

# Franz Kafka's "Description of a Struggle" and the Narrative of Ontological Shift

## Franz Kafka'nın Bir Savaşın Tasviri ve Ontolojik Dönüşüm Anlatısı

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### Abstract

"Description of a Struggle" ("Beschreibung eines Kampfes") by Franz Kafka has a murky and opaque narrative. Such a fragmentary and reality-bending storytelling style is actually instrumental in juxtaposing social rationality against individual desires, expressing individual's difficulties in conforming to social norms. The storytelling itself contrasts the rational with the irrational, order with imagination, as well as the organization of a city with the delusional perspective of a traveler. As the seemingly physical promenade in the city of Prague transforms into an inner journey led by the desires of the narrator, we come to understand that the murky narrative of "Description of a Struggle" displays how social consensus excludes, classifies and/or ignores individual desires. Such an exclusion is depicted through the ontological shift of the narrator, as well as the delusional narrative. In the first part, the study defines the delusional narrative and the ontological shift of the protagonist. Following that, the article shows how the narrator starts blurring the boundaries not only between the outer world and the inner world of the protagonist, but also between the reality and the narration. Once the narration starts reshaping the world, this study argues, Kafka's story turns into an example of delusional/schizophrenic narrative that functions as a critique of social norms that define, isolate and exclude the self.

**Keywords:** delusional narrative, schizophrenia, modernism, literature, Kafka.

### Öz

Franz Kafka'nın "Description of a Struggle" ("Beschreibung eines Kampfes" "Bir Savaşın Tasviri") adlı eseri, anlaşılması ve takip edilmesi güç bir anlatı-yapısına sahiptir. Parça parça anlatı gerçekliği sürekli değiştirirken aslında anlatıcının bilinçaltı yolculuğunu hikaye eden bir aracı olarak işlev görür: Hikaye kurgusunun dağınık ve gerçek-ötesi görüntüsünün altında yatan temel unsur aslında kurgunun aktarmayı hedeflediği bireysel arzularla sosyal kuralları arasındaki çatışma halidir. Bireyin sosyal normlara uyma zorunluluğu karşısında yaşadığı bu çatışma hali, anlatıcının deneyimlediği bir dizi ikileme okuyucuya aktarılır: eserde rasyonel olanla irrasyonel olan, düzen ile hayalgücü, toplumsal hayatın tezahür ettiği şehir ile bir gezginin yaratıcı bilinçaltı düzlemine kadar pek çok karşıtlık ve çatışma hali kurgu aracılığıyla aktarılır. Bu bakımdan, görünüşte Prag şehrinde yürüyüşe çıkmış gibi görünen anlatıcı, aslında bir içsel yolculuk yapmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Franz Kafka'nın "Bir Çatışmanın Tarifi" hikayesindeki anlatı yapısı, sosyal kuralların dışladığı veya görmezden geldiği bireysel arzuların yarattığı gerilimi kurgusal düzlemde belirtir. Bahsi geçen dışlanma ve ait olmama durumu, anlatı(cı)nın ontolojik değişimi ve delüzyon anlatısı aracılığıyla aktarılır. Makalenin birinci bölümü delüzyon anlatısı ile anlatıcının ontolojik değişim sürecini tanımlar. Bir sonraki aşamada ise anlatıcının dış dünyası ile iç dünyası arasındaki sınırları anlatı aracılığıyla nasıl ortadan kaldırdığını açıklayan bu çalışma, Kafka'nın hikayesinin aslında gerçeklikle kurgu arasındaki sınırları da ortadan kaldırdığını gösterir. Gerçekliği kurgu aracılığıyla yeniden yaratan ve şizofreni anlatısı olan "Bir Çatışmanın Tarifi" adlı eser, bu noktada bireyi tanımlayan, izole eden ve dışlayan sosyal normları sorgulayan bir edebi eser olarak ön plana çıkar.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Delüzyon anlatısı, şizofreni, modernizm, edebiyat, Kafka.

### Introduction

In *Odd Jobs: Essays and Criticism*, John Updike defines Kafka's "Description of a Struggle" as a story that is full of "contortions both psychological. . . and physical" (2012, p. 220-21). According to Updike, the story has "something of adolescent posturing" and "self-loathing and self-distrust lurk within all this somatic unease" (p. 221). What is more, Updike defines Kafka's "Description of a Struggle" and "Wedding Preparations in the Country" as "not merely opaque but repellent" (p. 221). Similarly, Sass underlines the "uncanny arbitrariness, absurd exaggeration, confusion, and sheer perversity" of the story (2017, p. 317). Considering the fragmented plot construction as well as the unreliability and delusional state of the narrator, one can simply agree with Updike's categorization of Kafka's "Description of a Struggle."

