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Shattered Heroism and the Crisis of Masculinity: Patriarchy and the Traumatised Protagonist in Kafka and Conrad

This paper looks at the early sense of fragmentation of patriarchy in the *fin de siècle* fictions of Kafka and Conrad and the accompanying sense of trauma in the protagonists. If *Metamorphosis* may be counted as fantasy literature then it seems, Kafka had to leave the world of the real and enter the fictional world of the eroded man, the liquid boundary, that place where things are not what they seem, of the fractured self, in order to express his unease. When I say it is a piece of fantasy literature I mean because fantasy disturbs rules of artistic representation and reproduction of the real in literature. At the heart of the crises and traumas I am looking at is the sense of dissolution, be it of the self in Kafka, or heroism in Conrad. Etymologically the Greek meaning of the word *trauma* is right there–these are wounded men whose cultural inheritance offers little support for their attempts to make sense of a changing world. And I think that there is at the core of much of the literature at the turn of the century: an attempt at hermeneutics, an attempt to interpret when the old cultural meanings began to become eroded.

Kafka explores the fracture of identity, when he writes about alienation. In "Metamorphosis" (1912), he writes of Gregor Samsa, who wakes one morning to find himself transformed into a giant insect:

> Did he really want his warm room, so comfortably fitted with old family furniture, to be turned into a naked den in which he would certainly be able to crawl unhampered in all directions but at the price of shedding simultaneously all recollection of his human background? (Kafka, Metamorphosis and Other Stories, 22)

The story gives a sense of both individual and familial alienation, and it uses the family structure to reflect a wider social arena of dehumanising tendencies. Kafka's struggle and the attendant themes of his fictions hint at the politicisation of man and the rise of totalitarianism in the twentieth century and all its shattered heroism. I believe that the key works I discuss explore the challenge to a traditional morality at the turn of the century for reasons that are partly cultural and partly economic, expressed through fiction, that absorbent sponge of the social unconscious. Kafka's relationship with his father is a salutary place to start, it exemplifies a deeply embedded sense of authoritarian control and the author's artistic rebellion from and interpretation of it.

In his "Letter to His Father" (1919), admittedly slightly outside our historical area but nonetheless relevant since it is based on a retrospective situation, the author tellingly writes:

> Dearest Father,
> You asked me recently why I maintain that I am afraid of you. As usual, I was unable to think of any answer to your question, partly for the very reason that I am afraid of you […] you have worked hard all your life, have sacrificed everything for your children, above all for me […]. You have not expected any gratitude for this, […] but have expected at least some sort of obligingness […]. I have never taken any interest in the business of your other concerns; I left the factory in your hand and walked off […]. (Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, 42)

The authoritarian father, inheritance and its burdens, the theme of sacrifice, gratitude and guilt are themes present here and they are at the heart of what I intend to discuss. While the reasons for Kafka's personal alienation may lie in his relationship with his father, it is interesting to reflect on Jonathan Swift's observation that men are grateful in the same degree as they are vengeful. Gratitude may attest to the authority of the benefactor, it is also part of a familial prison in Kafka. I want to look at how the ideas of legacy, be they familial or colonial are at the centre of early twentieth century fiction that explores the erosion of the structures that uphold these values, and how they predate the ongoing crisis of the twentieth century. Kafka refers elsewhere in his letter to his father as, "my father, the ultimate authority." That is a key part of what he is writing about and not just here but in "Metamorphosis", in *The Trial*, *The Castle*, "In the Penal Settlement", and numerous other fictions, he is dramatising the breakdown of a historical certainty, of the securities of patriarchy as a provider of economic and social continuity, interestingly, at the start of a century which saw the rise of totalitarianism. The word was coined in May 1923 by Giovanni Amendola as a condemnation of Fascist ambitions to monopolise power. And there is much of the totalitarian in Kafka's works and especially in *Heart of Darkness* by Conrad. The two fictions glimpse the roots of a cultural shift, of the genesis of a new paradigm and hint at what was to come. It is clear what kind of father Kafka had. He writes, "Your self-confidence was indeed so great that you had no need to be consistent at all and yet never ceased to be in the right". And Kafka describes it quite explicitly when he writes: "For me you took on the enigmatic quality that all tyrants have whose rights are based on their person and not their reason" (Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, 84).

