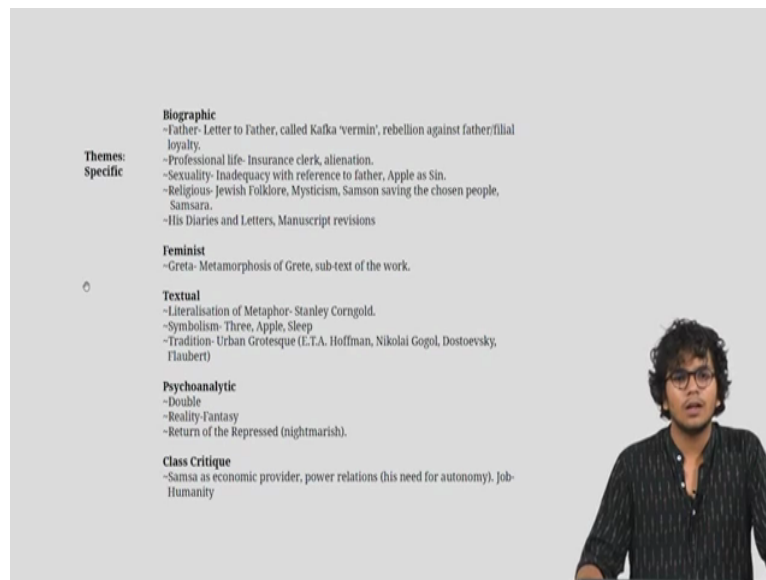


Introduction to World Literature
Indian Institute of Technology Madras
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Metamorphosis – II
Franz Kafka

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Themes: Specific

- Biographic**
 - Father- Letter to Father, called Kafka 'vermin', rebellion against father/filial loyalty.
 - Professional life- Insurance clerk, alienation.
 - Sexuality- Inadequacy with reference to father, Apple as Sin.
 - Religious- Jewish Folklore, Mysticism, Samson saving the chosen people, Samsara.
 - His Diaries and Letters, Manuscript revisions
- Feminist**
 - Greta- Metamorphosis of Grete, sub-text of the work.
- Textual**
 - Literalisation of Metaphor- Stanley Corngold.
 - Symbolism- Three, Apple, Sleep
 - Tradition- Urban Grotesque (E.T.A. Hoffman, Nikolai Gogol, Dostoevsky, Flaubert)
- Psychoanalytic**
 - Double
 - Reality-Fantasy
 - Return of the Repressed (nightmarish).
- Class Critique**
 - Samsa as economic provider, power relations (his need for autonomy), Job- Humanity

And sexuality so it's inadequacy with reference to his father is also seen as a very big manifestation of his internal turmoil because the father is a very authoritative figure in whose possession is Kafka's mother is, so Kafka's father so one can easily see where this is going because Kafka's father is authoritative figure who has in his possession the mother and there is always a sense of inadequacy that Kafka feels which also can be seen can be read in in.

Now we will take a look into the biographical details with reference to sexuality. So it is usually said that it is usually seen in works relating to Kafka that Kafka was very interested in pornography and had so many relationships and so on and so forth but and when read with his reduced self-esteem and when made a connection to his work and his time and etc etc we get a very interesting picture with which we can associate the work and it is an interesting point of discussion because we see that he always had a feeling of inadequacy with reference to his father was an authoritative figure who also possessed his mother so that is an important point to discuss and also the apple.

So the Apple which (())(2:26) in Kafka's the Apple which (())(2:29) Samsa's behind which is thrown by his father is also very interesting to read. So the Apple is always a symbol of sin, so the Apple which his father throws at him is almost as if the authoritative father who has in

possession Kafka's or Samsa's mother he is throwing something which is deeply suggestive of sin into Samsa's back into Samsa's behind which (())(3:11) functions as a turning point in his in his life because after the apple gets lodged in his behind he loses so many of his biological functions and that eventually turns into that eventually causes some suspect so that is an important and interesting point to read, so when you connect his sexuality with the symbols in his text and his biography it forms an interesting web of connections which if you think about becomes more and more interesting.

And the other point which is usually made in or Kafka related works his office religiosity so this is another interesting point because if we want to we can read into so many more motifs which are available in his text. So Jewish Folklore and reading of Kafka as a Jewish as a and the reading of Kafka's dealing with so much of Jewish mysticism is also very important so is one of his close associates is also said to have influenced and introduced Kafka into most of the Jewish (mystic) mist into most of the Jewish Folklore and mysticism so that is also an important point which we usually see across Kafka literature.