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Still, one main question remains: what is the narrative function of the use of delusional imagery in the “Description of a Struggle?” In other words, why does Kafka employ *opaque-ness* as a literary technique that purposefully makes readers feel *repelled*? In this context, this paper explains the narrative function of delusional narrator in Franz Kafka’s “Description of a Struggle” and I state that the deliberate opaqueness of the story and the delusions of the protagonist serve as a means to express the narrator’s individual feelings of alienation and withdrawal. In other words, what Updike as self-loathing is a deliberate narrative style employed by the author to depict the complex psychological state of the narrator. Rather than being a physical journey in the fictitious city of Prague, the story is an inner journey of the protagonist as well as that of the author. “Description of a Struggle,” then, is a statement of individual’s incompatibility with the rest of the society: the reality-bending-imagery and the delusions of the protagonist are narrative techniques that form the storytelling. Therefore, Kafka’s work is both a literary expression of estrangement and isolation, as well as a literary response to those feelings.

“Description of a Struggle” (“Beschreibung eines Kampfes” in original) is one of the earliest published works of Franz Kafka, (1908-1909). The title of the work, as one can see, refers to a conflict, a struggle. A relevant question that can be asked is who the struggling parties are. This paper contends that Kafka’s “Description of a Struggle” is an inner journey of the protagonist; and hence, is an account of a unique, subjective experience of the central character. This study focuses on whether the characters in this short story are distinct and separate characters, or if they are parts of the protagonist/narrator. In other words, the paper explores whether the above-mentioned that accompany the protagonist/narrator are fully separate characters, or they may be classified as products of the narrator’s imagination that appear throughout his long walk in the city. This question is central to “Description of a Struggle,” because many times the borders among the characters in the story become very blurry. Another significant point I analyze is *desire*. How desire operates in “Description of a Struggle” is important, and this paper demonstrates that the desire to be recognized, liked or admitted is a major motive for the protagonist. Similarly, the absence of recognition (or the state of being unwanted / undesired) pushes the narrator into action, as well.

In connection with the above, the following question of movement or action occurs regarding the protagonist’s journey: what is the main clash in Kafka’s work? In Updike’s words, the *self-loathing* and *self-distrust* dominate the story, but *how* the narrative forms the psychological incompatibility with the outer world also matters. Is it possible to read the story and the adventures of the narrator as a jump into reality, or is it a consistent escape from it? As this paper shows, the narrator starts distorting the reality; but the reasons that lead the protagonist to begin fashioning the world as he pleases are not clear in the story. Kafka’s short story portrays a complex narrator that makes it hard to simply categorize him as an example of relationships based on submission, antagonism and fear, as Kane suggests (1999, p. 197).

### **Delusional Narrative and The Ontological Shift in “Description of a Struggle”**

Delusional narratives have certain characteristics. As Currie and Jon Jureidini report, in delusional narrations, “[e]vents present themselves as meaningful in ways the rest of us find hard to grasp, or as causally related in ways that violate empirically established laws” (2003, p. 567). A reality-bending story, they write, “often unfolds after a period during which the subject has an emotionally charged sense of present but unclarified meaning” (2003, p. 567). Third, a delusional narrative, may even “vacillate between locating the subject within the world of the story . . . and taking on something more like the authorial role” (2003, p. 568). In other words, delusional narratives are hard-to-grasp stories that make the border between fact and fiction quite vague one. In this respect, Kafka’s deliberate use of such a

complex and disturbing narrative style becomes more comprehensible: the reality bending narrative during the long promenade in the city is actually a literary portrayal of a deep inner conflict that the narrator goes through.

Even though the main clash is only an inner journey of the protagonist in "Description of a Struggle," physicality and the concerns related to body (bigness-smallness; attractiveness-repulsiveness, coldness-hotness etc.) are actually fundamental. This can be observed in not only in the protagonist/narrator, but also in the minor characters. Considering the blurriness between physical and imagined aspects of the protagonist's journey, we realize that the story brings forward more questions than answers: why is the acquaintance in the party portrayed by the beauty of his torso several times? In contrast with that, why is the fat man (or ego) represented through a repulsive image? Or how can one interpret the praying man (supplicant) who does his best to attract the attention by smashing his body to the ground? How do all these characters and the physical references relate to a bigger question of being as an ontological problem? For Kafka, what definable or discussible problems arise related to being in the narrator's surreal journey? "Description of a Struggle" provides answers to these multiple and complex questions in an indirect way: "Description of a Struggle" is a story of *self and others*; *others in the self* (which is a parasitic relationship, a common theme in many Kafka works); or *others of the self*.