In "Metamorphosis" as Gregor Samsa struggles to come to understand what has happened to him, his family watch, his isolation and alienation are complete:

> If he only had a chance to turn round he could get back to his room at once, but he was afraid of exasperating his father by the slowness of such a rotation and at any moment the stick in his father's hand might hit him a fatal blow on the back or on the head. […] keeping an anxious eye on his father all the same over his shoulder, he began to turn round as quickly as he could […]. (Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, 86)

The story is in many ways about family alienation and patriarchal authoritarianism. Gregor's situation is an illustration of the utter dehumanisation of a human being. I quote:

> Gregor's serious wound, from which he suffered for over a month – the apple remained in his flesh as a visible souvenir since no one dared remove it – seemed to have reminded even his father that Gregor was a member of the family, in spite of his present pathetic and repulsive shape, who could not be treated as an enemy; that on the contrary, it was the commandment of family duty to swallow their disgust and endure him, endure him and nothing more. (Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, 102)

Gregor is the traumatised protagonist of a narrative about the alienation within an authoritarian family. His situation is a microcosm of a larger social reality, one that carries with it the burden of a repression by forces that either engineer or break the individual, thus ensuring trauma and crisis within the personality. While Gregor Samsa's predicament is enacted along fantasy lines, with his alienation so complete he is perceived as less than human, other characters in Kafka are subjected to a far more blatant intrusion by the state. His story "In the Penal Settlement" (1914) tells of a huge state machine that inscribes a prisoner's crimes on his skin. The story opens like this,

> "It's a remarkable piece of apparatus," said the officer to the explorer and surveyed with a certain air of admiration the apparatus which was after all quite familiar to him. The explorer seemed to have accepted merely out of politeness the Commandant's invitation to witness the execution of a soldier to death for disobedience and insulting behaviour to a superior. (Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, 16)

The idea represents the ultimate intrusion on the body by state punishment, a totalitarian control that is eerily prescient of the acts that would be carried out by the Third Reich later in the century. The machine assumes a life of its own, tearing apart an officer when he offers himself as sacrifice. The issue of disobedience is crucial here, especially if you think back to Kafka's relationship with his father. The idea of sacrifice is something I will return to. It is implicit in much of the work of Kafka and Conrad and central to a culture in a state of implosion, harnessing energies to its own ideology.

It is interesting to bring in Georg Lukács here, albeit he is talking about capitalism, the idea is useful to what we are looking at, since ideology is fundamental to the subject. Thinking of Kafka's portrait of the sacrifice of a human being to a system that demands obedience, it is an example of Lukács's observation in *Capitalism and Class Consciousness* (1923):

> The problem of commodities must not be considered or even regarded as the central problem in economics, but as the central, structural problem of capitalist society in all its aspects. Only in this case can the structure of commodity be made to yield to a model of all the objective forms of bourgeois society together with all the subjective forms corresponding to them. (100)

It is a structural issue, with the individual being placed inside that structure and subjected to its ideology. Whether you take a Marxist reading or a Freudian one, the result is that it is clear he is dramatising the issue of human identity in a system that attempts to reduce it or clone it to a model that makes it functional to the purposes of that system, no matter how remote its interests are from the individual's. Issues of obedience and cultural programming are present here and also in the works of Conrad who I will come to. Lukács writes:

> Neither objectively nor in relation to his work does man appear as the authentic master of the process; on the contrary, he is a mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system. He finds it already pre-existing and self-sufficient, it functions independently of him and he has to conform to its laws whether he likes it or not. (108)

Conformity, sacrifice, the engineering of the personality, cultural control programmes, all are inherent in these fictions. If we look at them in the wider context of any ideology, it is important to note that they were written at the turn of a century in which ideology played such a key role not only in intellectual movements but in wars that destroyed the economy. The trauma of the protagonists of these fictions is one of repression by an idea, or enforcement to conformity to an idea. Men are reduced to commodities.

