Max Brod saw something in Kafka’s glory that was not very reassuring, something that made him regret having helped it come into being. “When I see how humanity refuses the salutary gift contained in Kafka’s writings, I suffer sometimes for having torn the work from the obscurity of destruction into which its author wanted to see it fall. Did Kafka sense the abuse his work might be exposed, and is this why he did not want to authorize its publication?” It was perhaps a little late to be asking oneself the question. The posthumous years having done their work, Brod was not grappling with the discreet fame he might have wished for—but, from the beginning, had he not wanted it to be dazzling? Did he not suffer when Werfel read the first writings of their common friend and said, “Outside of Tetschenbodebach, no one will understand Kafka”? Did he not recognize a part of himself in the glory of which he complained? Was it not also in keeping with him, in his image, not close to Kafka’s reserve but close to Brod’s swiftness of action, close to his honest optimism, his determined certainty? Perhaps there had to be Brod beside Kafka for the latter to overcome the discomfort that prevented him from writing. The novel that they write in collaboration is a sign of this joint destiny: a collaboration about which Kafka speaks with uneasiness, which engages him, in every sentence, to concessions from which he suffers, he says, in his very depths. This collaboration ceases almost immediately, but it resumes after Kafka’s death, closer than it had ever been before, heavier also for the living friend who has dedicated himself with extraordinary faith to bringing to light a work destined, without him, to disappear. It would be unfair—and frivolous—to say that there is, in every writer, a Brod and a Kafka, and that we write only insofar as we satisfy the active part of ourselves, or else that we become famous only if, at a certain moment, we abandon ourselves completely to the unlimited devotion of the friend. The injustice would consist in reserving for Kafka all the merit of literary purity—hesitation before the act of writing, refusal to publish, decision to destroy the work—and in charging the powerful, friendly double with all the responsibilities connected to the earthly management of a work too glorious. Kafka dead is intimately responsible for the survival of which Brod was the obstinate instigator. Otherwise, why would he have made Brod his legatee? Why, if he had wanted to make his work disappear, did he not destroy it? Why did he read it to his friends? Why did he share many of his manuscripts with Felice Bauer, with Milena, not, no doubt, out of literary vanity, but to show himself in his dark realms and in his lightless destiny?

Brod’s fate is also moving. At first haunted by this admirable friend, he makes him the hero of his novels—a strange metamorphosis, a sign that he feels himself bound to a shadow, but not bound by the duty to leave the shadow undisturbed. Then he undertakes the publication of a work, of which he was the first and for a long time the only one to recognize the exceptional value. He must find publishers, and the publishers evade him; he must collect the texts, which evade him no less; affirm their coherence, discover in the scattered manuscripts, almost none of which is finished, the completeness that is hidden in them. Publication begins, it too is fragmentary. Of the big novels, certain chapters are held back, one does not know why. Here and there, one does not know how, a certain page torn from the whole comes to light, a certain ray escapes from a hearth still unknown, shines, and is extinguished. Because one must protect the living, one excludes from the Diary documents that are too direct or notes that seem insignificant; one
confines oneself to the essential, but where is the essential? However, the glory of the writer quickly becomes powerful, soon all-powerful. What is unpublished cannot stay unpublished. It is like a greedy force, irresistible, a force that digs about in even the most protected reaches, and little by little, everything that Kafka said for himself, about himself, about those he loved, could not love, is handed over, in the greatest disorder, to an abundance of commentaries, themselves disorganized, contradictory, respectful, insolent, tireless, and such that the most impudent writer would hesitate to stand up to such curiosity.

There is nothing, however, that one should not approve of in this terrible bringing to light. Once the decision to publish is made, it follows that everything must be. Everything must appear, this is the rule. He who writes submits to this rule, even if he rejects it. From the time that publication of the complete works was undertaken—it is reaching its end—the part left to chance and to the arbitrary is reduced as much as possible. We will know everything, in the order in which it is reasonable—though always contestable—to know it, with exceptions as far as the letters are concerned: for example, passages that implicate certain living people have still been deleted from a few letters, but the living quickly disappear. Already, the ordeal of the war and the persecution, to an extent that it is not necessary to recall, has wiped out witnesses and the consideration that they are due; it has also wiped out, it is true, the testimonies and destroyed a large part of the work, already in part destroyed by Kafka during his lifetime, and then, after his death, according to the instructions he had left, by Dora Diamant, especially with regard to the Diary. The Diary is missing precisely for the last part of his life, from 1923 on, when he found, as we are told, peace and reconciliation. This is what we are told, but we do not know it, and when, in reading his Diary, we see just how differently he judged himself from the way his friends and those who were close to him judged him, we must recognize that the meaning of the events that marked the coming of his end remain for us, for the moment, unknown.

But who is Kafka? While he began to bring to light the manu-
that it illuminates; gives hope, but makes hope the shadow of anguish and despair? Why is it that he who, in his work, passes from the objectivity of the narratives to the intimacy of the Diary, descends into a still darker night in which the cries of a lost man can be heard? Why does it seem that the closer one comes to his heart, the closer one comes to an unconsolable center from which a piercing flash sometimes bursts forth, an excess of pain, excess of joy? Who has the right to speak of Kafka without making this enigma heard, an enigma that speaks with the complexity, with the simplicity, of enigmas?