Before focusing on the blurry borders between characters, the element of desire and the physical aspect of all fictitious characters, it might be useful to present a brief outline of the story. "Description of a Struggle" is composed of three chapters. In the first part, the narrator meets a young and flirtatious man, whom he calls as acquaintance. Narrator's relationship to the acquaintance is important, because this affiliation includes all of the elements stated above, including blurry borders, love and hate relationship and continuous physical comparison.

In the following chapter of the story, narrator starts distorting reality as he pleases, that is, the protagonist *bends the reality*; he changes shapes of the environment as follows: "I walked on unperturbed. But since, as a pedestrian I dreaded the effort of climbing the mountainous road, I let it become gradually flatter, let it slope down into a valley in the distance. The stones vanished and the wind disappeared" (Kafka, 1995, p. 22). Narrator rides the acquaintance like a horse<sup>1</sup> and starts his promenade into his fantasy world. Still in the same chapter, narrator meets the fat man, who is carried via a litter by four men. Narrator listens to the fat man's stories of the supplicant, who worships by beating his head on the ground: "he clutched his skull with all his strength and, moaning loudly, beat it in the palms of his hands on the stone floor" (Kafka, 1995, p. 29). The third and the last chapter is when narrator leaves this dense fantasy world and gets back to his state in Chapter 1; once more he is with the acquaintance and walking with him in Laurenziberg, but the setting "leads [them] nowhere" (Biderman and Lewit, 2016, p. 311).

As stated above, "Description of a Struggle" is an inner journey of the narrator. Even though it is not a physical journey, this does not make the protagonist's expedition any less

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<sup>1</sup> A 2003 sculpture based on Kafka's story in Prague by Jaroslav Rona might help readers visualize the famous scene. As the acquaintance is imagined as a fictitious character in the mind of the narrator, it is portrayed as an empty suit, and the narrator is riding him like a horse. Even though it is seen as an empty suit in this sculpture, there is enough evidence in the text to categorize this character as a male, due to its relationship to women (flirting, kissing women) along with narrator's continuous comparison of himself to him. The image of the sculpture is available at <https://www.prague.eu/en/object/places/1872/statue-of-franz-kafka?back=1> (Retrieved 12 February 2019). Also available in an article by Alfred Thomas: <http://journals.openedition.org/res/677> (Retrieved February 12, 2019).

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real. The setting of the story is seemingly the city of Prague. However, similar to the castle in Kafka's *The Castle* (as an edifice and a literary trope), the city of Prague in "Description of a Struggle" is "radically indeterminate, subject to strange shifts in structure and orientation," as Jamison states (2018, p. 96-97). Similarly, the characters and events in the "Description of a Struggle" are all mind-products of the young, male protagonist who has problematic relations with others. A prominent evidence one can find in the text is the borders between the characters, because these borders are always very blurry. An analysis of the conversation between the narrator and the acquaintance will reveal that they are not separate and distinct characters. The first proof is from chapter one: the narrator loudly states in the crowd that he will attend the acquaintance in his promenade to Laurenziberg, which he will claim to be his own idea:

A few guests, suspecting ours to be a rather more animated conversation, approached us closer, yawning. Whereupon I stood up and said so that all could hear: "All right then, if you insist, I'll go with you, but I repeat: it's ridiculous to climb up the Laurenziberg now, in winter and in the middle of the night. Besides, it's freezing, and as it has been snowing the roads out there are like skating rinks. Well, as you like --" (Kafka, 1995, p.10).

At this stage, it is the protagonist who claims that the acquaintance invites him to a walk toward Laurenziberg; we learn that it is more than an invitation; an insistence. Interestingly, the reply of the acquaintance sounds more like an acceptance, instead of insistence:

At first he gazed at me in astonishment and parted his wet lips; but then, noticing the guests who had approached quite close, he laughed, stood up, and said: "I think the cold will do us good; our clothes are full of heat and smoke; what's more, I'm slightly tipsy without having drunk very much; yes, let's say goodbye and go (Kafka, 1995, p. 10).

In the same chapter, after the narrator and his acquaintance start walking, we witness everything through the stream of consciousness of the narrator. He thinks to himself:

But if they carry him off, then they steal him from me. And he must always remain with me, always. Who is to protect him, if not I? And he's so stupid. Someone says to him in February: Come up the Laurenziberg -- and off he goes. And supposing he falls down now, or catches cold? Suppose some jealous man appears from the Postgasse and attacks him? What will happen to me? Am I to be just kicked out of the world? I'll believe that when I see it! No, he won't get rid of me" (Kafka, 1995, p. 13).

