

KAFKA'S INFLUENCE ON CAMARA LAYE'S *LE REGARD DU ROI*

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Camara Laye's *Le Regard du roi* (1954) is undoubtedly one of the most sophisticated and creative novels to emerge from the relatively new body of African literature. It is a novel which not only affirms the writer's significance and depth of creative skill, but also demonstrates his understanding of the thematic and structural aims and potentials of modern fictional endeavor. As his second work, it represents not only an effort to surpass the folklore and «story-telling» atmosphere of his first work, *L'Enfant noir* (which he feared might mark him as a «regionalistic» writer¹), but also an attempt to assimilate into his own fictional creation the structure, techniques, and themes which he found in the works of Franz Kafka. The novel is, very simply, the story of a white European in Africa, who finds himself destitute and unable to comprehend the culture in which he now lives. With some African companions he travels south in hopes of meeting the King and being given a job. He eventually does meet the King and experiences his great radiance.

Laye, in a letter dated 2 January, 1955, discusses in a general way his perception of Kafka's influence, stressing the technical nature of that influence. He writes: «Kafka has influenced me, but I don't feel that his influence has gone beyond the aspect of a technique which refers continually to the dream, a technique intended, consequently, to appeal strongly to my African temperament...Kafka's world is not mine.»² It is quite obvious that *Le Regard du roi* is imbued with Kafkaesque elements, but Laye is mistaken when he affirms only a technical relationship with Kafka. A close analysis of the novel reveals not only significant influence, but direct imitation in form, style, theme, and characterization. It

is also evident from Laye's letter that he holds definite views on Kafka's fictional world, since he disclaims any connection between what Kafka envisions and what his own fictional world represents. Such an assumption is easily justified, for Laye is obviously interested in some problems foreign to Kafka's intent. He is concerned with the African continent and people, in particular with the *négritude* theme, and these issues move the novel into a realm foreign to Kafka's fictional world.

However, despite Laye's disclaimer of any thematic relationship with Kafka's work, there is a very strong thematic influence apparent in the novel. The quest motif and the problem of the individual in society are important concerns of both Kafka and Laye, and the presence of these themes in Kafka's novels and in *Le Regard du roi* are proof of a significant thematic influence. Therefore, although there are important distinctions to be made in comparing the thematic aims of both writers, it seems to me the distinctions lie not in the essential ideas, but in the overall fictional view and use of those ideas.

I have chosen to work primarily with Kafka's *Castle* in the comparison because so many of the thematic considerations and techniques in Laye seem to point back to this work in particular. In fact, it seems that *The Castle* served as the primary model for Laye's novel.

The opening chapters of *The Castle* and *Le Regard du roi* are particularly fruitful for an examination of the stylistic and technical influences. Already the beginning paragraphs display a number of analogies. Kafka's opening paragraph begins:

It was late in the evening when K. arrived. The village was deep in snow. The Castle hill was hidden, veiled in mist and darkness, nor was there even a glimmer of light to show that a castle was there. On the wooden bridge leading from the main road to the village, K. stood for a long time gazing into the apparent emptiness above him.³

And Laye's:

When Clarence reached the esplanade he found his way blocked by such a vast, dense crowd that at first he felt it would be impossible to get through. He was tempted to turn

back, but he had no say in the matter—he seemed to have had no say in anything for some days now!—and tucking in his elbows, he began to squeeze his way through the crowd.'

Not only are the form and style of the narrative situation used by Kafka in evidence in Laye's opening, but we also find the particular use of temporal structure, setting, and atmosphere which will ultimately link the thematic concerns of *Le Regard du roi* with those of Kafka in *The Castle*.

Kafka introduces us to K. by: «It was late in the evening when K. arrived»; Laye introduces us to Clarence by: «When Clarence reached the esplanade....» We meet both characters with no prior knowledge of their situations, and we move with both, never beyond, as they advance into the story. Thus, as in all Kafka's novels, as here in Laye's, the future becomes a true future, completely open, because there is no omniscient consciousness present to anticipate future events.

