarians. The real issue of their literature is the human problem of political authority - the sole individual as well as the collective individuals. Since Mahfuz is generally more politically inclined than Kafka, he covers a wider section of the territory than does Kafka. Still, his work is a vehicle for commentary on the problem of political authority as opposed to ideology. Using standard political analysis, the society and the individual are, in one way, adversaries. To Kafka and Mahfuz, the political spectrum is almost a literary device for showcasing social conflict.

The rights of individual and society suggest the parameters of another struggle under the heading 'authority.' This is the struggle on a mass scale. Inherently, it is very similar to the problems of authority that have been discussed so far. Its special quality is the number of people affected by the turns it takes - virtually all within a particular framework. Dostoyevsky points out the

certainty of turmoil in these words from Crime and Punishment:"

... there may be certain kinds of people in the world who...
are endowed with the right to commit all sorts of crimes and excesses
and the law, as it were, was not written for them."⁸⁰ This mocking
of Raskolnikov's arrogance indicates the danger in sociopolitical
situations. Rights, beliefs, actions are subject to differing concepts
of authority and reality.

Structure is the important element in social order. The fine
points of anomaly and doubt cannot be allowed to preclude the
workings of a general order. Some abuses will occur, but a fundamental
stability cannot be subject to tampering. Dostoyevsky's portrait of
philosophical criminality is the exact attitude that most threatens
society. How then does society promote order and subdue any predilection
toward anarchy ? Under the assumption of man's freedom, the conventional
formula of mass suggestion or even oppression loses its credibility.
Such analysis depends on man's behavioral predictability and general
lack of sovereignty.

For writers who adhere to the existentialist view of man's complete
freedom and responsibility, the idea of social order is problematic.
Nietzsche implies that man chooses a conventional pattern. " Only
where the state ends, there begins the human being who is not superfluous
..."⁸¹ Somehow the superfluous is desirable to man, and the state
flourishes. Kafka's view of the state also shows man as an oppressed
being. But the misery of Kafka's humanity is heightened in that the
oppression seems to derive from man's recognition of the necessity to

deny anarchy. So man creates a political authority to which he can surrender.

When this surrender produces absurd results, the absurdity must be overlooked for the sake of stability - ultimately for the sake of survival. As Mahmud Amin al-'Alam says with regard to the policeman in Mahfuz's "Under the Bus Shelter," "He accuses their existence... on societal grounds, destroying security... Did they fall because they asked questions... because they stood distant in a given moment and did not participate in the distressing game ?" (my translation).⁸² Neither the questioning of political authority (symbolizing anarchy), nor total apathy are useful to the state. This story (which will be explicated in this chapter) puts absurdity before anarchy. The importance of social order makes adjustment for wild abuse, just so long as the basic equilibrium is maintained. Political tyranny in Mahfuz reflects the same sort of resignation to the status quo that characterizes Kafka.

The real problem, then, is one of reconciliation. The insensitive monolith that protects the greater stability of mankind systematically destroys man's aspirations. The need for conformity works against the capacity for spontaneity inherent in man's freedom. Defeat of the human spirit is the real price of social integrity. Whether this is acceptable is not really the question. Kafka and Mahfuz reject it, yet they explain why it is so. Instead, the dilemma is appeasing the sociopolitical monster and holding onto some measure of human dignity at the same time.

"Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk"

Kafka's "Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk" explores the phenomenon of influence. Josephine's hold over the masses symbolizes the social need for authority. The pleasant aura of music casts a ritualistic tone over the story. The interplay between singer and audience (leader and masses) speaks of "... the fusion of autonomy and anonymity in a momentarily balanced world," in the words of James Rolleston.⁸³ This balance is the kind of utopian arrangement that constantly seeks to express itself. Politics and art come together to make a statement on behalf of the human psyche. The whole story is the acting out of a satisfied need.

