

Anette Horn

Language and paranoia: a response to J M Coetzee's reading of Kafka's *The burrow*

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This paper attempts an alternative reading of the temporal structure of Kafka's last novella, *The burrow*, which was analysed by J M Coetzee in his essay 'Time, tense and aspect in Kafka's *The burrow*'. While Coetzee's analysis has lost none of its cognitive value a quarter of a century after its first publication in 1981, a psychoanalytical reading of verbal aspect as a symptom of paranoia will be attempted here. I wish to suggest, further, that this paranoid structure is potentially to be found at the heart of all language and subjectification.

Sprache und Paranoia: eine Antwort auf J M Coetzee's Lesung von Kafkas Erzählung *Der Bau*

In diesem Aufsatz versuche ich eine andere Lesart der Zeitstruktur von Kafkas letzter Novelle *Der Bau* vorzunehmen als die von J M Coetzee in dem Aufsatz 'Time, tense and aspect in Kafka's *The burrow*'. Während Coetzee's Analyse nichts an Erkenntniswert ein viertel Jahrhundert nach seiner ersten Publikation im Jahre 1981 eingebüßt hat, schlage ich eine psychoanalytische Lesart vor, die den Gebrauch des Aspekts des Verbuns in der Novelle als Symptom der Paranoia versteht. Damit verweise ich auf die paranoide Struktur, die potentiell jeder Sprachordnung und Subjektwerdung zugrunde liegt.

In a linguistic study titled 'Time, tense and aspect in Kafka's *The burrow*' in *Modern Language Notes* (1981), J M Coetzee attempts to understand the use of the iterative present in Kafka's last story *The burrow* [*Der Bau*] as an expression of a "mystical" experience of time which breaks the frame of any historical, social or psychological determinants. While Coetzee's differentiation between time, tense and verbal aspect has lost none of its cognitive value a quarter of a century later, I do not completely agree with his "mystical" interpretation, because it overlooks the paranoid elements of the text.

My argument is that in the political context of the early eighties in South Africa, with the worsening crisis of the confrontation between the apartheid system on the one hand and the armed resistance of the African National Congress on the other, J M Coetzee was specifically interested as a writer in this "solution" of the time conflict because he saw no personal alternative to a retreat into a "mystical" timelessness. The novel he was writing at the time, *The life and times of Michael K*, seems to corroborate this thesis (cf Horn 2000). Coetzee (1992: 202) perceived South African critics to demand of him a novel in the style of "social realism", a style of writing he did not want to adopt:

Nevertheless, the general position Lukács takes on what he calls realism as against modernist decadence carries a great deal of power, political and moral, in South Africa today: one's first duty as a writer is to represent social and historical processes; drawing the procedures of representation into question is time-wasting; and so forth.

As an alternative to Coetzee's "mystical" interpretation of the time structure in Kafka's *Burrow* I would like to propose a psychoanalytical reading of the text, which takes into account its paranoid symptoms. I am not interested in psychoanalysing the author Franz Kafka; my aim is rather to analyse the literary representation of a paranoid thought system, which underlies every linguistic order and every subjectification. This is what the story implies.

Coetzee's analysis of the time system in the *Burrow* is based on the study *Temps et verbe*, in which the Canadian linguist, Gustave Guillaume (1929), develops a model of the verb which is composed of a universal time and an event time. Universal time is based on the well-known irreversible linear time of Newtonian physics, while event time encompasses the length of time which an event requires in order to come about.

According to Guillaume this event time could be infinitesimal, without any interval between beginning and end. On the grammatical level the universe and the event time are each represented by the tense and the aspect of the verb. The verb system thus combines two different concepts of time (cf Coetzee 1992: 221f).

Guillaume's concept of event time may be compared to Bergson's theory of *temps duré*, to which he found himself drawn because of the experience of objectified universal time as unbearably alienating (cf Adorno 1974: 273). Bergson understood duration as pure quality (an intensity), in which the limits between the individual stages were dissolved, so that the result of each movement could never be derived simply from the previous stages. Bergson (1912: 155) writes:

For between successive conscious states there exists a difference of quality which will always frustrate any attempt to deduce any one of them *a priori* from its predecessors.