Again, like Kafka's, Laye's first paragraph contains the essence of atmosphere which will pervade the entire novel, and which has a strong relation to the world the author invokes. In Kafka's passage the Castle is «veiled in mist and darkness» and there is «apparent emptiness»—an atmosphere which holds a tinge of mystery, uncertainty, even dream or illusion. In Laye, such an atmosphere is hinted at also: the «dense crowd» surrounding Clarence and later the «fine red dust» which hovers above the crowd are indicative of the uncertainty and mystery which is forever clouding Clarence's perception.

Beyond this similarity of temporal and spacial configuration, the very situation proposed in Laye's paragraph shows a striking likeness to Kafka's. Kafka begins all three of his novels in a similar way: a character is presented who has broken with his past, and we meet him only as he is on the threshold of a new situation.' K. has come to the Castle village to be a land-surveyor; where he comes from we never find out and only in brief flashbacks do we learn anything of his past. Clarence, too, has broken from his life with the white men when we meet him, as he had broken before that with the Western world. While Laye's techniques of characterization resemble Kafka's, they are also identifiable as elements in the African literary tradition. For example, in many African novels, characters are presented at the initiation of a quest, and they are revealed through their present actions, not in reference to their past

situations. Laye's artistry in blending such African features with techniques adapted from Kafka is highly original.

Going on through the first chapter of *Le Regard du roi* we become aware that Kafka's influence is present not only in the general situation dealt with in the first paragraph, but also in the type of narration, descriptive techniques, characterization, setting, and use of symbols—to the degree that some instances seem to point to direct borrowing on Laye's part. The type of narration in both novels is similar, as even the first paragraphs demonstrate. Despite the use of the past tense in these paragraphs, an atmosphere of presentness emerges from them which will be sustained throughout both works. Kafka adopts the point of view of his protagonist, and frequently resorts to the narrated monologue technique to render his thoughts. For example:

K. pricked up his ears. So the Castle had recognized him as the Land-Surveyor. That was unpropitious for him, on the one hand, for it meant that the Castle was well informed about him, had estimated all the probable chances, and was taking up the challenge with a smile. (p. 7)

Kafka uses this technique so that no temporal gap exists between the narration and what is happening, and consequently, the reader knows only what the character knows, his vision, then, being as limited as that of the character's. It is this same sort of temporal structure that is evident in Laye's writing. Like Kafka, he uses the phrases «he felt,» «it seemed,» etc., rather than straight description, as part of the narrative technique to limit the protagonist's perspective and vision or to distort the reality of the fictional world.

We also find in Kafka the use of a technique that one critic calls «dual description,» referring to the ambiguities evident in the very form of narration. Such ambiguities bring the reader from the very beginning into a «world where presence and absence, affirmation and denial, recognition and bafflement follow rapidly on one another.»⁶ One form which this «dual description» takes is that which has been described as «Aufhebung»⁷ (cancellation), a process whereby the description goes on and on, each statement modifying successively each preceding statement, so that the reader emerges with only various impressions having nothing of the concrete about them, nothing which confirms a particular viewpoint of

reality as true. This particular borrowing of technique can be illustrated by a comparison of Kafka's passage in the first chapter which describes the Castle, and a strikingly similar one in *Le Regard du roi* which describes the palace into which the King disappears. In Kafka we have:

It was neither an old stronghold nor a new mansion, but a rambling pile consisting of innumerable small buildings closely packed together and of one or two stories; if K. had not known it was a castle he might have taken it for a little town. There was only one tower as far as he could see...it was after all only a wretched-looking town, a huddle of village houses. (pp. 11-12)

In Laye:

At first sight it looked like a long, crenellated wall surmounted at intervals by thatched roofs, as if various main buildings were attached to it. The whole was dominated by a central tower whose staircase, constructed on the outside seemed to give access to the sky itself...the general impression was one of sturdiness and strength. The building had more the air of a fortress than of a palace, and its proportions even gave one the feeling that it was a fortified city rather than a mere fortress. (pp. 30-31)