If we look again at Kafka's relationship with his father it is a reflection of a wider sense of struggle with patriarchy. "Metamorphosis" is in many ways structured around an Oedipal conflict: father and son are antagonists. The father's space, the family home, is threatened by the son's metamorphosis, and the father drives him to suicide. Destroyed or castrated by the father, Gregor finds it impossible to move through the Oedipal stage and has to be got rid of. The story acts as a counterpoint between familial conflict and its place within a social structure that relied on a form of repression that Kafka was actively exploring in his fictions; it is a repression that results in the diminution or annihilation of a protagonist who is battling a system, such as Josef K. in *The Trial* (1914). There is no hope for Josef K. from the beginning of the novel: "Someone must have been spreading lies about Josef K. for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one morning" (Kafka, *The Trial*, 1).

So begins his pointless efforts against a bureaucracy that is so large he cannot penetrate it. His sacrifice is embedded in his initial arrest for a crime he is neither guilty of nor even understands the nature of. It is a brilliant and chilling echo of what was to take place during World War Two, a narrative of persecution by a state machine that needs to give no explanation. Josef K. is the eroded protagonist, traumatised, in a state of constant crisis with no resolution since he is surrounded by a state machine that denies him a voice. At the end of the novel he submits to his fate as an object of sacrifice. There are many other examples of characters who are diminished in Kafka. The character in *The Hunger Artist* (1922) shrivels into a bundle of straw and is replaced by a panther. "The Burrow" (1923) is a fantasy of an underground creature, buried beneath "a big hole that leads nowhere." In *The Judgment* (1913), we see a story that closely parallels Kafka's relationship with his own father. In it a young merchant, George Bendemann writes a letter to a friend in Russia informing him that he is about to be married. When he tells his father about the letter his father questions the existence of his friend and accuses him of deceiving him about the business. George shrinks away into a corner. His father accuses him of being selfish and sentences him to "death by drowning." George runs to a stretch of water and plunges over the railings.

The conflict between father and son runs throughout his work and Kafka utilises it to explore a much wider social sphere. Artistically he was struggling against the tyranny of the patriarch and it seems that his protagonist is inevitably an object of sacrifice in a society that needs his energies to survive. As such the society Kafka portrays and its family structure is one which needs to indoctrinate its sons, and where obedience fails, then punitive measures are brought in to the point of erasing the self, crushing the personality and denying an individuality, as the ultimate statement of the totalitarian regime, in the name of social integration and a law that offers no explanation and is in a sense its own absolute and moral imperative. These are fictions in which heroism is redundant.

The theme of self-sacrifice is central to Conrad's *Lord Jim* (1900), as is the theme of heroism in a novel that explores the need for it on both a personal and social level. The protagonist is traumatised by his own moral failure and lack of courage in an instant of crisis. And he spends the rest of his life sacrificing himself to atone for it. Conrad's *Lord Jim* is about the eponymous protagonist, Jim, first mate on board the ship Patna, a young idealistic dreamer of heroic deeds. When faced with the reality of a sinking vessel Jim jumps ship and brands himself a coward. The ideal and the real meet in a conflict that sets the narrative in motion, and it is a narrative that digs deep into the motivations of its central character and his fractured masculinity: "It had happened somehow. It would never happen again" (46).

For Jim the event sets him on a course that is one of self-sacrifice as he tries to rescue his romantic ideals of the heroic. Conrad shows in many ways how flawed idealism is, as if Jim has inherited a set of cultural expectations that define masculinity and that ultimately fail it: "He had tumbled from a height he could never scale again" (88). Jim is the traumatised

protagonist and his trauma may derive not so much from his actions as his inheritance, a man from whom a certain behaviour is expected. Again patriarchy is at work here and there is the sense that Jim is battling his ideal self, living in the shadow of who he thinks he should be, as if he is split, presenting the negative side of his double. "Given a certain combination of circumstances, fear is sure to come […]. And even for those who do not believe this truth there is far all the same – the fear of themselves" (100). At the end of the novel the theme of sacrifice is clear:

> He goes away from a living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct. […] ready to surrender himself faithfully to the claim of his own world […]. (284)

While Gregor Samsa's alienation comes through a physical transformation, Jim's alienation lies in his inner sense of displacement from who he believes he is. Both protagonists suffer a trauma that consists of a separation of their perceived sense of themselves and a corrupted version that becomes their reality, a separation of their identity and its corruption. This form of dualism is to be found elsewhere in Conrad, and it is a useful theme to explore since it is a narrative method of dramatising the fractured man, the man who has drifted towards "the other." It is as if the self has become unknowable in a world of moral compromise, one in which old certainties had begun to fail at the turn of the century. It embodies Rimbaud's observation that, "Je est un autre."

The theme of the double is central to the fragmented protagonist. Conrad's fantasy of the double, "The Secret Sharer" (1913), explores the kind of encounter with darkness told in *Heart of Darkness*. The narrator doubts his ability to be his ideal ego and is confronted by his double on a sea voyage: "I wondered how far I should turn out faithful to that ideal conception of one's own personality every man sets up for himself secretly". That idea is at the core of *Lord Jim* and much of Conrad's writing, it is also at the core of the reason the protagonists are traumatised, as they live in the perpetual conflict between who they are and who they aspire to be, and those aspirations are subject to cultural conditioning.

The double in the story has committed murder, and for several days it is concealed, so that the narrator's complicity with it is recognised. It is "driven off the face of the earth," abandoned in a state of permanent exile–the imaginary is relinquished with little regret. This is quite different to what happens in *Lord Jim* because he is seeking his ideal self, not fighting his corrupted self. It is as if the situation is reversed, with Jim living inside the skin of the negative double, a disappointment to himself as he tries to reach his ideal. The only way out is self-sacrifice.

In *Heart of Darkness* (1899), we find an interesting reversal of the theme of heroism and reality. The novella is about a voyage up the Congo river into the Congo Free State. One of the themes central to it is Conrad's idea that there is little difference between so-called civilised people and so-called savages. The novella asks key questions about imperialism and

racism, as well as about the self and what heroism is, as opposed to what history tells it to be. It is narrated by Marlowe aboard the Nellie, anchored in the Thames. Marlow tells his fellow sailors about the events that led to his appointment as captain of a river-steamboat for an ivory trading company. He describes his passage into the interior to the Company's Outer Station, which is a scene of utter devastation. It is immensely disorganised with native black men chained together, wasted, demoralised, and being worked to death and strolling beside them is a native working as a uniformed armed guard. At the station Marlow meets the company's chief accountant, who tells him about Mr Kurtz, a widely respected first class agent who brings in more ivory than all the other agents combined. Central to the story is the meeting with Kurtz, the protagonist. The journey into the darkness is both geographical and figurative with Kurtz being the real heart of the novella. It was used many years later in a different setting, but one which illustrates the universality of the themes of the story, in Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now* (1979), which has much of the story transposed to the American occupation of Vietnam, another imperialist act bringing with it all the flawed idealism of a patriarchal inheritance by now bloody with sacrifice. Historical leap as it is, I mention this to illustrate the prescience of the novella. There is the sense that from the turn of the century society is breaking down and sacrifice of youthful energies is needed.

Kurtz is in many ways a hero, he is described as 'remarkable' and 'exceptional,' he is talked of by everyone and is expected to go far. And yet what Kurtz goes to is far from what is expected of him, as if the burden of success he carries within a flawed paradigm brings with it the corruption of the man who believes too much in his own heroism, and lacked the necessary moral reality that prevents him from utilising it to create a form of totalitarianism. He is the reverse of Lord Jim. Kurtz is a man who has succeeded in embodying the ideal and revealing its inherent corruption in a world where the old colonialism was imploding. It seems as if in Conrad's narratives, heroism is shown to be a fiction and the author reveals the reality behind it.