In duration there is therefore a qualitative leap which gives the process of consciousness a new direction. Two diametrically opposed consequences may be derived from Bergson's theory: the impossibility of understanding the world, or the recognition of the break between the overly powerful and unassimilable world of things and the experience which eludes it (Adorno 1974: 273). On the level of the theory of storytelling it is the difference between the time related in the story (the preterite) and the time when the story is told (the present) — or between what has been written about and the process of writing.

For Kafka, the two different systems of time rub against each other in such a way that the event time undermines and hollows out the universal time, although the latter does not altogether disappear. Kafka (1990: 877) reflects in his diary on this conflict, as follows:

The clocks do not agree, the inner clock hurries along in a devilish or demonic or in any case in an inhuman way, the outer clock hesitantly goes its usual way. What else can happen, except that the two different worlds separate or at least tear each other apart in a frightening way. This wildness of the inner course may have different reasons, the most visible is self-observation, which does not allow any idea to come to rest, which chases all others, only to be chased in turn by a new self-observation.

Deborah Harter (1987: 53) comments on this diary entry as follows:

For him there was the inner clock — keeping time while he was writing, governing a world obedient to its own laws, ‘unberechenbar ..., freudig ...’ (Jan. 27, 1922) — and an outer one, governing the slower, the ‘human’ world as he sometimes called it, a world which held a certain attraction for him but in which he felt awkward, ill-equipped, a foreigner. There was certainly no doubt for him which clock he would have to follow, but if he could have joined the two and held them together, if he could have made the one make sense beside the other, he would have done so.

Kafka significantly mentions self-observation as the trigger of the tumultuous movement of inner time, which in my reading reveals paranoid traits: thoughts race through one’s head, apparently automatically. The fact that the process of self-reflection and self-observation does not lead to any result indicates that inner time is not subject to the control of the ego. Thus, for Kafka, even event time becomes an expression of psychic alienation, and as such an inner equivalent of Bergson’s objectified empty time.

For Kafka, the tumultuous movement of inner thoughts is concomitant with a stoppage of outer time. This indicates that the critical reason of the enlightenment, which aims at the recognition of truth and the improvement of society, has turned into obsessive self-observation, fundamentally excluding any relationship to an empirical reality. Instead, Kafka’s figures move in a system of linguistic representation which they cannot escape except by death. Inside the game of the shifting signifier they themselves have become immutable figures. The ego no longer masters the rules of the game of language but is itself moved like a piece in a game played according to unknown rules. The story *The Burrow* makes explicit the paranoid structure of rationalist thinking — a form of thinking which aims to control an incommensurable reality, yet on the other hand tends to retreat from this reality into its own linguistic construct if the external reality proves too threatening. Psychoanalysis can assist in deciphering the signs of this unconscious writing, but (as Kafka has stated), in fact only mirrors a mirror-writing.

The paranoia, I would argue, manifests itself narratively in the iterative present tense and the subjunctive mood. The iterative present refers to a recurrent event (for example, “He goes to church every Sunday”), while the subjunctive mood refers to hypothetical situations which also include the wishes of the speaker (for example, “If I were a bird,

I would fly to you”). To remain with the metaphor of the relentless assault of inner time, the everlasting present would be the eye of the storm (the unconscious conflict which generates the unstoppable attack of thoughts) while the thoughts which unceasingly chase one another are articulated in the past subjunctive. Coetzee points out that the everlasting present serves to describe an event which returns from time to time. He understands the regularly recurring panic attacks of the animal in the burrow as unproblematic insofar as the normal use of the present tense is concerned. As an example he uses the sentence: “Every month I run about the streets naked”. But Coetzee (1992: 212) notices that Kafka also uses the iterative present tense to portray sudden events of the type: “Every month I impulsively run about the streets naked”. This second sentence appears absurd, because the recurrent and therefore predictable event cannot be combined with the sudden and unpredictable. Such sentences do, however, accumulate in Kafka’s *Burrow* as the uncertainty of the animal increases, dominating its consciousness despite its obsessive attempts to increase its security measures.