As Kafka's castle appears first as a «rambling pile...of small buildings,» then perhaps as a «little town,» and finally as a «huddle of village houses,» Laye's is first a «long crenellated wall,» then a «fortress,» and finally, a «fortified city» in the metamorphosis of appearances. Again, the transformation of people and things is a noticeable element in much African literature. Kafka's influence here is evident not so much in Laye's use of metamorphosis, but in the particular image Laye selects and his use of it. Like Kafka, Laye uses the technique to reflect the obscure and enigmatic nature of the fictional reality. Each impression of the protagonist continually contradicts a preceding one and there is a changing assessment of viewed reality from one perspective. These shifts are abundant in Laye's novel.

It is significant that the technique is used by Laye with precisely the same symbol Kafka uses—a palace, which like the Castle, is

the symbol of the «unknown» for the protagonist. For the palace which Clarence views in the beginning, like the King who inhabits it, is an expression of the mysterious absolute. There are two images in Kafka's description of the Castle which further illustrate the technique of dual description and evoke the atmosphere of the mysterious; both recur in Laye's passage. The first is the tower, which K. describes as

...firm in line, soaring unfalteringly to its tapering point, topped with red tiles and broad in the roof—an earthly building—what else can men build?—but with a loftier goal than the humble dwelling houses, and a clearer meaning than the muddle of everyday life. (p. 12)

The note of ambiguity is struck by the contrast between the «earthly building» and its «soaring»—as if the Castle's nature were physical and spiritual at the same time. Laye also makes such a contrast: his tower «seemed to give access to the sky itself...not that the tower was exceptionally high, but the platform to which the staircase led seemed in a curious way to be level with the sky» (p. 30). We find also the note of uncertainty, the ever-present «but» in Kafka's narration, carried over into Laye's. Kafka's tower has «swarms of (black) crows circling around it,» and this second image, used to intensify further the pervading atmosphere of mystery, is also found in Laye's novel. Not around the tower in particular, but above the palace Clarence observes «vultures hovering in the sky» (p. 34), which are also described later as being black. Such an obvious borrowing seems to indicate Laye's familiarity with *The Castle*.

As the Castle is the central focus in Kafka's novel, the King and his palace form the central focal point in Laye's. Laye's description of the King reveals the same ambiguities and dualistic nature as the palace. Clarence's first view of him is expressed in terms of opposites: he seems at the same time extremely heavy and «miraculously» light. And as the beggar points out to Clarence further on, the King «is young and he is frail...but at the same time he is very old, and very strong» (p. 20). This continual contradictoriness not only imitates, but exaggerates Kafka's technique in mystifying the reader about the true nature of the Castle.

These elements in the first chapter of *Le Regard du roi* indicate a very close adherence to the beginning of *The Castle*. Two more

devices in the novel point to Kafka's influence on Laye: the use of time and the use of space. Both writers dispense with time and space as measurable quantities; instead, time and space reinforce the dream-like atmosphere evoked in description. They continually play tricks on the protagonists' perception. For example, when K. starts out from the inn toward the Castle it is morning, but only a few hours later night has come. Laye uses this same situation: we meet Clarence waiting for the King in strong sunlight, but by the time the King has left, darkness is falling. Space is just as unreal: the more K. advances toward the Castle, the further away it seems to be. And Clarence continually laments his bad luck in getting nearer the King, despite his efforts to do so. Like K., he seems always to remain on the periphery of success, circling his goal, but incapable of attaining it.

The indefiniteness of spacial data is further reinforced, in Laye as in Kafka, by the use of darkness. An obvious borrowing by Laye is found in the scene in which Clarence looks back at the palace after the King has left. Darkness is beginning to fall and not only clouds the area, but causes physical objects to be distorted.

Then the tower itself seemed to fade away...everything was gradually becoming blurred, as if night were already beginning to fall...and the palace itself seemed to have been moving imperceptibly away. (p. 37)

We need only look back to K.'s impression at the end of the first chapter of *The Castle* to affirm the origin of this idea: «The Castle above them...was already beginning to grow dark and retreated again into the distance» (p. 20).