The plot is not eventful. It is mostly a sketch of the phenomenon of Josephine. The society is human in nature, but mouselike in description. Kafka allows this point to remain ambiguous. The story pivots on the relationship between Josephine and the masses. At first, her singing is the issue. Though she is immensely popular, no one really considers her to be a good singer. It is something else she possesses that commands their devotion. In fact, Kafka suggests it may be her frail and childlike manner, which compels a sense of protection in the people.

She inspires a desire in the people to watch over her, en masse. Kafka emphasizes that the relationship must incorporate the masses: "... no single individual could do what in this respect the people as a whole are capable of doing."⁸⁴ The sense of participation is complete in terms of these musical performances. But music is not really

popular among these people. Josephine's ability to make a popular art form of it attests to her great power over the people.

The nature of Josephine's performances is theatrical, even melodramatic. When she decides she is going to sing, she assumes a stance that indicates her intention. News travels that a performance is imminent and the audience gathers. Josephine expects everyone to be there, and they are. Then she proceeds with a mediocre vocal display that, nonetheless, transfixes the audience. Kafka speaks of the unifying force of her performance, the sense of community that attends a musical presentation by Josephine. To be sure, it is the event and not the music that attracts the crowds.

In the progress of the narrative, Josephine begins to play the part of prima donna. She demands to be released from the mundane requirements in her society. She feels her singing is enough, and she should not have to do any form of work beyond it. (Here Kafka refers to a mouselike system of social order.) To press her demands, she announces that she will leave certain notes out of songs. Then she will shorten her songs. This continues through dramatic proofs of the burden upon her (having to be carried onto the stage) and standard behavior for a prima donna. Finally she disappears altogether, though it is understood that she will return to perform again.

The tension between Josephine and the people serves, in Kafka's view, an important societal function. The people focus upon Josephine as a cause, a symbol of their race. Perhaps Kafka's reference to mice is a means of establishing clearly their isolation in the world. As such, their integrity as a race is paramount in the matter

of their survival. Josephine is the one who does what the many cannot do: she is a strong leader. As Kafka says, "... frequently as many as a thousand shoulders are trembling under a burden that was really meant only for one pair. Then Josephine holds that her time has come."⁸⁵ Josephine is the archetype of the personality in political authority.

In a very apolitical story, Kafka details the realities of politics, authority and people. His realism in the form of fantasy covers the psychology behind the facade. By consciously avoiding a representation of anarchy or oppression, the human factors behind any social order are revealed. Political jargon gives way to the fears, strengths and weaknesses of the human spirit. The matrix creates and exalts Josephine as hero and leader, and Josephine delivers to them the security they need. This is the distaff side of political authority, the need for belief in and commitment to the system. Whereas the inexplicable machinations of bureaucracy are normally the object of Kafka's attention, Josephine is his metaphor for the full force of personality.

"Under the Bus Shelter"

"Under the Bus Shelter," by Mahfuz, is more politically blatant. The mix of anarchy, apathy and repression creates a chaotic political scene. This piece shows Mahfuz at his most bizarre and surreal. The theme is indeed nihilistic, though Mahfuz himself has told Mikhail that "...we should not consider it as an expression

of sheer nihilistic pessimism."⁸⁶ Certainly, though, it is an expression of the destructive forces in society. The violence of political authority is commensurate with the violence of anarchy. The social balance is a bleak testimony to the power of violence.

As the title implies, the point of view in this story is from under a bus shelter. With rain pouring down, several people shelter themselves at this site. As they look on, a man runs through the street, followed by a group calling him a thief. When they catch him they beat him brutally. A nearby policeman witnesses the incident and does nothing. The people under the bus shelter decide that a movie is being shot, since it is the only explanation for the unusual behavior of the policeman. At this point, two cars come speeding onto the scene and collide violently. A man crawls from the wreckage then collapses, apparently dead. The cars burn and no one on the street, policeman, thief or the others, pays any attention. The thief and the men who have caught him are carrying on some kind of discussion. The people under the shelter continue to argue whether this is a film or reality. For fear of getting wet, no one leaves the shelter.