The animal’s fear of an imagined enemy (which up to the last sentence of the novella does not materialise) creates symptoms which are typical of a neurosis that could be described as obsessive and/or anxious. According to Pongratz (1977: 356), the obsessive neurosis is characterised by

... persistent contents of consciousness, impulses to act or actions, of which the persons concerned say they cannot control them, or only with great difficulty. These symptoms are often experienced as nonsensical, absurd, alien to one’s being, and anxiety-inducing, and they appear to occur against the inner resistance of the obsessive neurotic. It is customary to divide the obsessive neurotic symptoms into *Zwangsgedanken* (obsessions) and *Zwangshandlungen* (compulsions).¹

Pongratz (1977: 356) defines obsessions as follows:

- 1 Zwangsneurosen sind durch persistierende Bewußtseinsinhalte, Handlungs-impulse oder Handlungen charakterisiert, von denen der Betreffende sagt, daß er sie nicht oder nur schwer kontrollieren könne. Die Symptome werden häufig als unsinnig, wesensfremd und angstauslösend erlebt, und sie scheinen gegen den inneren Widerstand des Zwangsneurotikers aufzutreten. Üblicherweise erfolgt eine Unterteilung der zwangsneurotischen Symptome in Zwangsgedanken (obsessions) und Zwangshandlungen (compulsions).

Obsessions can manifest themselves as obsessive brooding or obsessive fixed ideas. Obsessive brooding is characteristic of a condition of uncertainty about an action or an inability to act. An individual wavers between different alternative actions, endlessly examining [the] advantages and disadvantages, never reaching a conclusion; or past actions are examined again and again, thereby arousing doubts in the subject as to whether they were carried out correctly or whether they were carried out at all.²

The notion of the enemy and the attempts to secure the burrow thus appear to be classifiable as obsessive ideas, although it remains unclear what constitutes their cause and effect. The dissolution of such basic categories of rational thinking such as time, space, and causality can also be observed in obsessive brooding, which is expressed here mainly in the past subjunctive, seeming not only to nullify everything the animal has already achieved, but also to prevent any rational action in the future. Thus at the very beginning the animal reflects on the advantages and disadvantages of an open entrance after it has already equipped the burrow with one, and ponders the advantages of a hollow space for its Castle Keep, which would protect it completely, although it is of the opinion that it no longer has the strength to execute this plan. This contradicts the initial assertion that it is at the peak of its life. Another obsessive action seems to be the need to create “fifty places for provisions” (which the animal builds whenever it experiences another paranoid episode), with the apparent intention of diverting its enemy from its main provisions at the Castle Keep.

The aural hallucinations of the animal seem to be additional paranoid symptoms. It is regularly awoken by noises which it believes to be signs of the enemy. The warning signal for an imminent attack becomes a persistent hissing which the animal believes it is hearing, sometimes at closer range, sometimes from a greater distance. It attempts to track down the hissing but does not succeed. At the end of the story the sound no longer disappears for periods, but seems to be located within the

2 Zwangsgedanken können sich als Zwangsrübeln oder als Zwangsideen manifestieren. Beim Zwangsrübeln handelt es sich um einen Zustand der Handlungsunsicherheit und des Handlungsunvermögens. Ein Individuum schwankt unentschieden zwischen verschiedenen Handlungsalternativen, prüft endlos ihre Vor- und Nachteile und gelangt zu keiner Entscheidung; oder vergangene Handlungen werden in Gedanken immer wieder durchgespielt, und dabei treten Zweifel auf, ob sie richtig oder ob sie überhaupt ausgeführt wurden.

animal's own body. Hiebel (1983: 55) has interpreted this hissing biographically as a reference to Kafka's lung illness: *The Burrow* was

... written in the last year of Kafka's life, when he was tormented by lung tuberculosis. The enemy who approaches is unrecognizable; it is about an animal 'which I do not yet know'. The danger is repressed, it is 'denied', i.e. recognized and at the same time warded off: the animal digs desperately and yet it basically does not 'believe' in a bad ending, a 'horrible result'. The enemy lives inside, therefore the animal at the end hears 'deep silence' outside of [its] burrow, [whereas] inside [its] burrow, which is its self, there is restlessness, 'hissing'. Nevertheless, the enemy remains an 'Other'; in the 'circle of outside and inside' the enemy outside has been replaced by the enemy inside, by obsession and anxiety, has become symptom, illness and Thanatos. History changes into a 'myth of the unconscious'; only symbolically, only by means of allusions can one talk about a mythical enemy: 'Confronted with this appearance my explanations fail completely'. The causal explanations turn into the 'inexplicable' — the same as the end of the sagas about PROMETHEUS. Even at the beginning of the story the animal thinks of the enemies in the 'interior of the earth': 'I have never seen them, but the sagas tell about them'; nevertheless it is true that 'not even the sagas can describe them'.³