While the narrator is speaking to himself, we see that the borders between him and his acquaintance start to vanish gradually and decisively. He thinks that they should always be together, and only he can protect the acquaintance (so he assumes the role of protection, which is another sign for a kind of unification of the two). But the main point here is that the narrator now claims that *it is the stupid acquaintance* who responds to the invitation to walk to Laurenziberg in this cold weather.

This is completely opposite to the first quotation above, because at first, the narrator was the one who was the invited. But as the story (hence the stream of consciousness of the narrator) proceeds, he starts to believe that any harm to be done to the acquaintance will directly affect himself. "Suppose some jealous man appears from the Postgasse and attacks him? What will happen to me?" (Kafka, 1995, p. 13). Narrator starts to think that this vulnerability of the acquaintance exposes risks to him (narrator), as well. But at the end of this quotation, he finds a solution to this and declares this solution to himself: being together and not separating: "Am I to be just kicked out of the world? I'll believe that when I see it! No, he won't get rid of me" (13). This is a good example of the blurry borders between the two characters. Yet, as this paper stated at the very beginning, the relationship of the self to its other (narrator to his acquaintance) is not a flat one; it fluctuates.

Another example to the indistinct borders between the narrator and his acquaintance is a moment of hostility between the two. Just a little time after the interior monologue above,

the narrator convinces himself that he is in danger, because the acquaintance is about to kill him with a dagger: "Obviously, this is the time for the murder. I'll stay with him and slowly he'll draw the dagger -- the handle of which he is already holding in his pocket -- along his coat, and then plunge it into me" (Kafka, 1995, p. 17). At this point, the interior monologue of the narrator supports the idea that narrator and the acquaintance are indeed the same person: "I realized that whether I allowed myself to be stabbed or ran away, my end had come." (Kafka, 1995, p. 17). In this parasitic relationship, it does not matter who is killing whom, because when the host dies, the parasite cannot survive. As the narrator and the acquaintance are indeed the same person, when one dies, so will the other. What is more, in another case, the narrator thinks to himself: "We sat close together in spite of not liking one another at all, but we couldn't move far apart because the walls were firmly and definitely drawn," (Kafka, 1995, p. 50) which is a clear way of expressing that the two are indeed one, and the acquaintance is a creation in the narrator's mind. But if this is the case, there is one main question that needs to be answered: what is it that pushes the narrator into the world of fantasy, up to a point at which he starts distorting the reality?

Hence, another point this study focuses on is the element of desire (or lack of it), which pushes the narrator into action, or to be more precise, into his fantasy world. The opening scene of the story is a party and it is late at night, "at about midnight" (Kafka, 1995, p. 9). Even though it is late at the party, we understand that the narrator is lonely at the end of this night and he is observing the people around him. His loneliness is evident in his following expression: "I sat at a tiny table -- it had three curved, thin legs -- sipping my third glass of Benedictine, and while I drank I surveyed my little store of pastry which I *myself*<sup>2</sup> had picked out and arranged in a pile" (Kafka, 1995, p. 9). This is the moment he declares that he met his acquaintance.

This acquaintance is narrator's creation in his mind and narrator continuously compares himself to him, particularly in their success or failure to attract women. Here is the first sentence of the acquaintance at the very moment they meet: "He [acquaintance] came toward me and, smiling absent-mindedly at my occupation, said: 'Excuse me for disturbing you, but until this very moment I've been sitting alone *with my girl*<sup>3</sup> in the room next door'" (Kafka, 1995, p.9). The narrator's dissatisfaction with his loneliness makes him create *another in the self*, who is more successful than him in contacting women. This opposition between the two (and narrator loneliness compared to the flirtatiousness of the acquaintance), because right after this first rather abrupt conversation, another similar one follows: ". . . he sat down with a jolt, leaned back in his chair, and let his arms hang down. Then he pressed them back, his elbows pointed, and began talking in rather a loud voice: 'Only a little while ago we were alone in that room, Annie and I. And I kissed her, I kissed her -- her mouth, her ears, her shoulders. Oh, my Lord and Savior!'" (Kafka, 1995, p. 10). This emphasis on the sexual contact is evident. The success to attract women is what the narrator lacks: his basic desire to be recognized by other people is not satisfied. That is why the fictitious character he creates and animates in his mind is thus a successful one, contrary to his own failure and dissatisfaction. In fact, this is the very reason that the narrator compares his physical attributes to those of the acquaintance.

Therefore, this is the moment that the narrator speaks to himself and says that he accepts the (fictitious) invitation of the acquaintance to take a walk to Laurenziberg. Indeed, this is his way of avoiding the disturbing reality and escaping into his world of fantasy. In addition to this, this rivalry between the narrator and the acquaintance is emphasized through the refer-

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<sup>2</sup> Emphasis is mine.