A series of surreal events ensues. A camel caravan arrives; a construction crew digs a large grave; foreign tourists begin looking around; the thief dances in the street; some engage in licentious behavior. A man in judge's robes appears and begins reading what seems to be a judgment. Though no one hears his words, after they are spoken a general fight erupts. "Everything intensified and reached a climax; killing, dancing, love, death, thunder, and rain."⁸⁷

When a man appears who seems to be issuing orders, the people under the shelter are confident they have found the movie director. Instead he is chased off by the pursuit of several others, running "like a maniac."⁸⁸

By now, the people under the shelter are beginning to see the reality to all that is happening. This shocks their sensibilities. As one of them states, "But to say that they were performing in a film is the only suggestion which makes their actions at all comprehensible."⁸⁹ Nevertheless, they admit it to themselves and wonder what they should do. One yells for the policeman, who comes over reluctantly. When they ask him why he did nothing at all, he questions their motives and asks for their identification cards. They deny any conspiracy, but he accuses them of lying. He steps back two paces and shoots all of them to death.

The continual argument about reality is significant in that this confusion allows chaos to flourish. In this story there is no law. A function of a viable political authority, then, is to impose not only law but also a reality. An ambiguous sense of reality makes anything possible. In a human social system, violence attends the legitimation of absurdity. Man's freedom is a power which he cannot handle; so he devises political and social hierarchies to impede his inclination to violence.

The state's violence answers social violence. The social milieu and the ruling political authority feed off one another. A repressive state counters an anarchistic society and vice versa. The inception of this debilitating spiral is the breakdown of perception.

As reality becomes more difficult to recognize, so does absurdity. The question in political authority is not one of opposition forces - state and individual - but of human forces - moral and material. The state and the individual attempt to strike a balance between the material and moral imperatives of man.

Conclusion

The political philosophies of Kafka and Mahfuz are not always clear. In general, Kafka censures totalitarianism and Mahfuz exposes tyranny. The tyranny in Mahfuz's work refers to the abuses of office which, upon becoming institutionalized, can result in a reign of terror. Kafka's chronicle of political abuse is aimed more at the slow, cumbersome, often ludicrous workings of the institution of political authority. In any case, Kafka and Mahfuz share a sensitivity to institutionalized corruption. Their stories tell of the inevitable breakdown in political authority, without regard to the details of authority. The theme of political disorder is another exponent of fundamental disintegration.

Mahfuz uses political events as symbolic antecedents. Several of his works draw their plots from situations involving Egypt, Israel and their conflicts, especially since 1967.⁹⁰ Hamdi Sakkout elaborates on this: "... Mahfuz relies so heavily on symbolism and the use of the absurd that... the significance of details is sometimes not at all clear. Critics, on the whole, have avoided commentary on these later collections, and have hesitated to offer any interpretations."⁹¹ In some ways, the

medium is the message. The absurdity that these political allegories create - nonsensical on the literal level - proves, as it were, the collapse of political order. At the same time that Mahfuz makes a statement on Mideast politics, he also enunciates the absurdity in all political maneuverings. The reverse symbolism, according to Sakkout, undermines their literary value;⁹² but their political chaos supports the idea of disintegration.

As for the guiding principles in Kafka, it is unrelenting bureaucracy that forces political authority to fall under its own weight. Authority outgrows its structural support and topples, leaving the groundwork for expanded bureaucracy and a more remote political entity. Zyla says, "All of Kafka's functionaries and officials ...are very real and act on an identical assumption of omnipotence."⁹³ This attitude is the thing which perpetuates a bad system. A complete unresponsiveness characterizes political authority in Kafka. This leads to Goth's statement "... revolt for the sake of revolt [regarding Camus] is certainly less exhausting than Kafka's revolt against a paradoxical and cruel Authority."⁹⁴ This acting out of resignation is summed up in the remark by Svitak: "Kafka's work is conceived in meaning as philosophical poetry..."(my translation).⁹⁵

The philosophy behind "Josephine the Singer," then, must be the early stage of bureaucratic development. With Josephine gone, nameless officials will attempt to take her place. "Under the Bus Shelter" is a vehicle for Mahfuz's philosophy of the absurd. He

indulges it only, as quoted earlier, for realistic effect. Political authority, as a large being, crushes the human element from which it springs. The human side is quick to fade, leaving an authority with powers of self-perpetuation. This authority grows into an abstraction and the human beings it prevails over suffer under its complete callousness.