While Kurtz embodies an example of a successful colonial figure, one who had inherited all the ideals that maim Gregor Samsa, and crucify Lord Jim, he also exemplifies the extent to which those values are pure veneer within an imperialist context and the extent to which they may assist in the breakdown of morality. For what Kurtz does in the Congo is not only highly transgressive but also authoritarian. Conrad based Kurtz on real life figures. The principal figures involved in the disastrous "rear column" of the Emin Pasha relief Expedition have been identified as sources, as has column leader Edmund Musgrave Barttelot, notorious for his brutal and deranged behaviour during his disastrous command of the rear column in the Congo. It is evident Conrad was thinking about the abuses of power in a colonial context. In his own words he describes *Heart of Darkness* as "a wild story of a journalist who becomes manager of a station in the interior and makes himself worshipped by a tribe of savages" (100).

Kurtz's crisis lies in his success in a corrupt system and he has transgressed morality in his success, as Marlow reflects:

> All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz, and by and by I learned that most appropriately the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs had entrusted him with the making of a report for its future guidance. (122)

It is quite clear that Conrad is placing Kurtz within a cultural framework, and not representing him as an isolated aberration. At the end of the novella Marlow says: "I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, and yet struggling blindly with itself" (128). On his return to Europe Marlow is contemptuous of the civilised world–all the trappings of success that Kurtz had have revealed a core of corruption. Juxtapose Kurtz with Kafka's or Gregor Samsa's father and the analogous patriarchal positions and you see in both authors a clear sense that authoritarian patriarchy results in the dehumanisation of a subject somewhere along the line. And that dehumanisation may take the form of the inner struggle of a character like Jim as he ruins himself in pursuit of spurious glories. Behind the success of patriarchy is an amorality that is of concern to both Kafka and Conrad.

The works I am discussing take place at the turn of the century and historically they form part of the lead up to World War I. They inherit the disease with the past and explore some of the reasons for its implosion. Both Kafka and Conrad question cultural inheritance, Kafka often in a familial sense, Conrad in a broader microcosmic setting. The evidences of authoritarian breakdown are there in earlier novels, such as Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), with Ahab representing the totalitarian ruler knowing no constraint on the Pequod, a microcosm of early America, especially as described in de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. Like Kurtz, Ahab is following his own dictates, in his case not economically sound ones. He is using the ship and his crew to pursue his mad vengeance of the white whale. I suppose, the themes present in Conrad had begun to emerge earlier and Conrad takes them further in his fictions. I have also said that both authors are prescient; their fictions speak of things that were to take place later in the century. This is especially true of Kafka, with his harrowing glimpses in *The Trial* of what was to take place in the Third Reich. His fictional resonance can be felt in many later works as if his axiomatic style of delivery had caught a Zeitgeist. It is salutary to bring in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) here. Although outside our historical field, it bears close relation to many of the themes discussed in my paper. In the novel we have another example of a successful product of patriarchy, in this case capitalist patriarchy. Jay Gatsby, the elusive protagonist and millionaire exudes the air of the kind of success dreamed about by all the aspirational debutantes and party goers of a twenties America. Yet his real story is one of bootlegging and other criminal activities. He is a veneer balanced precariously on

a carefully protected lifestyle that embodies the great American dream and his story reveals the hollowness at its core, since like the fictions that surround colonialism, it is built on a series of false propositions that are pure ideology.

It is ideas and ideology that drive the structures that traumatise the protagonists in these works, be they patriarchal or colonial. And the authors I am citing lay those ideologies bare by not only showing what happens to men subjected to their dictates, but what success means when you take into account the fiction of ideology as if both Kafka and Conrad while writing a story were engaged in laying bare the narrative of reality, or a reality that had been politicised by an authoritarian structure that dictates personality and male inheritance within a world that demands success. Gregor Samsa fails his father and is made into an insect, while Jim fails his society and is turned into an object of self-sacrifice. The reasons for patriarchal success are laid bare in these fictions–it requires obedience or it enforces it.