So, we also see that it also has Christian interpretations such as Samsa as Samson saving the chosen people or Samsa as Samsara and disconnecting it into eastern philosophies and eastern religious traditions. So that is also important but when you look at it, it almost looks as if it is overextended and an ungodly amount of over reading has been done but it is again a point of departure for most of Kafka scholar so that is also included. And yes of course he has left a lot of his manuscripts and diaries and letters so so many diaries and letters to his partners like letters to Milena for example his letter to his father so these are also published and is of interest to people who want to read into Kafka.

And another thing which we have is his manuscript so since Max Broad who was a close friend of Kafka had not burned the manuscripts of Kafka as Kafka had requested to him because of Max Broad who preserved Kafka's manuscripts and most of his written but unpublished material even though Kafka had requested Broad to burn all those because of him we have his manuscript revisions also available which is another interesting point of entry into Kafka's work.

So for example (can be) if you read if you try to look into Kafka's revised manuscripts we can see where he made his editorial choices because some in some senses we can see that he might have he has turned for example his into its for example so that there is a movement from a subjective human mind into something as it has an object. So if you try to connect it

with his time, modernity and etc etc this part is also interesting. So it is more like we are trying to take the context and the text together this is also very important and equally interesting.

So another and very usually seen way of reading Kafka is through a feminist lens so maybe if you are interested you can look into it the most one of the most famous authors who have worked with a feminist understanding of Kafka is Nina Pelikan Straus and her essays are interesting to read. So most of those works on feminist criticism of Kafka usually it takes in case of metamorphosis usually takes Samsa's sister has a sub-textual theme which runs through the entire work and they also said and they also say as we have already noted that the metamorphosis is not just the metamorphosis of Samsa into a beetle but also of (())(8:36) into a mature young lady.

So so trying to find a closure to this story with reference to circum-textual evidences such as the title metamorphosis can be argued to work in another way when you take the element of a female presence in the story this is also one way of seeing Kafka's works especially metamorphosis. And when we go to textual criticism this opens up an entirely different world for us this opens up an entirely different world for us because there is this literalization of metaphor which happens, when we take into consideration that textual analysis it is very interesting and opens up an entirely different worldview for us because the literalization of metaphor and the symbolism and placing the textual tradition uses an entirely different but not contradicting view of Kafka.

So let us start with the literalization of metaphor which is discussed by Stanley Cohen Claude, so Stanley Cohen Claude is another figure who is very much well known in Kafka circles and usually seen as and usually seen in most of the collections of Kafka's of literary interpretations of Kafka. So literalization of metaphor is interesting because metaphor is fundamentally (())(10:21) because metaphor is it is taking two things together and trying to tell us a more or less universal truth by giving us (())(10:34) and part Stanley Cohen Claude usually argues in his works is that Samsa's metamorphosis into a dung beetle is a metaphor which is disrupted by Kafka to a great extent that that we can see that this metaphor is kind of attacked upon because it is not a complete metaphor and is not and has not come to a closure.

So how this how this literalization work is by transforming the character Samsa into a beetle which is not entirely a beetle still a human. So Nabokov in his lectures on Kafka notes this

part because Nabokov was so Nabokov we say Nabokov apart from being an author was also very interested in insects and butterflies and that and so on and so forth. So Nabokov makes this interesting (())(11:49) in makes an interesting insight into the beetle because in the text it is said that the beetle cannot close its eyes. So Nabokov says that it is a beetle but with human eyes and here we can see the metaphor getting distorted because the beetle is still human but it is also not human in the same time.

So the beetle has human emotions, human thoughts which are slowly transforming and dimming but it still is human, but is it in a human form? So we see that the humaneness is lost in some sense but it is not lost in some sense. So this mixing of the metaphor the tenor and the vehicle is interesting here and the symbolism is also very interesting. So I have picked up a few elements from the text to explain the symbolism.

So for example let us take the figure 3 so this is again from Nabokov's lecture on Kafka so in metamorphosis we have three people in Samsa's family excluding him and three (())(13:18) and three lodges and the figure 3 is very interesting because it has many religious connotations in most religious traditions and as Nabokov says 3 can be also linked into the process of creation itself as in thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

So that is important and it is a interesting read and you can also see that there are 3 parts for the text, there are 3 parts in the text part 1, 2 and 3 which can be read as a (())(13:59) which is a form of art which has 3 panels and the 3 panels describe events or it can be also thought of as a 3 act play, so this is also interesting but might look like as if we are throwing an ungodly amount of extra reading into the work.