Humanity becomes an instrument of a self-important authority. The gods of twentieth century political systems are ideologies. In earlier centuries, some kings and the pharaohs were associated with the divine. Where political authority was abusive, it could generally be traced to personalities. The trend toward dehumanization in the twentieth century has brought with it a new form of political oppression. The abstract system, serving itself, takes its toll through indifference and absurdity. The absence of a human factor accounts for these abuses: the common sense and concern of mankind is now missing in the matrix of political authority.

What then can be the reaction of modern man to a dull and lifeless political authority ? Camus's revolutionary formula is not the prescription of Kafka and Mahfuz. Even in Camus's thinking revolt is more an end in itself than a serious attempt to restructure the political order. The reality of defeat that continually presents itself in the works of Kafka and Mahfuz is not circumvented on the political level. Any solution would necessarily contradict the material no-man's-land which Kafka and Mahfuz have endeavored to reveal. It is a world in which no authority can build and maintain

a just order. Political authority simply fails on a grand scale.

As for living with that failure, in the face of the evils it produces, there is a fine line to walk. Refusing to deal with the world denies man's responsibility in the world; commitment to materialism can end only in total defeat. The balance takes into account these two extremes. In a moment of a very vague history, Kafka's Josephine defies the natural forces of dissolution and momentarily brings a unity and comfort to her people. This is not to say that the quasi-state that Josephine 'rules' is a political paradise. It merely stands as a brief interlude in the otherwise brutal story of man. But, as an exception, it precludes the nihilistic conclusion that might suggest itself for acclamation.

If the world were perfect in its defeat, then Camus's problem of suicide would not be a difficult matter. It would be the logical course. Yet the depressing tales of neo-realism in Mahfuz are tools. They serve to criticize destructive attitudes; so they are didactic to that extent, though didacticism is not a major point in Mahfuz (and not at all part of Kafka's writing). He levels criticism against the attitude of indifference among the Egyptian people.⁹⁶ In doing this, he certainly assumes a political posture and, paradoxically, reverses the asceticism that characterizes some of his stories. In fact, paradox is the key word in the balance.

Man, with a vision of good, continues to battle what he cannot defeat. The overriding fact is the corruption of political authority. But man, who is the perpetrator of that corruption, is also the visionary

that would perfect the world. Kafka and Mahfuz understand both sides of this paradox. Their work, showing the potency of evil in the material world, considers the forces of good that could be enlisted in man's behalf. The revision of political authority - and all authority - cannot rely upon the material world. Transcendentalism in Kafka and Mahfuz is more than escapism; it is the last possibility for reconciliation and reform in the material world.

CHAPTER 6

UNIVERSAL AUTHORITY

Much of this searching beyond is directed toward the realization of justice. All forms of human authority are unable to deliver justice in the world. Looking to a universal authority - with omnipotent powers - is both logical and urgent; urgent in the sense that Kafka and Mahfuz demand the inclusion of justice in the world. They could just as easily resign themselves to the nature of things. But this is not to be the case with these two writers. In poignant and ironic narratives, they repeatedly register a subtle outrage at the world.

Kafka's bucket rider is the innocent victim of indifference; the director in Mahfuz's "A Dream" is victimized by arbitrary laws; real suffering surrounds the execution of justice in "In the Penal Colony." Helplessness characterizes these situations. The dependency on exterior forces is a constant theme in the fiction explicated here. Mistreatment in these relationships of dependency is the rule. Everyone in "The Black Cat Tavern" is subjected to indiscriminate abuse. Georg in "The Judgment" is psychologically terrorized; while the characters in "The Heart Doctor's Ghost" alternate deceptions and power plays against one another. Even Josephine claims that she is the victim of great injustice; and "Under the Bus Shelter" is shocking in its display of a general breakdown.