This very situation presented by the Castle's seeming to move away, which is sustained throughout *The Castle*, has been termed the «Tantalus situation.» The protagonist's object of desire is ever-present and there to be grasped, it seems, if only he reaches out for it. But the very action of his striving towards the object causes it to move away beyond his grasp.⁴ So the Castle «retreats» as K. attempts to approach it, and Laye's palace (as symbol of the King) «moves imperceptibly away» when Clarence concentrates his efforts upon it. In both novels, then, the protagonist stands in the beginning on the periphery of a circle whose center is his goal, and from then on seems never to move beyond that periphery.

A comparison of these first chapters illustrates not only the

technical aspects of Kafka's influence on Laye, but also demonstrates the similarity in the basic plot of the two novels. Like Kafka, Laye outlines the situation to be explored and developed within the remainder of the text. A stranger is presented at the beginning of a new adventure; he is an outsider seeking a way in (K. to the Castle village; Clarence, to the black man's world). From the very start the protagonist's goal is identified (for K., the Castle; for Clarence, the King), and subsequent perception of that goal is so distorted and contradictory that the protagonist and reader remain in a baffling and incomprehensible world. The setting is vague, irrelevant; the atmosphere obscure and enigmatic. Each protagonist seeks to make a connection with his goal, and by each that goal is seen as absolute. In the subsequent narration, every effort of the protagonist is directed only toward that one object. At the end of the first chapter both protagonists are exactly where they were in the beginning: each has identified his goal, but is still as far away from it as before and will remain so, if not permanently, at least for some time yet.

When we move into the realm of thematic influence, we discover the point at which Kafka's influence in Laye's novel ends, and Laye's personal ideas begin. Having pointed out the similarity of plot as it develops in the first chapters of *The Castle* and *Le Regard du roi*, we can see that a thematic relationship does exist. Both novels deal primarily with the quest motif, as these first chapters illustrate; however, in terms of the significance and outcome of each protagonist's quest, we find important differences between Kafka and Laye. In Kafka, although the possibility of a positive resolution is hinted at,⁹ the quest is not completed; K. never reaches his goal. In Laye, it is; Clarence manages to make contact with the King. The break between Kafka and Laye, then, lies in the presence of a positive resolution of the quest in *Le Regard du roi* and its absence in *The Castle*.

Both Kafka and Laye in their beginning chapters emphasize the «absolute» nature of the Castle and King, and these are the objects toward which K. and Clarence respectively strive. Kafka's method for rendering K.'s quest is outlined throughout the remainder of the novel as a series of futile attempts to establish contact with the Castle—attempts as futile as those which Clarence initially makes to reach the South, and in doing so, the King. One futile attempt concerns K.'s efforts to establish himself in the Castle village. For K., the village provides a point of siege for the Cas-

tle; it is a foothold from which he can begin to establish contact with the Castle. Although he spends a great deal of time orienting himself in that environment, security in the village is in no sense K.'s final goal. However, it is a necessary element for the potential success of that quest, and thus, in itself becomes an important factor in the K. quest. K.'s quest becomes, thus, a struggle with mundane, insignificant people and situations, since «reaching» the village is a prerequisite for reaching the Castle. Laye uses precisely this situation for Clarence's quest. Clarence must become a part of the African world in order to keep himself in a situation most conducive to meeting the King. And the black world of Laye's novel presents an atmosphere teeming with the same frustrating and enigmatic situations and incidents as those of K.'s village. Both K. and Clarence are pictured as outsiders; both feel their alienation from the new world they have entered, while at the same time both see the necessity for working through, and perhaps in spite of, this frustrating medium to achieve their goals.

In terms of the protagonist's personal approach to his quest, we find the same point of departure in Kafka's and Laye's novels. K. states quite emphatically from the start, in his interview with the Mayor: «I don't want any act of favor from the Castle, but my rights» (p. 96). K. thus asserts his belief in a state of absolute freedom in which he feels he deserves a share, although at the same time his dependence upon the Castle village and Castle officials puts him in a state of near slavery.