But again this is this is a usually live point of discussion in Kafka's literature, so that is then we have the Apple as symbol of sin of the father mother sexual relations which to the child is somewhere is a sphere which should not be peeped into and is a form is a place of so much of political tensions that is and another important figure. Then the sleep so (Kafka) when Samsa awakes from uneasy sleep so that is also very very interesting as in sleep is one of those activities were high, so this is also very interesting because sleep is one of those activities where our essential human activities the consciousness of humans are kind of suspended and in sleep there is no difference between person 1, person 2 and person 3.

So when you awake from sleep it is an entire transformation in itself from from maybe we can call what we can call us lifeless person 1, person 2, person 3 into Samsa, Samsa's father,

Samsa's mother and etc etc. So sleep and uneasy dreams etc etc can also be related to what Kafka tries to tell us through his story.

And the another very interesting part is about the tradition, so tradition is very important in making of a literic enhance, so we have essays like Eliot's tradition and individual talent etc which discusses about the process of literary creation itself so this is very interesting. So we have so many essays which seek the tradition in which Kafka can be placed and usually for let us say explanations sake let us take Kafka as practicing the form of Urban Grotesque novel or the Urban Grotesque work.

So in this way we can see that many many literary scholars have interpreted Kafka to be following a line from Hoffman was a part of German Romanticism to Gogol and then to Dostoevsky and maybe Gustave Flaubert or so. So the first three figures are very interesting so Hoffman and Gogol these two figures are interesting because when we read Hoffman we get a sense of the artist being a social personae in his social setting who interacts with people as in a everyday sense but in his own private sphere we see that there is a sort of a (())(18:03) emerging. So this duality between two people two forms of life please is seen in Hofmann and when it goes to Gogol we see that Gogol who himself was part of a bureaucratic system in his professional life, we see that the Hoffman's imagination of these two things coming together has a new addition to it with Gogol's introduction of a clerk inside.

So for example when we see Gogol's over caught for example we see that there is this element of the bureaucratic system trying to intrude into the text and give it yet another angle with which it can be understood and when it gets to the Dostoevsky we see that the mix of Hoffman and Gogol gets a new setting of the Urban. So this is how we can actually try to figure out how the tradition in which Kafka fits comes into being. So we see a kind of snowball being formed from adding little bit of pieces of information to it.

So the tradition is also a very important thing very important term here and tradition in with respect to (())(19:38) is a hotbed of so many connotations which trail behind it. For example the politics of cannon building and how we can actually play somebody in a tradition indicator so this also gives rise to many many interesting points of discussion. So we will go to the psychoanalytic part, so this is yet another huge area where we can see Kafka's creativity Kafka's creativity in work. So so as we can as we have just seen so Hoffman's idea of the double the double is usually seen in say (())(20:27) of early English writing and also the double as a manifestation of the unconscious mind is also very important.

So there will be two people in the story who are say two sides of one person. So for example The Strange Case of Jekyll and Hyde is one example of the double coming, so two characters who are actually manifestation of a single mind and this two might be these two characters might be very different and and if you really try to read these two characters together we get an idea about the the single mind which use rise to that character. So in metamorphosis we can see that Gregor and Grete are kind of a double in one sense. So a tortured mind which tries to escape its social constraints into another mode of being human and Grete who is more or less adjusted with this existence social existence but yet are trying to have a very trying to be much more sympathetic to Gregor in her attitudes towards him, so that is a very curious point for discussion and the reality fantasy mix in metamorphosis.

So metamorphosis is say let us for let us say that it reminds us of magical realism for example. So if one asks whether the realm of reality the realm of fiction lies in reality or fantasy. So this division between reality and fantasy is a permanent permanently reoccurring idea in fiction. So let us see how we can how we can come into terms with the reality versus fantasy debate using our metamorphosis.