In the iterative present and the past subjunctive of the story, rationality turns into irrationality, as the timelessness of the rationalist discourse, which claims to be the eternal truth ["this is so"], intersects with the timelessness of the unconscious and becomes conflated, so that a single tangle of (non)sense is created. This moment marks the collapse

- 3 der BAU ist ja im letzten Lebensjahr des von Lungentuberkulose gepeinigten Kafka entstanden. Der herankommende Gegner ist unerkennbar; es geht um ein Tier, das 'ich noch nicht kenne' (ER 433, vgl 438). Die Gefahr wird verdrängt; sie wird 'verleugnet', d.h. anerkannt wie abgewehrt zugleich: das Tier gräbt verzweifelt und doch 'glaubt' es 'im Grunde nicht' an ein böses Ende, ein 'schreckliches Ergebnis' (ER 434). Der Gegner wohnt im Inneren, daher hört das Tier auch am Ende außerhalb seines Baues 'tiefe Stille' (ER 437), in seinem Bau, der es selbst ist, herrscht Unruhe, 'Zischen'. Dennoch bleibt der Gegner 'Anderer'; im 'Zirkel von Außen und Innen' ist der äußere Feind durch den inneren, durch Zwang und Angst, ersetzt, ist Symptom, Krankheit und Thanatos geworden. Die Geschichte wird zu einem 'Mythos des Unbewußten'; nur symbolisch, nur andeutungsweise kann von dem mythischen Gegner gesprochen werden: 'Vor dieser Erscheinung versagen meine ersten Erklärungen völlig' (Er 433). Kausalerklärung wird dem 'Unerklärlichen' — in welches auch die Sagen von PROMETHEUS münden (ER 351) — nicht gerecht. Schon am Beginn der Erzählung gedenkt das Tier der Feinde im 'Innern der Erde': 'Ich habe sie noch nie gesehen, aber die Sagen erzählen von ihnen'; gleichwohl gilt: 'nicht einmal die Sage kann sie beschreiben' (ER 413).

of the system of universal time, according to which the subject could move between conceptions of the past, the present and the future. Instead continuous time disintegrates into unconnected moments.

The story begins at a point when the animal has already dug the burrow. This is indicated by the transition from the perfect tense to the present tense: "I have furnished the burrow and it seems to be a great success". The perfect tense could mean here that the animal has just completed the burrow and thus has not yet gained enough distance in time to justify the use of the preterite. The animal looks back on its just-completed work and thinks it has achieved its goal. It is important to note the qualification of this judgement by the verb "seems" (*scheinen*), which designates this proposition as a subjective one which could be refuted. In this way the "I"-narrator is explicitly revealed as non-omniscient. After this first sentence this narrator changes to the iterative present in order to describe the advantages and disadvantages of the security measures which have been taken in order to protect the burrow against external attacks. Beyond that the animal is concerned with making provision for its old age, as the Castle Keep shows. That the animal's precautions go way beyond normal measures is shown by the fear that the burrow has already been destroyed by the real enemy. These hallucinations, which relate to the weakest part of the burrow (the entrance), no longer allow the animal any rest: "My life, even now at its culmination, has hardly a completely quiet hour, there, in that place in the dark moss I am mortal and often in my dreams a lecherous snout is sniffing around there incessantly" (360).

Peter Horn (1990: 112) points out the problematics of applying psychological concepts to literature. He questions the distinction between the literary portrayal of hallucinations and their occurrence in "real life". One could argue that he thereby shares Coetzee's view that any deviation from the norm be seen as "pathological", an inference I would like to avoid. Peter Horn refers to Esquirol's definition of hallucinations "as ascribing a body and reality to images which do not have such a reality. To hallucinate is 'to be out of touch with reality', to be crazy, to be mad". Horn (1990: 112) goes on to castigate interpreters, not only for applying this medical diagnosis to literature, but for drawing a distinction between normality and abnormality at all:

In their zeal to deny the reality of certain religious, 'superstitious' and 'mystical' experiences, bourgeois moralists and enlightenment philosophers and scientists have put themselves into a logically untenable position when they attempted to define 'hallucination'. The concept 'hallucination' presupposes that a person 'sees' certain things, 'images', the reality of which he is subjectively fully convinced, and that another person makes a judgement that the first person is ascribing a body and reality to images, which do not have such a reality. Formulated in a different way the judgement of the second person is: The one who is 'hallucinating' reacts to stimuli which do not exist. This judgement puts the one about whom this judgement is made into a position, in which there is no defense for him. The one who 'hallucinates' cannot undertake a self-diagnosis, otherwise he would have to say that his sensory data have a material reality and do not have one at the same time. If he really 'hallucinates' then he is completely convinced of the reality of the 'body' which engenders his sensory data, just as much as anybody who does not 'hallucinate' is convinced of the reality of his sensory data. For the one who 'hallucinates' it is impossible to say 'I hallucinate'. By what right then does the one who does not 'hallucinate' believe the 'reality' of his sensory data, when he does not believe the 'reality' of the different sensory data of somebody who 'hallucinates'?

Perhaps one could argue that modernist literature makes readers aware of this conundrum and allows them to empathise with people who hallucinate and/or to disturb their own sense of un/reality.

The gap in the animal's security system reminds it of its own mortality. It is significant that this mortality expresses itself in the dream symbol of the lecherous snout (an image of sexual desire), which is warded off by its fear of death. This alludes to the underlying drives of the fictitious animal, the intertwining of Eros and Thanatos. The reference to the dream makes the source of its unease clear: the unconscious can express itself more freely during sleep because the censorship imposed by the super-ego is relieved. The unconscious cannot be forced into any time-system because the endless presence of everything which ever was, is, and will be, rules simultaneously in the unconscious, which thus breaks into the dream consciousness as a regular but unpredictable force:

I do not know whether it is a habit of olden times or whether indeed the dangers of even this house are strong enough to awaken me: *at regular intervals from time to time* I am startled out of a deep sleep and listen, listen into the silence which rules here unhindered by day and by night, smile reassured and sink into an even deeper sleep with relaxed limbs. Poor wanderers without a house, on the open road, in the forests, at best hidden in a heap of leaves or within a pack of com-

rades, exposed to all the disasters of heaven and earth! I lie here in a place which is secured to all sides — there are more than fifty such in my burrow and between day dreaming and unconscious sleep *the hours pass which I choose at my pleasure.* (361)

This last sentence creates the absurd impression that the animal's panic attacks are voluntary, as it maintains that it controls its unconsciousness, even while sleeping. The question is whether the animal has projected the enemy from the outside to the inside, or whether it was inside all the time, and now makes its appearance because of circumstances which the animal can no longer control. Freud attempted to make the atemporal nature of the unconscious clear by comparing it to the ancient city of Rome, in which the layers of various historical epochs have been deposited. Historians can theoretically recognise the remains of the past if they have not been destroyed by wars or fire. According to Freud, trauma plays a role in the unconscious similar to that of wars and fire, effacing traces of memories. One could maintain that trauma involves a regression to an earlier level of development, just as the mention of the monster in the depths in *The Burrow* indicates that the animal's rational explanations are already fundamentally unsettled.

It is interesting that Freud (1963: 97f) himself rejects the comparison with Rome as fantastic:

Now we make the fantastical assumption, Rome is not a human habitat, but a psychic being of a similar long and rich past, where nothing which has ever come to be has perished, where next to the latest phases of development all previous ones still continue to exist. [...] It does not make sense to draw out this fantasy any further because it leads to something inconceivable, to the absurd. If we want to portray the historical consecutive states spatially, we can do so only by some form of contiguity in space; the same space does not allow for two different objects filling it.

Freud (1963: 98) refers to the limitations of the “graphic, vivid description”, when we are dealing with the “peculiarities of the life of the soul”. Kafka's fantastic story, however, does exactly what Freud thinks is impossible: in it space is filled with two different objects at the same time.

Together with universal time Kafka dissolves the separation of inside and outside. As in a Möbius-strip they gradually change into each other. The animal speaks about the mythical monsters of the deep which it has never seen as if they represent a real danger. The animal is obviously

not able to differentiate between real and imagined danger, between mere appearance and reality. It seems to be a delusion that it treats both with the same claim to rational reality. In this way, ironically, Kafka makes the reader aware of the sign character of reality.