Clarence's approach is initially identical to K.'s; when he first encounters the beggar who offers to «put in a good word» for him with the King, he vehemently responds that «he was asking no favors of anyone» (p. 13). He goes on, however, to question what his rights really are, and indeed, if they exist at all. It is here that Laye's approach diverges from Kafka's. Although both protagonists approach their quests from the starting point of privilege versus right, their attitudes towards the dichotomy are different, and the subsequent actions of each are based on that personal conception of the meaning of «right» and «privilege.»

K. sees his quest in terms of exerting his «rights» to reach the Castle and to be recognized officially by it. Association with the Castle is not a privileged state to K.'s way of thinking; rather, it is his «right.» However, his difficulty in getting there, the implied negative attitude the Castle has toward him, and his perception that the Castle views his presence as a «challenge,» identify it as the

enemy. Thus, enemy and goal are merged into one in Kafka's world,¹⁰ and the K.-Castle relationship becomes that of the protagonist seeking to reach the Castle and the Castle resisting this attempt. The relationship is one of mutual opposition, if not of enmity.

Clarence, on the other hand, sees his quest first in terms of exerting a «right,» if only by his very nature as a white man in this black world, but almost immediately comes to realize that it is a privilege to be allowed to meet the King. Laye emphasizes the point by contrasting Clarence with the beggar who, although the lowliest of creatures to Clarence, enjoys a seemingly intimate relationship with the King. Clarence perceives that a connection with the King is a privileged state. We may note that K. is aware of the «privilege» enjoyed by those in contact with the Castle, but never does he, as does Clarence, accept the justice of the absolute's inaccessibility.

The beggar character in Laye's novel is important not only for purposes of comparison, but also because he is the one most directly related to Clarence's quest. He is a messenger of the King and is the one who leads Clarence to the South, betrays him eventually, and thus makes it possible for Clarence to reach his goal. In many respects he is modeled upon the Bürgel character in *The Castle*—the character most directly connected with K.'s quest. Bürgel is the one who offers K. the solution to his quest, although K. remains oblivious to the opportunity. He leads K. to the Castle (as the beggar leads Clarence to the King) not directly, but by presenting K. with the formula for reaching his goal. That formula is a presentation of the miraculous situation.

...if a man takes a secretary of the Castle by surprise—if the applicant slips through the network of difficulties that is spread over all approaches to the center of authority, then the Castle, in the person of this one secretary, must yield to the intruder, indeed must almost force the granting of the request upon the unsuspecting subject. (pp. 229-30)

It is significant that when the solution is presented K. falls asleep—Kafka here implying that the miracle is beyond human possibility, that in fact, the human consciousness is incapable of ever perceiving it. Laye's beggar, like Bürgel, offers that solution to Clarence; indeed, his very nature is reflective of that solution. He is a black man in a black world and perceives that world from within.

Laye intimates that Clarence, in order to reach the King, must become like the beggar, become that is, a part of the black world by embracing its values and customs. Thus, while K.'s consciousness is forever closed to Bürgel's message, Clarence is led by the beggar and others of the African world to recognize and take advantage of the miracle.

It is, then, in the resolution of the quest that Laye breaks away completely from Kafka. In Kafka we emerge with no resolution, and perhaps no possibility of resolution, for protagonist and absolute are opposed at the end just as they were in the beginning. Indeed, the fact that none of Kafka's novels really «end» seems to indicate that Kafka saw no possibility of positive resolution for the conflicts he presented. Even Kafka's proposed ending for *The Castle*, which Max Brod outlines,¹¹ provides a resolution no more positive than the one which the unfinished work now contains. In this version, K., on his deathbed, receives word from the Castle that he is to be permitted to live and work in the village. Even though the Castle makes a positive gesture for the first time, it is made, ironically, at the very point in K.'s life when it can have no meaning for him. K's death, in this version, is a negative resolution, if indeed a resolution at all. In Laye's novel, however, there is an ending and resolution of a positive nature. Clarence finds the King and forms a union with him.