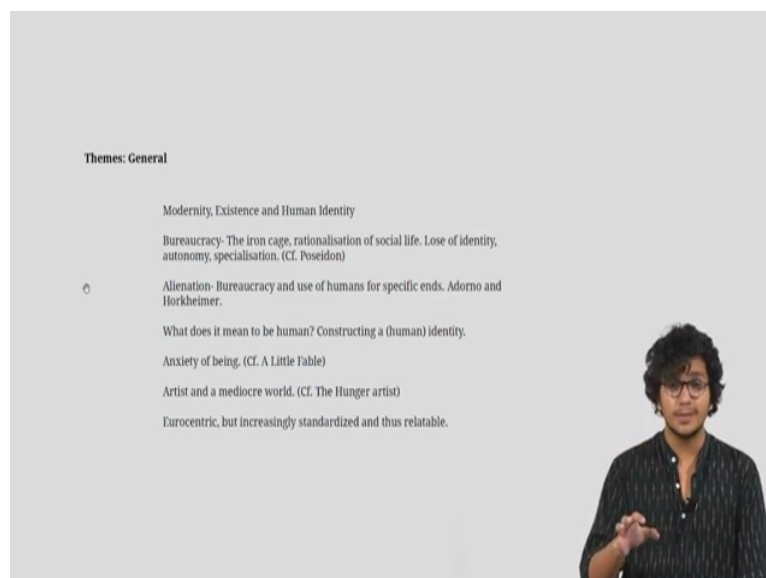
So it is said that we can see that in many works of literary criticism the emergence of unconscious is not possible with the real world as we see it because the real world is usually manifested to the conscious mind and the emergence of something which has been repressed the unconscious cannot happen in a realist setting. So Kafka introduces so many unrealistic things for examples of main premise of this plot, the metamorphosis of a human into something which is non-human and human at the same time for which is completely unthinkable for a rational conscious mind.

So this mix of reality and fantasy gives the unconscious to manifest itself in in many in many modes so for example the metamorphosis is the metamorphosis the the action is an example of that and the setting of the work is a deliberate mix of reality and fantasy so that the the author can reach out to the audience through his through his through the workings of his unconscious, so that is an really interesting part and the return of the repressed is also another important theme we have because when we when we speak about Kafka it is also the connotation is of Kafka's which is usually described as nightmarish, so why is it called as nightmarish but not exactly something say illogical or unreal? Because nightmarish is more close to one's consciousness because it does not have any constraint and the anxieties which

have built-in built into one's unconscious usually returns as the as in in so many forms of one which can be thought as the metamorphosis.

And there is also a class collective which will be not this was so much about because so let us say the Samsa's economic provider for the family and his life as life and his humanity is connected to his job in one sense because it is being human is mainly as being the economic provider for the family, so the power relations with his family and other other members of the family is also very interesting to read through and his need for autonomy (to ex) to escape this this field of bureaucracy, modernity and etc etc and his and his power relations with the other now earning members of family so this is also a very rich point for further interpretation.

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So general themes so these terms which we have here are ready loaded terms only and only trying to connect the echoes of Kafka's work will help us have some will help us make some sense of the general theme, so modernity, existence and human identity will be three major things which we will be talking about. So in in the modern time what the social structure and the kind of ways in which the society interacts with the individual is usually through the bureaucratic setting.

So this iron cage of bureaucracy which is what (())(26:54) calls it is and is a kind of rationalization of social life. So you treat individuals as cogs in a machine which can be replaced as on when needed is a strong mirror of modernity. So this loss of identity autonomy is linked into the specialization of lever and for example we can read post it on which is yet

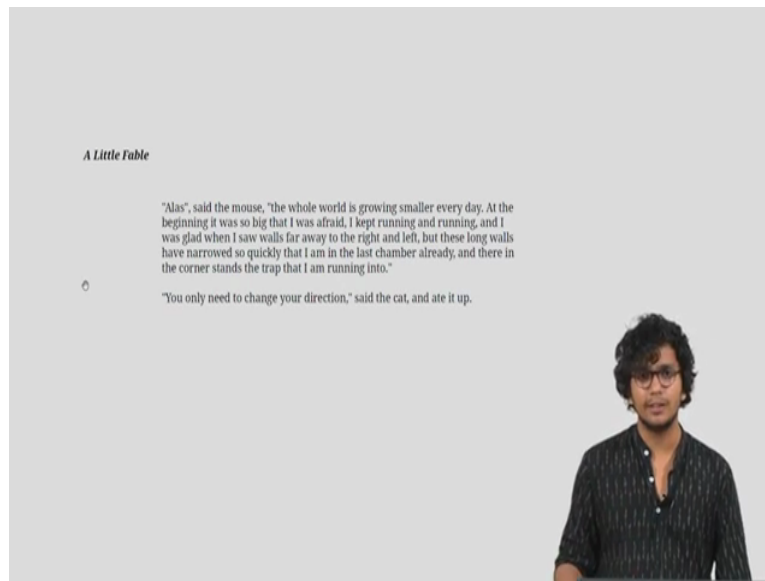
another very short work by Kafka which tells us the story of just the god of the seas who is who cannot escape his work table where he calculates the figures and everything and etc etc so this is one of one point of analyzing this Kafka and alienation.