Freud points towards the linguistic character of paranoia by showing that the main forms of paranoia are contradictions contained in one sentence, which can be read as follows: "I [a man] love him [a man]", and that they "exhaust all possible formulations of this contradiction" (Freud 1943: 299). Freud demonstrates how the persecution complex contradicts this sentence by maintaining: "I do not love him — I hate him". This means that the verb ("love") is turned into its opposite ("hate"), something that, according to Freud, is typical of the unconscious: a denial means an affirmation. But the paranoid person is not aware of this contradiction. The mechanism of the formation of the paranoid symptom demands that the inner perception, the emotion, be replaced by an apparently external perception. Therefore the sentence "I hate him" is transformed by a projection into another: "He hates (persecutes) me, which will justify my hating him". Not only is the verb inverted, but subject and object are exchanged. The inner driving unconscious emotion appears as a consequence of a perception in the outside world: "I do not love him — I hate him — because he persecutes me" (Freud 1943: 299). Freud maintains that a fourth contradiction is admitted, the rejection of the sentence as a whole: "I do not love anybody at all". As one needs to attach one's libido to someone or something this sentence means: "I love only myself" (Freud 1943: 301). This type of contradiction produces megalomania.

Thus paranoia, according to Freud, is closely related to what he calls *dementia praecox*. Freud sees this condition as a turning away of the libido from the outside world and a regression to the ego. In clinical psychiatry paranoia is counted among the endogenous disturbances (arising spontaneously from within) characterised by the withdrawal of the libido from objects in the outside world towards the inside. In my opinion the animal also shows acute symptoms of anxiety and an obsessional neurosis. According to Degkwitz, anxiety is defined as various combinations of bodily and psychic symptoms of fear, which cannot be ascribed to a real danger and which appear either as panic attacks or as continuous fear. The fear is diffuse most of the time and can increase

to a form of panic. Other neurotic traits such as obsessive phenomena or hysterical symptoms can be present but do not dominate the clinical image (Pongratz 1977: 345). Pongratz *et al* go on to say that the anxiety neurosis differs from “real fear” (Freud 1948) because of its chronic character as well as the absence of any true danger, whether current or to be expected in the near future, as perceived by an external observer. If there is a real danger, the anxiety exceeds the measure to be expected in relation to that danger. Therefore it appears “irrational” to the observer and often also to the person concerned. As opposed to phobia, the fear is not bound to specific objects or situations. A strict separation between the two forms of “neurotic fear” is probably impossible, however.

These four levels of libido cathexis and finally of libido withdrawal from the outside world can all be studied in Kafka’s animal. They explain — at least partially — its wavering between the need to accept a friend inside the burrow, and the inability to realise this wish. Significantly, this relationship founders on the fear that its friend could become its potential persecutor. Therefore the regression of the libido to its own ego remains as the sole possibility. Kafka portrays the signs of socialised desire in the ego, which do not allow the animal any rest, but drive it against the limits of its language — without which, however, it cannot exist. The attempt to break out of the burrow would represent the attempt to live outside language. Life at the margin of society and language would be unbearable for the animal, as is demonstrated by its unsuccessful attempt to escape. While its burrow gives it a relative measure of security, its fear when outside the burrow intensifies to the point of panic, which forces it to crawl back into its burrow, completely exhausted and without any cover to hide its entrance from the prying eyes of an imagined enemy.

Pongratz (1977: 347) writes:

In neo-psychoanalytical theories anxiety is interpreted as a consequence of disturbed social relationships (e.g. Sullivan 1953) and social life forms (Fromm 1945). According to Sullivan (1953) the fear of the anxiety expresses a crisis of self value and as deeply rooted uncertainty, whether one is accepted by other people. Portnoy (1959), too, emphasizes the extreme dependence of the anxiety neurotic on his surroundings, the strong alienation from one’s self and the feeling of a more or less permanent helplessness. Fischer (1970), in his attempt to synthesise the known theories of anxiety, comes to the conclusion that the patient develops a free-floating fear, if the previous ego-

environment-system breaks down or is endangered. In close association with a strong loss of self-value is the loss of belief to be able to manage the environment and the task at hand, and in this connection not only certain situations — as is the case with a phobia — but vast areas of life.