In light of these differences between the two novels' endings, we can see significant distinctions between Kafka's and Laye's visions of the world. Kafka's world seems most adequately characterized, as Heller puts it, as «the worst of all possible worlds.»¹² It is a world of confusion, contradictoriness, and illusion, a world in which the protagonist moves neither forward nor backward and remains in his adventures far away from his goal. Kafka's protagonist senses that there is something in which he can believe, towards which he can strive, but that something is impossible to define and equally impossible to reach.

In contrast, Laye's world presents a confirmation and a resolution which has spiritual significance. Laye's world may contain much of the confusion, despair, and illusion of Kafka's, but there is also an element of hope within it. It is a hope presented as a chance for completing the quest, for reaching some form of divine absolute and thereby gaining salvation. Although Kafka's world is far more pessimistic than Laye's, Laye seems to have gotten the inspiration for his novel from Kafka. On the title page Laye quotes a

passage from a fragment in one of Kafka's notebooks which goes right to the heart of the novel's theme: «The Lord will pass down the corridor, look at the prisoner, and say: 'it will not be necessary to lock up this prisoner again; he will come with me.'»¹³ This is an unusual piece of Kafka, since the prisoner is to be acquitted and redeemed. Its theme, perfectly in keeping with the finale of *Le Regard du roi*, is hardly typical of Kafka. Yet there is something which Kafka and Laye share in relation to the possibility of salvation or resolution: the idea that salvation, if it comes, will come only by some unusual and unmediated circumstance—that is, by a kind of miracle.

Although there are instances in Kafka's novels when such miracles occur—as in the Bürgel-K. scene mentioned before—the protagonists most often cannot respond to these opportunities. Kafka's miracle becomes meaningless, for nothing will ever issue from it. It is the supreme irony that it exists and can never be made use of. However, in Laye's novel, it is precisely this miracle situation which leads to the fulfillment of the quest. It occurs near the end of the novel after Clarence has given up all hope of being worthy enough to be in the King's service. Paradoxically, it is at the very moment of self-denial that divine affirmation occurs; the King «looks» at Clarence and opens up the path of salvation, the end of Clarence's quest. This great acceptance by the King inevitably recalls the «glance» that Bürgel spoke of to K., which can so simply provide the solution to the quest: «...there are sometimes...opportunities in which by means of a word, a glance, a sign of trust, more can be achieved than by means of life-long exhausting efforts» (p. 337). In Kafka, given the conditions under which the miracle is presented, it does not and can never take place. In Laye, the miracle is not dependent upon any action of the protagonist, but comes about as a positive act of the absolute and provides gratuitously for the fulfillment of the quest.

Even though *Le Regard du roi* grew out of Laye's attempt to assimilate into his own fiction the form, structure, and ideas he found in Kafka, the novel has merit on its own account. However, since Laye himself points to Kafka as a chief influence, we must examine and evaluate the novel in terms of its attempted assimilation. Laye himself seems to have regretted avowing Kafka's influence, because he feared readers might feel he had plagiarized Kafka. Discussing the issue in a letter, he wonders, «Will people say that I have plagiarized Kafka in borrowing his technique rather than that

of Balzac or of Stendhal? It's likely. People would not say that...in regard to Dujardin or James Joyce if I had chosen the interior dialogue. But they will say it in reference to Kafka. Why?»¹⁴ One answer might be that Kafka's techniques and devices are so uniquely his own that they become easily identified when they appear in other writers' works. What is more, in Kafka there is unity of technique and overall structure and meaning. The kind of world view he presents is strongly and effectively reinforced by his use of techniques and devices which convey the ambiguity, paradox, and sense of mystery of this perspective. The question then presents itself: can the transposition of Kafka's fictional techniques and devices into a novel whose world view is totally different from Kafka's be truly successful?