So bureaucracy and the use of human for specific needs which we have just seen it is very interesting. So when you try to read it with say example I have taken the Adorno and Horkheimer so these two are (film) critics social critics who wrote a book called the enlightenment who wrote a wonderful book called dialectic of enlightenment where they give us an idea of how the use of humans as of the the replacing of God with (())(28:26) and the supreme rule of (())(28:29) has led us to what Kafka had experienced.

So so constructing a human identity is one of those themes in this work and you have to relate it to whatever you can read like modernity existence and identity. So if you try to relate the human identity to these process which happened and look at the relations it gives us a very rich insight into Kafka's works and anxiety of being, so a little (())(29:01) which we will read now what it means to be human and what is essence which gives us an idea of what it means to be human, so anxieties are also important and the and the relation between an artist and the mediocre world is also again another point of discussion, you can if you want to read metamorphosis as an artist trying to escape the mediocre world this is also and that such a reading is also very interesting.

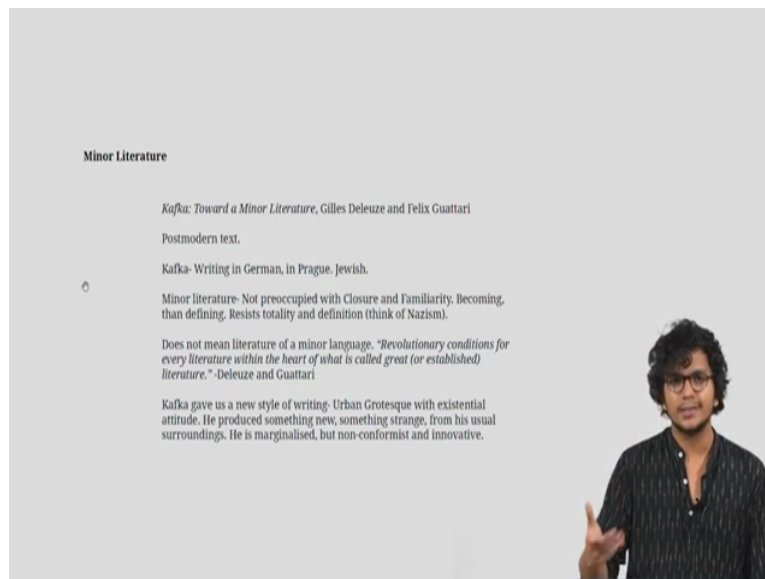
For example we went can look at The Hunger artist for a Hunger artist by Kafka as an example. So the entire kind of analysis which we have tried to do is very Eurocentric because the audience to which we are trying to think and explain the story in terms of the analysis which we have just read now is very time and space constructed so such analysis will make sense only if we have lived through all those eras of modernity and bureaucratization but which will not be a problem for us because our experiences are more standardized or over space and time and so this is very relatable to us so that is point.

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So this is a little fable which you can read from the screen and it gives you an idea of how Kafka's works share a lot of these general themes which we have just talked about.

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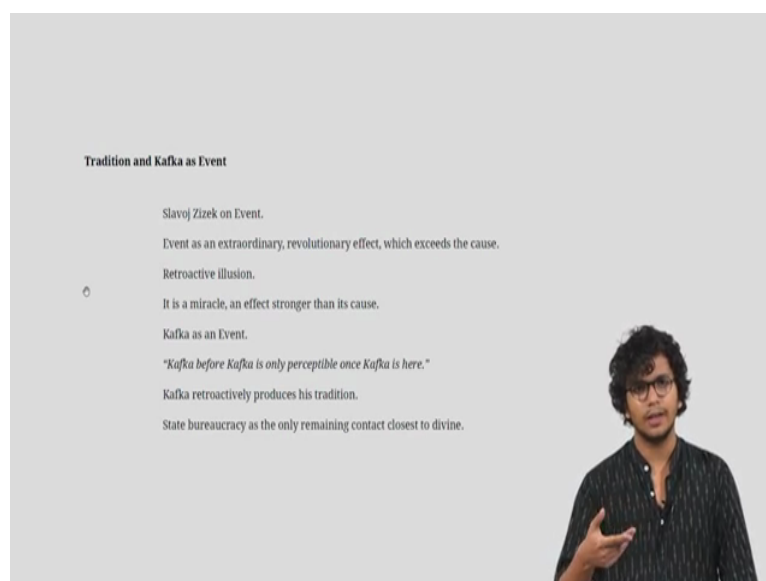
And so minor literature is another very interesting concept with which we can understand Kafka, so Kafka towards a minor literature is a text which have been published by I mean written by Deleuze and Guattari who are philosophers is a philosopher and a (psychoanalysis) psychoanalyst so better known to a literature and to academia and literate in literature through his work (())(31:21) so it is a postmodern reading of the text because as we will see.