It is clear that justice provides a point of departure for Kafka and Mahfuz. But what is the nature of their preoccupation with the subject ? Simply to express that there is no justice is hardly a sophisticated literature. In fact, hope in the power of a universal authority is the real reason behind the justice motif. Their work is something of an elaborate proof that justice is to be found only in the mystery of ultimate authority. Their purpose then is an apologia for hope. The twentieth century convention in the mood of ennui should not detract from the elements of hope in Kafka and Mahfuz.

Kafka deals with the ironic presence of hope. Mahfuz, on the other hand, treats hope as a human fact. The difference is that an incipient hope marks the work of Kafka, while a reactionary hope characterizes Mahfuz. In the narrative, Mahfuz relies upon shock and outrage to generate, not a feeling of hope, but a need for hope. The brutality of his fictional surreality renders hope conspicuous by its absence. Kafka's hope enters as an afterthought, but assumes real stature in the interpretation of the narrative. Each writer includes and offers the possibility of hope in his work.

The dead ends of Mahfuz - escalating violence at the end of "The Heart Doctor's Ghost;" the street corner executions of "Under the Bus Shelter" - produce the sense of a miscarriage of justice. The hyperbole in these stories emphasizes the miscarriage without denying hope. The brutality is calculated to offend and arouse. Hopelessness cannot be equated with rage and anger, but with numbness and resignation.

Mahfuz's stories, as vehicles of discontent, make a de facto statement for a world of hope. The reference in "A Dream" to a transcendent order (Buddha) and the mysterious deliverance of "The Black Cat Tavern" corroborate the idea of a mysterious justice. To hope is to react with abhorrence to evil.

The undefined appearance of hope in Kafka grows in the dying moments of the narrative. Georg Bendemann ("The Judgment") affirms his relationship with his parents, even as he falls from the bridge. Perhaps things could have been different, is the suggestion. The explorer ("In the Penal Colony") wakes up to an unexpected reverence in the acts of the officer, after he had already formed his condescending opinions. He leaves in confusion, unsure of his earlier condemnation of everything. The ice regions ("The Bucket Rider") and Josephine's insistent vision also challenge the pessimism of the narratives, with hints that good may yet surpass evil. Thomas Mann offers this view of Kafka's compositions: "... they are full of a reasoned morality, struggling with all its might toward justice, goodness and the will of God."⁹⁷

The forms of hope in the conceptualization of Kafka and Mahfuz aim toward a just order. The institution of such an order depends upon the benevolent offices of some authority. Two levels of authority - personal and relational - lack the power necessary to control extended surroundings. Due to problems of truth and perception, even immediate surroundings are beyond the just authority of individual persons. The authority of the masses however, as a consensus of human experience,

is likewise unable to establish the beneficent order that humanity seeks. Time and again, Kafka and Mahfuz record the shortcomings, errors and abuses of man-made law. Man's rule, over the choices of his individual behavior or the operations of his vast society, is flawed and hopeless.

If hope remains, it is placed outside the human forces. Man's attempts to utilize his freedom in the construction of a just world are failures. This is the lesson of Kafka and Mahfuz. But man is free to issue an appeal for the mercy of a transcendent authority. This is the convergence and the uniqueness in the writings of Kafka and Mahfuz; it is their synthesis of religious quest and existentialism. The means to order issues from universal authority. The qualities of this authority must include the insight into truth, access to total power and commitment to good which mankind lacks.

Menahem Milson has described the symbolism in Mahfuz's story called "Za'balawi:"... the search for cure is in fact a quest for religious belief. Of Kafka, Thomas Mann has said, "Perhaps I shall best characterize Kafka as a writer by calling him a religious humorist."⁹⁹ He refers to the bureaucratic absurdity that thwarts Kafka's characters as the humorous element. The quest is, in allegory, religious. In seeking truth and justice, Kafka and Mahfuz are seeking God. The appeal for mercy is then an invocation for the presence of God.