The difference between clinical paranoia and Kafka's story is mainly that Kafka is staging the reflections of his first-person story-teller, while in a clinical case of paranoia, the person would produce his/her delusions unconsciously. Kafka's literary representation of paranoia throws up basic questions about rationality and madness, language and history, desire and death.

My hypothesis is that, in the 1980s, Coetzee was particularly interested in Kafka's "solution" of the conflict between universal time and event time, as a means of claiming the right of South African writers to represent (inner) event time. He did not want to subject himself to the anti-apartheid writers' demands that he should unmask apartheid critically or that he should comply with a kind of social realism in the sense of Lukács. One thinks of his essay on the relationship between ethics and aesthetics in Nadine Gordimer's work in *Doubling the point*. He contrasts objective reality with the subjective time of writing. In doing so, he also radically questions the relationship between the individual and society, between language and reality. It is no coincidence, therefore, that he selected the story *The Burrow*, in which the animal has cut off almost every relationship with the outside world and reflects endlessly on its own situation.

Coetzee attempts to resolve the conflict between the two time systems by declaring linear historical time to be insignificant while asserting that the present moment is the only decisive one. In an interview with David Attwell, Coetzee (1992: 198) confirms this:

No one who has really followed Kafka through his struggles with the time system of German can fail to be convinced that he had an intuition of an alternative time, a time cutting through the quotidian, on which it is as foolish to try to elaborate in English as in German. But Kafka at least hints that it is possible, for snatches, however brief, to think outside one's own language, perhaps to report back on what it is like to think outside language itself. Why should one want to think outside language? Would there be anything worth thinking there?

In valorising the present moment above universal time, Coetzee refers to Kafka's (1966: 73) aphorism: "The decisive moment of human development is everlasting [...] the revolutionary movements are right which declare everything in the past void, because as yet nothing has happened". In so doing he lends the iterative present tense in Kafka's stories a quasi-mystical meaning instead of understanding it in the light of social alienation or of psychological breakdown. He writes:

Kafka's concern is with the experience of a breakdown of time, of the time-sense: one moment does not flow into the next — on the contrary, each moment has the threat or promise of being (not becoming) a timeless forever, unconnected to, ungenerated by, the past. One can choose to regard this as a symptom of psychological breakdown in the man Kafka, but only at the risk of dismissing as pathological every so-called mystical intuition (Coetzee 1992: 203).

However, Coetzee overlooks the fact that this moment of grace does not occur in Kafka's story *The Burrow* — and, indeed, cannot occur because the animal is in a psychotic circle from which there is no possibility of its breaking out. The everlasting present is punctuated by panic attacks at regular intervals, also related in the iterative present. The paradoxical time structure of the story is symptomatic of psychogenic disturbances. While the unconscious underlies the psychic constitution of every individual, in pathogenic cases it breaks down the barriers of consciousness which run along the coordinates of time, space and causality. In *The Burrow* Kafka portrays the progressive dismantling of the normal relations of time, space and causality in the sense of persecution of the animal.

The attempt to alter linear time radically seems to be condemned to failure for the simple reason that the ego is caught up by it at the last, at the moment of death. The consciousness and fear of death, however, becomes another trigger for the paranoid reflections of the animal. Death is the gap in the security system which can never be closed. The moment of truth can only be postponed. But since death also puts an end to fear, death also appears desirable. This is at the heart of the paradoxical structure of the story, in which desire and defence, Eros and Thanatos, are intertwined.

The question is whether this very conflict does not lie at the heart of language and its constitution of the ego, because language is the potentially paranoid attempt of human beings to gain control over their

surroundings. In order to do so they invent a system of time with which to order them, which we call “history”. To the ego the history of its society seems too abstract and general for it to identify with because it reminds it of its insignificance in the universe. Against this universal time the poet therefore develops his/her own subjective concept of time (or duration) which extends some moments infinitely, while contracting others to an infinitesimal time-span. Coetzee argues that this subjective consciousness of time in Kafka’s *The Burrow* gives the reader a sense of omnipotence. However, he does not analyse the contribution of the unconscious in the animal’s paranoid episodes. In an alternative reading of the story I have tried to draw out these paranoid elements (which Coetzee hints at but disavows in favour of a mystical time), demonstrating how they operate on a linguistic and temporal level.

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