<sup>3</sup> Emphasis is mine.

ence to physicality, as well. Following the alleged invitation, he describes the acquaintance with his “parting wet lips”, after which the acquaintance kisses another girl: “So we went to the hostess, and as he kissed her hand she said: ‘I am glad to see you looking so happy today.’ Touched by the kindness of these words, he kissed her hand again; whereupon she smiled. I had to drag him away” (Kafka, 1995, p. 10). Then, the erotic tension is always alive in this scene, and this is the reason the narrator creates the acquaintance. In other words, the narrator’s imagination creates his alternative self, which is an act of doubling. One major argument in phenomenology is that “human dilemma is to experience oneself as *both* subject and object” (Mishara, 2010). In this way, as Mishara suggests, Kafka’s fiction becomes a further exploration of the self. This is actually the second meaning of the journey, or the promenade: at one level the narrator protagonist starts a night walk in the city, but as he progresses, the second and implicit meaning of the promenade arises, which is this exploration of the self via creating a double of the self, which ultimately turns the self into both subject and the object. In this respect, the story shows its *modern* perspective by focusing on the here and now. Besides, the modernist characteristics may also be observed in the portrayal of the fragmented self, as well as in the complexity of it. The object-subject question and the complexity of the self becomes even more apparent in the protagonists’ creation of more characters (or further fragmentations of his self) during his journey.

One might question the presence of erotic desire in the narrator as a motive. Yet, the text itself consistently emphasizes this erotic tension and how the narrator fails to satisfy it. At the very same moment that the acquaintance kisses the hostess, the narrator describes her in the following way:

She helped us into our coats and then took a small lantern to light us down the stairs. Her neck was bare save for a black velvet ribbon around her throat; her loosely clothed body was stooped and kept stretching as she went down the stairs before us, holding the lantern low. Her cheeks were flushed, for she had drunk some wine, and in the weak lamplight which filled the whole stairwell, I could see her lips trembling. At the foot of the stairs she put down the lantern, took a step toward my acquaintance, embraced him, kissed him, and remained in the embrace. Only when I pressed a coin into her hand did she drowsily detach her arms from him, slowly open the front door, and let us out into the night. (Kafka, 1995, pp. 10-11).

In this scene it is the acquaintance that kisses the hostess, yet, the narrator portrays her as an object of his desire. Her body is described in details, particularly the attractiveness of certain body parts, such as neck, cheek or *trembling lips*. Her drunkenness and the weak lamplight ignite the imagination and the desire of the narrator toward her. Yet, it is still the acquaintance that *kisses and embraces* her. With a coin, narrator separates the acquaintance from the hostess<sup>4</sup>. And it is after this point, and repeatedly, that the narrator compares his poor and deficient physical attributes to the attractiveness of the acquaintance.

Then, the last point this paper will focus is the physicality aspect in the narrator’s inner journey. This conflict reveals itself through awkward portrayal of bodies and in their bigness-smallness or attractiveness-repulsiveness. The starting point can be the emphasis of the beauty of the acquaintance unlike the hideousness of the narrator, which like everything else, expressed by the narrator himself. While describing the acquaintance, the narrator expresses that “Whereupon he quickly opened his overcoat and waistcoat and his shirt. His chest was indeed broad and beautiful” (Kafka, 1995, p. 49). On the other hand, the narrator describes himself

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<sup>4</sup> Unsatisfied erotic desire, the physical dissatisfaction and the reason for the creation of the other (the acquaintance) can also be observed in the quotation: “‘Whew, what a cold hand!’ he cried. ‘I wouldn’t like to go home with a hand like that. You should have let yourself be kissed, too, my friend. That was an omission. Still, you can make up for it’” (13). Then, kissing, or satisfaction of erotic desires is connected to physical dissatisfaction. This tension is always evident in the narrator’s relationship with the acquaintance.

from the point of view of the acquaintance: he imagines that the acquaintance will meet a woman the next day, and then describes the narrator in the following way:

Tomorrow he'll be talking to Fräulein Anna, about ordinary things at first, as is natural, but he won't be able to keep it from her any longer: Last night, Annie, after the party, you remember, I was with a man the like of whom you've certainly never seen. He looked -- how can I describe him to you? -- *like a stick dangling in the air, he looked, with a black-haired skull on top*<sup>5</sup>. His body was clad in a lot of small, dull-yellow patches of cloth which covered him completely because they hung closely about him in the still air of last night. Well, Annie, does that spoil your appetite? It does? In that case it's my fault, then I told the whole thing badly (Kafka, 1995, p. 14).