Though God is not identified per se, the traits associated with the divine are repeatedly alluded to by Kafka and Mahfuz. Nor does this happen by accident. The allegories and references (Kafka in "In the Penal Colony," "The Judgment," "The Bucket Rider "; Mahfuz in "A Dream,"

"The Black Cat Tavern," "The Heart Doctor's Ghost") suggest the authors' awareness of the religious foundation to their writings. The apparent ethnocentricity of their fiction concentrates on the need for mercy to alleviate human misery. Since the logical process they follow - the collapse of the material world - leads to a spiritual dimension, then the agent of the mercy they postulate is, by definition, God.

The Problem of God

The problem of God in Kafka and Mahfuz is, to begin with, their roundabout approach to the subject. Their literary genre, realism, explains this. If they were mystical writers, they could explore the theme with direct reference and exposition. As realists, writing in terms of objectivism; and as existentialists, whose writing springs only from human experience and perception, they must follow a deductive road to the divine. Though they display mystical sentiments, they avoid them for the purposes of their literary proof. Instead, rationality, freedom and emotion comprise the levels of dramatic statement. The credence of the human condition and dilemma informs the reality of an ultimate authority.

The existence of God in Kafka and Mahfuz is a formulaic concept. God is never named. Instead, the attributes of divine authority are delineated and presented as a logical paradigm. Taking all variables into consideration, God should exist. What is missing from the formula is faith. Doubt continues to plague the worlds of Kafka and Mahfuz.

God is disembodied to the point that His existence remains unconvincing; even mysticism is more a theory than an experience.

Evil is not the obstacle to belief. In general, Mahfuz blames man for the evil of the world. Kafka almost entirely suspends judgment. On the problem of God, both writers display the capacity for suspended judgment. Of course, that makes it impossible for them to affirm the existence of God. So their convictions are unassigned; the unmet need for faith and conviction manifests itself in anxiety. The unsettled or grim conclusions to some of their stories reflect their anxiety.

Regarding the fiction of Mahfuz, Peled cites the ideas of Menahem Milson: "Anxiety and the quest for the help of religion are thus seen as the leitmotif of all of Nagib Mahfuz's works since 1960."¹⁰⁰ This is exactly opposite to the atheism that is often associated with any rendering of the absurd. Nietzsche's nearly self-evident truth in the words of Zarathustra (" Could it be possible ? This old saint in the forest has not yet heard anything of this, that God is dead !" ¹⁰¹) is not so self-evident in Kafka and Mahfuz. They share the imagery of absurdity, but use it for different purposes. Their preoccupation represents the paradox of God and absurdity, rather than a refutation of the existence of God. As Goth suggests, Kafka has thrown himself into the middle of this paradox: "Yet this non-being is almighty, and K. cannot withdraw from it."¹⁰²

Universal authority is an enigma. Kafka and Mahfuz attempt

to break through the mystery but never do. At least they can assert the inconclusiveness of all arguments. If faith is elusive, absence of faith, in the form of atheism, is untenable. The resulting buffer zone allows conjecture, but not certainty. Hope is an admissible element in uncertainty. So, Kafka and Mahfuz, seekers after the justice and mercy which only a universal authority can bestow, create a literature of possibility in the existence of God.

The Problem of Absurdity

Absurdity provides a contrast within a fictional context. Kafka and Mahfuz make extensive use of the absurd, intimating the ordered structure which must oppose it. If these two writers could dismiss the idea of order, they could embrace rather than exploit absurdity. However, the one axiom of their thinking is order. As Camus says, "... if Kafka wishes to express the absurd, he makes use of coherence."¹⁰³ Both authors write for the sake of dichotomy. Their literary product forces the issue between the mutually exclusive concepts of order and absurdity.