So Kafka was writing in German in Prague and he was Jewish, so these three identities are a minority figure in a huge Non-German speaking setting. So so this minor literature is not in the sense of that minority language and minority identity but more on the souls on the on the lines of it is not preoccupied with giving us a certain meaning and the familiarity to the text. So he is trying to make it strange the experience strange to us.

So it is not the minority of a minority language but the language which he uses German is deterritorialized this this word of deterritorialisation is used by Deleuze and Guattari in their work. So he takes the language out of its political context and thus do just by doing such a work it gives the language another political immediacy to yet another another political immediacy to another way of thinking. So it is kind of derouting, it is kind of taking the work away from its context and reading so so reading it. So it is a quad from Deleuze and Guattari.

Revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of which is called great or established literature that is how they classify Kafka into their way of reading the text, so Kafka gave us a new style of writing. So it is Urban Grotesque with existential attitude which till now is has been non-existent, but with Kafka he there is a germ of of new style of writing and new way of thinking which Kafka gives us. So this is how the minor literature concept is explained. So this is again a very postmodern reading because it does not try to read it with reference to structuralist understandings of how these things works but tries to uproot the things and and give us a very new way of looking into it.

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Tradition and Kafka as Event

- Slavoj Žižek on Event.
- Event as an extraordinary, revolutionary effect, which exceeds the cause.
- Retroactive illusion.
- It is a miracle, an effect stronger than its cause.
- Kafka as an Event.
- "Kafka before Kafka is only perceptible once Kafka is here."*
- Kafka retroactively produces his tradition.
- State bureaucracy as the only remaining contact closest to divine.

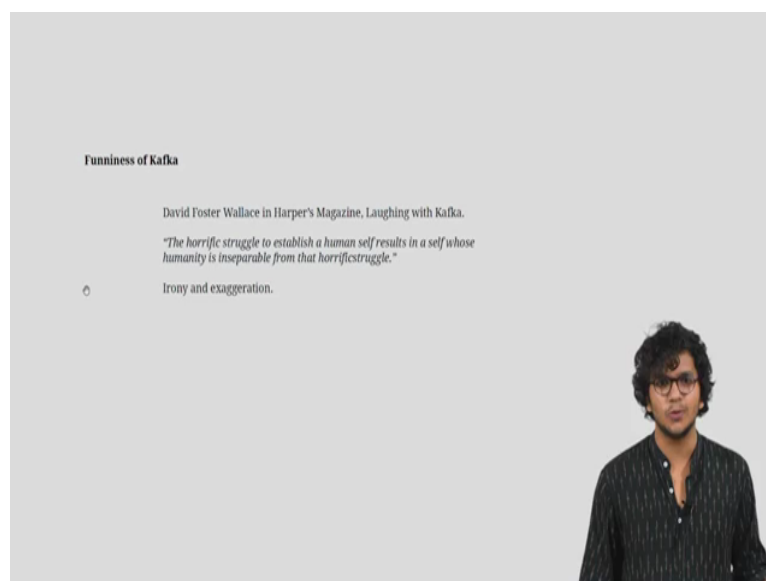
The slide features a video inset in the bottom right corner showing a man with dark hair and glasses, wearing a dark patterned shirt, speaking and gesturing with his right hand.

And tradition and Kafka's event it is yet another interesting example which I recently discovered. So Slavoj Žižek a contemporary (34:07) on event. So event is considered as an effect of so many causes but the duty in this event is that the causes although they exist is only the causes although they exist only comes into picture when the effect actually comes into picture. So the effect defines the cause, so it is retroactive so he gives us example of an event with Kafka.