Then, the first reaction to the dissatisfaction of erotic desire and the feeling of incompetence shows itself in the narrator's understanding of physicality. The acquaintance is one who is portrayed as someone beautiful to look at and who is good with women, whereas the narrator sees himself as not only *a stick dangling in the air*, but also as one that any woman would detest. It is this state of mind that pushes him to reshape not himself, but his perception of the world. From this point on, the narrator goes through a fundamental ontological shift:

The mountain already belonged to the darkness, the road crumbled away at the point where I had turned toward the slope, and from the interior of the forest I heard the approaching crashes of collapsing trees. Now I could have thrown myself down on the moss to sleep, but since I feared to sleep on the ground I crept -- the trunk sliding quickly down the rings formed by my arms and legs -- up a tree which was already reeling without wind. I lay down on a branch and, leaning my head against the trunk, went hastily to sleep while a squirrel of my whim sat stiff-tailed at the trembling end of the branch, and rocked itself (Kafka, 1995, p. 23).

This ontological shift in question is going from one state to another; it is an escape from reality and getting into the dreamlike-state of mind, that is, the delusional narrative. It is a way for reasserting what is already lost. A Kafka expert, Walter H. Sokel defines this transformation of the narrator (and hence the title of the story – *the struggle*) as “the temptation is life as erotic and social existence” (2002, p. 169). In other words, the transformation and the ontological shift of the narrator could be well explained as a response to the state of erotic and social dissatisfaction of the self; which are supported by the erotic references in the text, the dreamy-nature of transformation and the text's circular structure<sup>6</sup> (Rolleston, 1990, p. 17).

Kafka's “Description of a Struggle” exhibits characteristics of modernism, as the plot construction and the characterization display some deep problems of modernist literature, such as “derealization, dehumanization (disappearance of the active self), giddy perspectivism or relativism, and detachment” (Sass, 2017, p. 317). For Sass, the modernist aspects of the work are clearly present, as the plot construction is almost never linear, but “in something like a series of concentric circles” (pp. 317-318). These are the main features that make “Description of a Struggle” not only modernist, but also an example of schizophrenic narrative: Sass explains that the story is deliberately “extremely raw and direct, at times almost unbearable, presentation of those central schizoid themes that make Kafka one of the most representative of twentieth-century writers—a sort of Dante of modern times” (2017, p. 318).

Similarly, In “Schizophrenia and Rationality, James M. Glass explains schizophrenic narrative as follows: “their significance...appear in what they speak, in their witnessing and representing through language a broader social fragmentation, the impact of that fragmentation of internal perceptions, a mirroring of the failures (and absences) in social rationality” (1987, pp. 406-407). In another article, Glass defines schizophrenic perspective as “a linguistic *mode of being* or *form of life* that begins from radically different assumptions than the social or instrumental maneuvers” (1982, p. 278). In both perspectives of Sass and Glass, the

<sup>5</sup> Emphasis is mine.

<sup>6</sup> *Fin de Siecle*; the story finishes at the point it starts.

common traits of schizophrenic narrative appears: the complex and conflicts of the self, non-linear narrative, the doubling and further fragmentation of the protagonist, the dreamy setting, deliberate and disturbing reality bending story-telling are some of the characteristics as exemplified in Kafka's short story.

### Conclusion

Franz Kafka's "Description of a Struggle" ("Beschreibung eines Kampfes") is a literary statement of an ontological shift of the individual/narrator. The blurry borders between its characters (narrator and the characters of the acquaintance, the supplicant, the fat man), continuous and fulfilled desires of the protagonist, the delusional and reality-bending narrative all create a literary account through which individual incompatibility with the society is expressed.

The opaqueness of the story is deliberate: and this inscrutability is both instrumental and significant for two reasons: first, the story itself is *murky* because this is a formal and literary expression of miscommunication (or difficulty of understanding and being understood) between individual and the society. The second use of opaqueness stems from the articulation of unfulfilled desires and individual's inability to express or experience them in a proper manner. This is exactly the source of what Updike calls "self-loathing" and "self-distrust" (2012, p. 221) in reference to both the narration and the narrator.

In this context, Kafka's "Description of a Struggle" questions the above-mentioned social rationality by juxtaposing the irrational with the rational, delusional with the normal, as well as the chaos (imagination) with the organization (the city). In doing so, the storyteller transforms the narrator's powerlessness into omnipotence through the work of imagination. As a modernist work that displays the characteristics of schizophrenic narrative, this is how "Description of a Struggle" offers a literary critique of social norms that exclude the discordant, noncompliant, disharmonious.