One must admit that the Kafkaesque devices lose much of their intricate complexity and ambiguity in a fictional world allowing, as Laye's does, for positive resolution. The incident of the stolen coat in Laye's novel provides a good example. Laye presents the incident as Clarence's tangle with the law, but it is obviously Kafka's law. Since Clarence has no money, he pays his bill at the inn with his coat only to be arrested shortly after for having stolen it back. His companions, in fact, have taken it without his knowledge. The scene which follows presents a court action which is highly reminiscent of Kafka's *Trial*. The incident is an obvious imitation of Kafka's law court and it is not integrally related to the further development of the plot. Laye uses it, it would seem, to reinforce the theme of the white man's ignorance of the African world and ways, but the elaborate imitation of Kafka's conception of the law is somewhat extraneous in *Le Regard du roi*. Laye expresses the seemingly confused and contradictory method of justice of the African world much more effectively later in the novel when he describes the beating of the Master of Ceremonies. In this instance, the situation and description are more in line with the intended theme of the white man's blindness and ignorance and are more effective because they are less Kafkaesque.

Beyond these borrowings of incident, which are for the most part rather artificial, if not gimmicky, there are major stylistic and technical devices which obviously have their source in Kafka, but which Laye uses very effectively in his own fictional creation. Laye uses Kafka's technique of limiting the perspective to the baffled consciousness of the stranger, thereby reinforcing the atmosphere of ambiguity and sense of mystery in his fictional world. He also ef-

fectively uses Kafka's technique of «dual description» with its process of cancellation to express the hero's shifting assessment of viewed reality and to further reinforce the confusion of the protagonist's perception. One element of this technique which is evident throughout Laye's novel is Clarence's blurred perception of reality, and Laye effectively transposes it, with all its Kafkaesque ambiguity and complexity, into his fictional world. Laye uses it with a more lyric intent than Kafka, however, pointing out the beauty, rather than the horror, of the unknown world.

Laye uses the technique of cancellation and blurred perception to demonstrate the growing uncertainty and confusion in Clarence's mind as he becomes integrated into a culture whose beliefs and logic are not characterized by the rigid concepts and set norms of Western society. Clarence's perception not only conveys his confusion, but also demonstrates the slow disintegration of his personality and beliefs. Laye accentuates the mystery of his fictional world by his use of repetition and qualification in much the same way as Kafka, but nevertheless, effectively, within his particular context. Laye also uses dream imagery in combination with blurred perception to suggest the spirituality and the reality that lie beyond rational understanding and which characterize, to him, the black man's particular mode of perception. This is in keeping with his *négritude* theme, which asserts that the black man «feels» rather than «understands» objective experience. However, in terms of overall effect, Laye's use of the Kafkaesque element of blurred perception falls somewhat short in his novel because the world presented is ultimately revealed as an ordered and meaningful world. This world is mysterious and enigmatic to Clarence at first because he is an outsider who tries to understand it rationally from a Western experiential framework, and not, as in Kafka, because it is in itself an incomprehensible world.

Laye, then, seems most often effective in transposing Kafka's technical and stylistic devices into the context of his particular world view when these devices are used to reinforce the ideas inherent in the *négritude* theme. His use of the limited or distorted perspective, the sustaining of a mysterious atmosphere, and the dispensation with time and space as measurable quantities are evidence of this. Laye uses these techniques more often in the first half of the novel than in the second, for it is in the first half that Laye comes closest to presenting a world view which is in many respects similar to Kafka's. It is in the second half of the novel that

Laye presents the possibility of positive resolution, and the Kafkaesque techniques and devices become less meaningful within this context. Laye's moving away from these devices in the second half of the novel, as though to lay the ground for the unKafkaesque resolution, seems to indicate that he himself was aware that they become somewhat shallow and artificial in a world view allowing for positive resolution.