I have emphasised the importance of ideology in this paper since it is exemplified in all of these works in different ways. In Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907), the theme is terrorism. The novel is set in London and deals with Mr Verloc, a spy for an unnamed country, possibly Russia. Verloc himself is a man in crisis, a far from exemplary agent, he has to redeem himself by carrying out the destruction of the Greenwich Observatory. Again we have a man having to comply with the dictates of a system, in this case an anarchist one. Interestingly, no matter what the ideology, the result is the same to the individual, especially the isolated male carrying the burden of patriarchy: the system seeks suppression. Verloc's contact is Vladimir, the new first secretary of the foreign country and Vladimir explains that Britain's attitude towards anarchism is a threat to his own country, claiming an attack on science will provide the necessary outrage for suppression.

Under Western Eyes (1911) is about the historical failures of revolutionary ideas and movements. Writing to Edward Garnett in 1911, Conrad said, "In this book I am concerned with nothing but ideas, to the exclusion of everything else." Conrad portrays not so much the political but the psychological state of Russia. At the centre of the novel is the identity crisis we have seen in other works. The protagonist, Razumov, is a student of the University of St Petersburg and he encounters Haldin, a fellow student, in his rooms. Haldin informs him that he has murdered the brutal Minister of State and tells him that he and his accomplice did not make a proper escape plan and he asks for Razumov's help. His request plunges Razumov into a deep identity crisis as he feels his life will be destroyed by the authorities due to his association with Haldin. Razumov's crisis is one of surrender to an ideology he does not believe in but which he fears. Razumov ends up betraying Haldin–he embodies the logic of Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1532).

Having discussed the themes of the enforced submission to an ideal, to an idea, now I reflect briefly on my own writings. I have highlighted ideology, totalitarianism and the effects of it on the protagonists in the works of Kafka and Conrad, while my own works fall outside

the historical arena we are discussing they are nonetheless part of it. My two most relevant novels here are *Meaningful Conversations* and *Paranoia and the Destiny Programme*. Both take place in historically vague and dystopian eras. The protagonist of *Meaningful Conversations* (2014) is Bertrand Mavers, a well adjusted and famous classical cellist who is inventing his own paradigm as a form of resistance against a therapeutic programme he believes is attempting to engineer society. Bertrand Mavers constructs his own reality to subvert what he sees around him: his is a rebellion of ideas against ideology. As such he embodies Marshall McLuhan's idea of the counter-environment, a means of establishing a way to question prevailing structures and Bertrand not only subverts these he manages to inculcate the ideologues into his own environment and convince his therapist he is the sanest man he knows.

Meaningful Conversations stands at a temporal threshold, an amorphous time that is both retrospective and forward glancing, a kind of satirical Janus of hybrid fiction. Therapy and the rehabilitation of the traumatised male is at the core of the novel and behind it all stands Freud, father of the tribe. Freud was needed by the twentieth century, as was his redundancy when feminism came along. Bertrand Mavers is the rebel protagonist, wounded and uncaring, a man who has erased the flawed morality of a decayed society. Bertrand Mavers narrates the novel. In a key scene where he and his wife Anna are guests at therapist Otto Wall's dinner party, Bertrand talks about Otto and the nature of control that informs his client care:

> We're dining at Otto's. He is the therapist for all the adjusted people seeking integration. His clients are the fractured, rejected, hopeless, wealthy deviants he listens to and sighs at, occasionally adjusting his shoe laces. Otto collects shoe laces. They could form a long cord that I would like to stretch all the way from London to New York. Musicians could strum them like an iktar, that one-stringed instrument of the wandering minstrel. Perhaps we will engage in some kirtan chanting tonight. I wonder which god I will be. Sometimes I think Otto is going to hang one of his clients with a shoe lace. I've seen the box he keeps them in. He also collects minds. He sees them as elastic, latex that needs to be filled. Otto sees himself as an inseminator of unfulfilled fertility. (11)

The last line evinces the eternal need for patriarchal reproduction. *Meaningful Conversations* shows a traumatised society, one in which it is no longer possible to treat trauma because of the inheritance of the past, of patriarchal paradigms that are programmed to wound. That is why Bertrand is creating his own paradigm. The passage shows Bertrand's disengagement and arguable need for therapy, it also shows the therapeutic programme's corruption. The patriarchal relationship between father and son is a parasitic one as the novel

shows. As Michel Serres writes in *The Parasite* (1982), "To parasite means to eat next to." It is fitting that Bertrand and Anna are dinner guests. As they dine, Julia, Otto's wife, speaks to Bertrand and the conversation causes him to drift to Freud:

> We serve the parasitic host, feeding, we are fed upon.
> "Is everything to your satisfaction?" Julia says.
> I feel like taking her upstairs to Otto's bed and parting her thighs beneath Freud's plotting eyes. He looms over their mattress, eternal patriarch, voyeur of the tribe, his distant eyes aroused beneath his tortoise shell glasses. I wonder how Julia manages to undress with him in the room, as if she is watched by her father each night….
> She is the permitted taboo, the unlikely source of pleasure in a world of compromised beauty. (14)

My novel *Paranoia and the Destiny Programme* (2015) is set at an indeterminate point of history that may be past or future. It is an exploration of state control, dictatorship, insanity and the engineering of killers. Set in a dystopian city, the narrative is told by Dale Helix, the protagonist. He is convinced his family is being replaced with replicants and he is being abducted by a shadowy group of rulers called The Assembly. He claims they are regendering humanity as part of a control programme and that they have programmed him to kill Automata in a zone the existence of which no one else knows about. The problem is no one believes him, the population thinks it is living in an ideal society and his wife, who is a doctor, appears to be a spy who works for The Assembly and may even be preparing to carry out an operation on him. Dale believes his wife and daughters have been replaced by replicants. As Dale says: "I see no butterfly wings in the Rorschach test, but a mountain of bones" (16).

Dale is traumatised on both a familial level and a state level, he is the object of a process that is attempting to erase his identity. Once again he is living in a traumatised world but it is a world that is totally programmed. As he says while riding the capsule to the bank he works at, a redundancy in a world without money:

> I go to the bank. The capsule shoots through the blackened tunnels that smell of rusting iron. The riders stare vacantly ahead at the blank space of the wall, their hard bodies break my bones beneath my dripping coat. As they jostle me, a smell like corroding metal rises into the polluted space we occupy and I see them there briefly beneath the luminescent lights. They aren't breathing any more. Are they part of the film? I reach out and touch the face of the woman standing before me. She looks as though she is made of metal. She withdraws in horror, placing a small bruised hand to her cheek.
>
> Some of the other riders stare at me in disbelief. I'm alive now, an object that doesn't fit the lies…. They try to hide Golgotha, but they can't blind me any more. (5)

His alienation is complete, totalitarianism has effectively suppressed and conditioned him and he knows no bounds but still he fights for them. He is effectively the ultimate object of the system and the ultimate revolutionary. He is fighting a new form of ideology, one aimed at gender as a means of eradicating identity. But the protagonist will not yield, similarly to the "heroes" of the analysed fictions, he does not succumb to the social programme.

That programme may exist in the family, it is there in patriarchy in all the works I have discussed and by extension it is there in the totalitarianism both Conrad and Kafka portray. Their fictions are enduringly relevant because they are archives of the early twentieth century alienation and the inheritance of Victorian ideals as well as their erosive effects on the individual. These are fictions of crisis that show how that inheritance was losing its hold, a precursor to the more extreme ideologies the century was to see in war and dictatorship. Kafka and Conrad exist in a curious relationship to one another as authors of crisis. If Gregor Samsa represents the alienated man who has been denied his humanity, then Jim represents the male who is ruined by his adherence to a value system that is not only unrealistic but that demands sacrifice. Both characters are corrupted by their situations and at heart the family shown in "Metamorphosis" and the social code in *Lord Jim* are corrupt since they are intrinsically dishonest and juxtapose the demand for obedience with the necessity of self-sacrifice, as if the man who fails is worth nothing. Both "Metamorphosis" and *Lord Jim*, and the other works I have presented show the attempted replication of a male type by a system that needs conformity and what happens when the male fails inside that system, as if the need for totalitarianism and its attendant propaganda is waiting round the corner.

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