So when we think of Kafka the (34:43) lineage the (34:44) tradition which we associate with him from Hoffman to Gogol and Dostoevsky comes into picture as a trend only when Kafka arrives. So with Kafka's writing we can then go back in time and make sense of the causes, so this is a very interesting way of thinking about how Kafka comes into the picture.

So this again has a huge connection into literary tradition and literary canon which in turn uses when you (35:17) thinking about world literature, so that is another important and interesting area and again (35:27) one of his feelings that perverts get to ideology says that the state bureaucracy is the only remaining contact closest to divine to a modern secular man, so he is referring to Kafka again that the divine has been replaced with rationality and bureaucracy is one manifestation of rationality so this is yet another equally important and interesting analysis.

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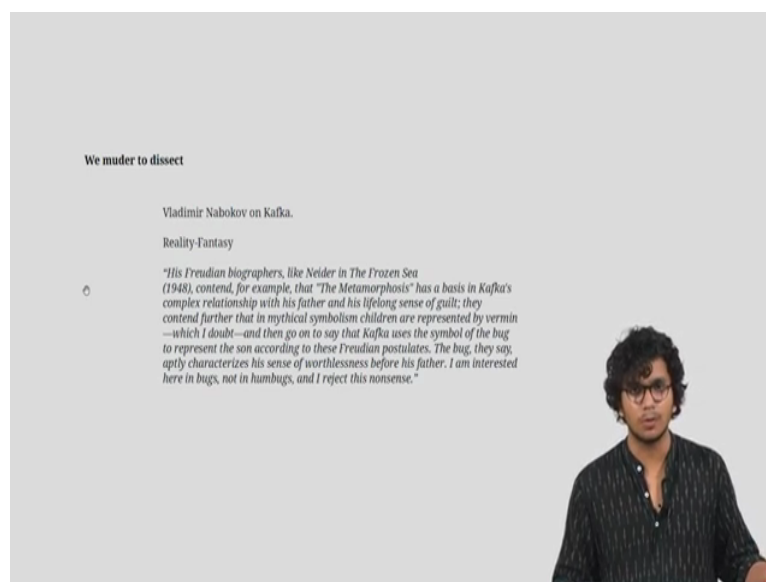


And the funniness of Kafka is again a new a new emergence, so it the one of those most beautiful expressions of this comes with David Foster Wallace's article in Harper's Magazine

which is available online as called laughing with Kafka. So so Foster Wallace is trying to give us an idea about how Kafka is actually funny. So to concretize Foster Wallace's argument we can refer back to Kafka's diaries and letters where we can see that Kafka was very interested in reading out his works and laughing with people.

So so the main key point is at the horrific struggle to establish a human self-results in a self whose humanity is inseparable from that horrific struggle. So is a kind of gallows humour which is subtle but very prominent. So if you really say the little fable in in such a light it it becomes very very funny in a in a particular sense. So there is too much of irony and exaggeration which Kafka puts into his works which turn his bleak world into something which is more interesting. So it is a kind of funniness which is not the usual funniness but which is more black in character.

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This is as a point of closing this discussion so Vladimir Nabokov's lectures on Kafka which is again available online is really interesting because and that Nabokov gives us an example of how the reality fantasy complex works. So if you take what is if you ask what is real to somebody they will give you one explanation. So for if you take so many people into consideration and mix their definitions we get a worldview which is very close to Kafka that is what he argues in his lecture.

So so he is also against the intellectualization of Kafka's work so as we see there are so many (try) so many attempts at running Kafka through the academic machine which gives us so many interpretations but Nabokov and say Milan Kundera for example they have commented

on how Kafka's works becomes interesting and readable only when you actually try to read the work for the work's sake itself. So that is another interesting discussion with which we can in the session.

So so basically what we have tried here what we try is to read the specific themes of metamorphosis in connection to the larger picture of Kafka with his time and with his historical place in the tradition and try to take a look at certain individual points and try to be view connection view the (())(39:11) connections which helps us understand. So it is by looking at these connections which we can better understand why Kafka has been placed in in world literature as a major pillar of yeah of literature so yeah.

So to understand this discussion in more light it is it is easy and quite beautiful if you try to look at these individual points and try to get a holistic understanding of how these relations work. So I hope this explanation of Kafka makes sense and and gives you a point of departure from where you can look at these things and try to imagine why he is in the place where he is now, so thank you.