They make it impossible to choose both order and absurdity. The standard existentialist practice of imposing a man-made order on absurdity is inconceivable under the Kafka/Mahfuz system. What they do is to impose the conviction of order on an apparent absurdity. Only through mysticism do order and absurdity converge in the truth. As rationalists, Kafka and Mahfuz themselves are unable to arrive at the truth through mystical experience. So they stand outside it,

pointing toward it. An absurd universe is not the truth behind the absurd facade.

Kafka and Mahfuz are quite comfortable with irony and paradox. The tragic outcomes in some of their stories, as triumphs of evil, do not destroy the paradigm of order. The split between the material world and an unknown spiritual world is so vast - signified by the exotic: ice regions in Kafka and references to Buddha in Mahfuz - that neither world influences the other. Thus, the material world can be perfectly absurd while spiritual anxiety is the enclave of order and truth. All paradox ceases when the universe is divided into two entities. The need for explanation and reconciliation disappears; good and evil, absurdity and order, God and nothingness coexist in a strange balance.

The moment of death separates the two worlds. The deaths of characters in Kafka and Mahfuz signify the transition from absurdity to truth. This is the same belief with countless historical precedents - from the Book of the Dead to the Bible. Death is then not an inherent evil, but a kind of mystical experience. Kafka and Mahfuz show their debt to the Abrahamic religions in their twentieth century versions of the universe. The fundamental agreement is a progression toward an afterworld. The twentieth century embellishments are the heavy attention to existence and absurdity.

Where earlier centuries indulged the macabre, Kafka and Mahfuz analyze life as an entity apart from death. They accept the traditional framework for life and death, but reexamine the focus of life - away

from death. The ensuing confrontation with injustice and absurdity sends them away in horror - like the explorer from the penal colony. In the end, they have written the story of twentieth century man. The fragmentation of the modern world has fed the natural anxiety of man. Now it is the psychology of alienation that holds sway. Aside from all else they do, basically Kafka and Mahfuz chronicle man's pain in his sense of distance, loss and loneliness.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The model of the universe, as a literary creation of Kafka and Mahfuz, envisions a theocratic order opposing a material absurdity. The tension between these contradictory states centers on the existence of man. Death is the final resolution of this tension; political and social orders intercede but can never establish more than a limited order. In terms of philosophical structure, God is the foundation of the universe, infinite in both authority and mercy. But the detached material world is man's own existential nightmare. It is a stage for continued confrontation with evil. The emotional reaction to evil generates the literature of Kafka and Mahfuz. The model is coherent, though paradoxical.

The cohesiveness of the paradigm owes to a suspension of rational judgment. The problem of good and evil and the problem of God give way to a transcendental conviction that renders them inconsequential. Under the tenets of transcendentalism, the material and the spiritual need not conform along the lines of logic. Glaring contradictions and abhorrent evils do not undermine the premise of order and justice. Kafka and Mahfuz hold to this premise, in spite of the inductive evidence for evil that threatens it. Since their original reasoning is deductive, their conclusions are formed at the time

they suspend further judgment. As writers and thinkers, they are committed to the idea of a radically good universe.

If this subjects them to criticism, it is from the absurdists, on whose rationale and nomenclature they draw heavily. They could be mistaken for absurdists themselves. At the existential level, this would not be wrong. They share in the concept of man's alienation. They recognize man's freedom and responsibility, but reject the idea of the universal sovereignty of man. In a limited context, Kafka and Mahfuz propose an existential order, confining it - commensurate with its definition - to the material world. It would be a philosophical error, to their way of thinking, to project a material reality onto the entirety of reality.

What their fiction offers is an understanding of this. The horror of existence should not taint the possibilities beyond existence. Hope remains a legitimate affirmation in mankind; this is in resistance to the sacrifice of hope. High anxiety has produced a panic that demands immediacy of solution. As man's institutions have failed in the attempt, despair has replaced hope. Kafka and Mahfuz vent the feeling of despair - through a classic literary catharsis - and thereby negate a deification of emotion. Knowledge that a divine order circumscribes the chaos of man introduces the positive side of mystery into human experience.

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