### Geniřletilmiř Öz

Franz Kafka'nın "Bir Savařın Tasviri" (Almanca orjinal adı "Beschreibung eines Kampfes") (İngilizce "Description of a Struggle") adlı kısa hikayesi yazarın görel olarak az bilinen erken dönem eserlerinden biridir. Yüzeysel bir okumada ana karakterin Prag řehrinde bir gece yürüyüşü yaptığını, ve bu yürüyüş esnasında çevresinde karşılaştığı her şeyi ve herkesi sadece tanımlamakla ve anlatmakla kalmadığı, bunlara ek olarak dış dünyayı anlatı yoluyla deęiřtirip dönüřtürmeye/şekillendirmeye başladığını görülür. Bir başka ifadeyle baş karakter şahit olduęu olay ve durumları aktarmayı bir noktada bırakır, ve anlatının kendisi dış dünyayı belirlemeye başlar. Bu noktada okuyucu neyin dış gözlem neyin içe bakış olduğunu ayırt edemeyeceęi gibi, zaman ve mekan kavramları da anlamsızlaşmaya başlar. Zira anlatı okuyucunun referans alabileceęi ve bir bütün içinde tüm gelişmeleri birbirine bağlayan bir olay örgüsünü bilerek ortadan kaldırır.

Hikayenin az bilinen olmasında Kafka'nın seçtięi spesifik anlatı yöntemlerinin etkin olduęu eser üzerine yazılan eleştirilerde de görülebilir. Örneğin John Updike eserin sadece opak (geçirgen olmayan, anlaşılması zor) olmakla kalmayıp aynı zamanda itici (repellent) olduğunu belirtir. Bu çalışma, "Bir Savařın Tasviri" adlı kısa hikayede ilk olarak anlatının kendisinin anlatılanın önüne geçtiğini; yani edebi form aracılığı ile özgün bir tartışma yolunun açıldığını göstermektedir. Daha açık ifade edecek olursak, gerçeklięi büken ve artık algılanan gerçeklięin ötesine geçen daęınık ve gerçeküstü anlatı, aslında bir yandan bireyin kendi iç çatışmalarını tasvir ederken, öte yandan da bireyin toplumsal yapı içinde nasıl ve neden kendini gerçekleřtiremedięine dair ipuçlarını edebiyat diliyle verir. Kafka'nın şizofrenik anlatı



yöntemi yüzeysel okumanın altında gizlediği ve aynı anda daha görünür kıldığı şey bireyin yabancılaşma süreçleri ve bu süreçlerde bireyin karmaşık psikolojik durumudur. Böyle bakıldığında, fiziksel olarak Prag şehrinde yapılan yolculuk anlatıcının iç yolculuğuna evrilmeye başlar. Ancak anlatı bu noktada edebi form aracılığıyla okuyucuyu hem şaşırtmayı hem de bilinçli olarak rahatsız etmeyi başarır: zira anlatı artık sadece yabancılaşma hikayesi olmaktan çıkar, bireyin bu duruma verdiği edebi cevap haline gelir.

Kafka'nın "Bir Savaşın Tasviri" hikayesi, hikaye başlığının da belirttiği gibi, bireyin içinde bulunduğu kuvvetli bir çatışma halini edebi düzlemde delüzyon anlatısı aracılığı ile aktarır. Bu anlatı türü, çalışmamızda belirtildiği gibi, genel olarak toplumun çoğuna anlamlı gelmeyen, fizik kurallarının geçerliliğini yitirdiği, bireyin kendini nesne olmaktan çok özne konumuna yerleştirdiği, ve hatta yaratıcı/yazıcı (authorial) bir beceri ile ön plana çıktığı bir durumla açıklanabilir. Tam da bu yaratıcı/yazıcı rol, anlatıcı-baş karakterin toplumsal bir çok meseleyi eleştirel bir bakışla ele almasına imkan verir. Örneğin, büyüklük-küçüklük, çekicilik-iticilik, yakınlık-uzaklık, ben ve öteki gibi pek çok dikotomi anlatı aracılığıyla akışkan hale getirilerek sorgulanır. Artık *ben ve öteki* dikotomisi şekil değiştirir, *ben'in ötekileri* (others of the self), ve hatta ben'in alımlamasında ötekiler (others in the self) tartışılır hale gelir. Aslında Kafka böylece anlatı perspektifi ile sürekli oynayabilmenin ve bu perspektifi sürekli değiştirebilmenin edebi düzlemde yolunu açmıştır.