The writing in the second half of *Le Regard du roi* is also more naturalistic, and the ambiguity and contradictions that Clarence experienced at first and in his journey south begin to clear up as he becomes progressively more like the African in his orientation to and perception of reality. The one obvious lapse back into the Kafkaesque world of confusion and distortion in the second part—Clarence's dream about the fish-like women—is quite baffling and unsatisfactory. It does have a relation to Clarence's metamorphosis in that it brings to light the guilt he feels when he judges his sexual exploits while in the South. This guilt ultimately disappears as Clarence rejects traditional Western values and accepts the wisdom of the African world. Yet, Laye's elaborate use of Kafkaesque techniques of description, atmosphere, and symbol here confuses rather than clarifies the meaning and significance of that particular episode.

In light of the vision informing both novels' presentations of the quest, *Le Regard du roi* and *The Castle* present a most striking contrast between absolute fulfillment and indefinite postponement. Laye's world of community, love, and redemption is far removed from Kafka's *Castle* world of isolation, hostility, and alienation. Yet, Laye's moving way from Kafka's world view in the latter part of *Le Regard du roi* is neither a facile nor blindly optimistic adaptation of the Kafkaesque quest. Rather, the novel presents an alternative to the ambiguity and frigidity of Kafka's world: the spiritually fulfilling cosmos that Laye identifies as African society and culture. Although Laye's novel presents a world totally different from Kafka's, Laye's situation links him closely with Kafka. As a black man in a white-dominated world, a Guinean forced into exile in Senegal, Laye shares an affinity with Kafka, that «uneasily assimilated Jew,» whose situation Walter Strauss has characterized as «a threefold social and linguistic exile: ...German-speaking, in Prague, surrounded in part by unassimilated, Yiddish-speaking Jews, who in turn form an enclave within an Czech-speaking Christian population.»¹⁵ While such an affinity perhaps accounts for

Laye's attraction to Kafka, Laye is cognizant that he shares a world with his fellow Africans which bears little relation to the world of Kafka's novels. For, Laye tells us, in pointing to such differences between himself and Kafka, «...never have I felt myself to be isolated, abandoned in this spiritual world. On the contrary, I have always felt myself to be intimately and affectionately surrounded by it. I am in it with all those of my race....I feel, in the depths of my soul, this unanimity and support. I have experienced neither that agony nor that tormented and hopeless fate.»¹⁶

NOTES

1. Fernand Nathan, ed., *Camara Laye, Ecrivain Guinéen* (Paris: Librairie de Fernand Nathan, 1964), p. 5.

2. Nathan, p. 37. The translation is mine.

3. Franz Kafka, *The Castle*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), p. 4. Subsequent page references will appear in the text.

4. Camara Laye, *The Radiance of the King*, trans. James Kirkup (London: Collins, 1956), p. 7. Subsequent page references will appear in the text.

5. Austin Warren, «Kosmos Kafka,» in *The Kafka Problem*, ed. Angel Flores (New York: New Directions, 1946), p. 72.

6. Ronald Gray, *Kafka's Castle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), p. 28.

7. Martin Walser, *Beschreibung einer Form-Versuch über Franz Kafka* (Munich: C. Hanser, 1961), p. 79 and passim.

8. Erich Heller, *The Disinherited Mind* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1952), p. 200.

9. Several cities have pointed to positive elements of affirmation and promise in Kafka's works. See Ronald Gray, *Franz Kafka* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 171-72, and Franz Kuna, *Franz Kafka: Literature as Corrective Punishment* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1974), pp. 11, 179.

10. Max Lerner, «The Human Voyage,» in *The Kafka Problem*, p. 43.

11. Max Brod, in the «Editor's Note to the First American Edition of *The Castle*,» as quoted in the «Publisher's Note to the Definitive Edition of *The Castle* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), p. vi.

12. Heller, p. 230.

13. Camara Laye, *Le Regard du roi* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1954). The quotation was not included in the Collins edition of 1956. The translation is mine.

14. Nathan, p. 37. The translation is mine.
15. Walter A. Strauss, «Turning Over an Old Leaf,» in *The Kafka Debate: New Perspectives for Our Time*, ed. Angel Flores (New York: Gordian Press, 1977), p. 17.
16. Nathan, p. 37. The translation is mine.