"Bir Savaşın Tasviri" hikayesinde delüzyon anlatısının bir başka başarısı da *sınır* kavramını da akışkan hale getirmesidir. Anlatıcı ile "tanıdık" (the Acquaintance) diye isimlendirildiği karakter şehirde yolculuğa başladıktan sonra ortaya çıkan monologda, konuşanın anlatıcı mı yoksa anlatıcının yarattığı karakter mi olduğu okuyucu tarafından anlaşılabilir. Kafka'nın diğer eserlerinde de eğildiği bir konu olan *asalak ve ev sahibi* dikotomisi de bu hikayede de ön plandadır: yolculuk esnasında kimin asalak, kimin ev sahibi olduğu da belli olmayacaktır. Örneğin, anlatıcı yanındaki 'tanıdık' karaktere zarar verdiğinde kendisinin de zarar göreceğini düşünür. Böylece bu karakterlerin hangisinin asalak, hangisinin ev sahibi olduğu da artık önemli olmayacaktır, çünkü bu kurguda ev sahibi ölünce asalak da ölecektir. Updike'in da opak olarak tanımladığı bu delüzyonel anlatı yapısı, bireyin karmaşık problemlerini, yabancılaşmasını ve uyumsuzluğunu hem bireyin kendisini, hem de *bireyi şekillendiren/kendisini* bu çıkmaza sokan toplum yapısını sorgular. Yalnızlığına bağlı olarak bir karakter yaratan ve onunla yolculuğa çıkan anlatıcı, kendi-ötekisine de yabancı hale gelir, anlatıcı en yakınındaki karakter tarafından da anlaşılır ve baş karakter bir kez daha çevresiyle uyuşamaz. Yani baş karakterin çevresi tarafından tanınma ve takdir edilme ihtiyaçları hiçbir zaman karşılanmaz. Kabul edilmeme, yabancılaşma, ruhsal ve fiziksel olarak tatmin olmama hali anlatıcının sadece kendisini değil, tüm çevresini anlatı aracılığıyla yeniden yaratmaya iter. Kafka'nın hikayesindeki ontolojik dönüşüm de tam olarak budur. Uyuşamama ve tatminsizlik durumu gerçekliği eğip büken rüyavari bir anlatıyla aktarılır. Hikaye tam bir çember çizerek başladığı noktada biter, çünkü bu fiziksel bir yolculuktan ziyade bir iç yolculuğudur.

Özetleyecek olursak, "Bir Savaşın Tasviri" hikayesi tatminsiz ve çevresine karşı yabancılaşmış hisseden anlatıcının ontolojik değişimini edebiyat aracılığıyla ifade eder. Karakterler de birbiri içine geçmiş ve çoğu zaman birbirlerinden ayırt edilemez hissi verir, bu yüzden hikayede karakterler arasındaki sınırlar da hayalgücü ve gerçeklik arasındaki sınırlar gibi oldukça belirsizdir. Başladığı noktada biten, ama asla doğrusal olarak ilerlemeyen anlatı, bu özelliklerinden ötürü modernist bir çizgide değerlendirilebilir. Ancak anlatı sadece bununla kalmaz, okuyucuyu başka bir özelliğiyle de rahatsız etmek ister: katlanılmaz olan gerçeklik, hayalgücü aracılığıyla baştan yaratılmalıdır. Kafka'nın delüzyonel anlatısı tam olarak bunu yapar: birey ve toplum sağlıklı bir iletişim kurmadığında, özel olarak böylesi bir hayali-gezi aracılığıyla anlatıcının hikayesi, genel olarak da edebiyat, bu uyuşamama/yabancılaşma hissi-

nin ifade edilme aracı haline gelir. Çalışmamızda belirtildiği gibi, rasyonel ve normal olan artık bireyin ihtiyaçlarına cevap vermediğinde irrasyonel ve delüzyonel olan ortaya çıkar, ve aslında her şeyi değiştiremese bile (hikayenin başladığı yerde bitmesi), en azından güçlü bir şekilde düzene ve iktidara karşı hayalgücünün önemini aktarır (gerçekliğin hayalgücü aracılığıyla bükülmesi/değiştirilmesi). Zira her şey anlatıcının hayalinde bile olmuş olsa, en azından bir noktada anlatıcı değişmiştir: hikayenin başında güçsüz, mutsuz ve yabancılaşmış anlatıcı, *hayalgücü* ile Prag şehrini, yani *düzeni* bir araya getirerek, güçle güçsüzlüğü, farkedilmezlikle görünürlüğü, nesne olmakla özne olmayı, rasyonel olanla irrasyonel olanı bir araya getirir. Tüm bu özelliklerine bağlı olarak, Kafka'nın "Bir Savaşın Tasviri" hikayesi sosyal düzene bir şekilde uyum sağlayamamış bireyleri dışlayan sosyal yapıya, edebiyat ve şizofreni anlatısı/delüzyonel anlatı aracılığıyla bir eleştiri getirmektedir.

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