After he published and annotated Kafka, after he made him the hero of one of his novels, Brod, in an attempt to push the double life still further, tried to insert himself into Kafka's world by transforming what is perhaps the most important work, The Castle, so as to make what was an unfinished narrative into a completed play. A decision that cannot be compared with that of Gide and J.-L. Barrault, who had done the same thing for The Trial several years earlier. Gide and Barrault, wrongly, no doubt, had wanted the space of theater to encounter a space of ambiguous dimensions—all surface, without depth, as if deprived of perspective but bottomless, and because of this, very deep—which was that of the world of infinite distraction represented by The Trial. Brod seems to have yielded to a more intimate temptation, that of living off the life of the central hero, of bringing himself closer to him, also of bringing him closer to us, to the life of this time, by humanizing him, by giving him the existence of a man who struggles, with discreet despair, to find work, resources, and existence in a place where he can be but an unwelcome stranger.

Thus Brod adapted The Castle for the theater. Let us leave aside the decision itself, though this manner of having a work pass from one form to another, of creating a work with the work, of forcing it to be what it cannot be by imposing another space of growth and development on it, is a kind of abduction that prohibits the one who engages in it from being too severe with the enterprises of modern nihilism. Let us leave aside the certainty that any adaptation of one of Kafka's works, even if the adaptation is faithful and because it can be too faithful only to certain moments and not to the dissimulated whole of the work (which escapes all faithfulness), must not only falsify the work but substitute a trick version for it, from which, henceforth, it will be more difficult to return to the offended and as if extinguished truth of the original. Let us forget, finally, the right that the adapter has taken upon himself, pursuant to what he believes to be dramatic necessities, to add a conclusion to a narrative that does not resolve itself, a conclusion that was perhaps, at a certain moment, in Kafka's mind, and about which he undoubtedly spoke to his friend, but that, precisely, he never resolved to write, that never entered into the life and intimacy of the work: it remains, furthermore, that this scene in which we are present at the interment of K., an interment that symbolically corresponds to his reconciliation with the earth upon which he had desired to dwell, this scene in which each person comes to throw a word and a handful of dust on a body that is finally at rest, is one of the best in the play, although it is the complete invention of Brod, which goes to show that this play would have had much to gain by owing nothing to Kafka. But why did Brod think it good to insert himself thus into the secret of a work, to which he had contributed, more than any other, to maintaining intact? Why did he, who had so forcefully criticized Gide and Barrault for committing an "unprecedented error" in their dramatization, change the center of the work in a way that was no less manifest, substitute for the central character a character who no longer has anything in common with him except a kinship of words—and this not in order to make the spiritual meaning of his actions any more precise, but to bring him down to a pathetic human level?

This remains an enigma. Certainly the adapter wanted to make the story work on a level that, according to him, was most able to touch us; he wanted to make us understand that Kafka was not a bizarre author, the demon of the absurd and the disquieting creator of sarcastic dreams, but a profoundly sensitive genius whose works have immediate human significance. A commendable intention,
but what was the result? From the standpoint of the story, the complex myth of the land surveyor has become the unhappy fate of a man without employment and position, a displaced person, who does not succeed in being accepted into the community to which he would like to belong. From the standpoint of the demand that the central hero must face, of the obstacles he encounters and that lie outside of him only because he is already entirely outside and as if in exile from himself, on this level the transposition is such that it is a true mockery to pass K. off as the bloated character who expresses everything he feels with a paroxysm of emotion, as he rages, shouts, collapses.

The price is certainly great in the effort to create the human at all costs. Brod reproached Barrault-Gide for having travestied The Trial by making its hero a "persecuted innocent" and the novel "a detective story in which fugitive and detectives pursue one another through the games of a superficial dramatization." But what reproaches should he not have directed at himself, he who not only makes the flaw, to which K. is perhaps doomed, disappear from his fate, but has reduced K.'s step outside the true to a crudely pathetic struggle without hope and without strength, against adversaries who symbolize the modern world, a step itself erroneous, marked by the serious flaw of impatience, yet nevertheless, at the heart of error, ceaselessly tending toward a great goal.

What can a man do who is entirely taken over by the necessity of wandering, a man who, because of an obscure impersonal decision has renounced his native land, has abandoned his community, has left his wife, his children behind, has even lost the memory of them? The man of absolute exile, of dispersion and separation? The man who no longer has a world and who, in this absence of world, nonetheless tries to find the conditions of a real dwelling? This is K.'s fate, of which he is very conscious, in this very different from Joseph K., who, in his negligence, his indifference, and his satisfaction of the man provided with a good position, does not realize that he has been rejected from existence and whose whole trial is the slow coming to consciousness of this radical exclusion, of this death by which, from the very beginning, he has been struck.

The spirit of the work has disappeared from Brod's play as the result of a spell; with the show of pathos and of humanity, everything that makes it so moving and, in effect, so human has disappeared, but the emotion is one that slips away, refuses cries, vehemence, vain complaints, that passes by way of a silent refusal and a certain cold indifference, in connection with the loss of all inner life, the initial wound without which the search that animates the work cannot be understood.

In such a way that everything that could be "positive" in the work has disappeared from Brod's play—not only the background of the Castle, which no longer offers even direction to the efforts of the exhausted vagabond (the Castle appears, at most, as an arbitrary concentration of power, a quintessence of authority and meanness, under the influence and fear of which the larvae of the village develop their own little tyrannical activities)—and furthermore, everything has been lost that radiates strength on the level of powerlessness, a concern for the true in the depths of distraction, an inflexible determination at the heart of the loss of self, a clarity in the empty and vague night in which everything already disappears.

Where does this come from? Why is it that Brod, who is so convinced of the non-nihilistic meaning of the work, has emphasized only its superficially unhappy side?

One of his errors is to have deliberately—out of a concern for humanity and actuality—reduced the myth of The Castle to the story of a man who searches in vain, in a foreign country, for employment and the happiness of a stable family. Is this what K. wants? No doubt, but he wants it with a will that is not content with it, an avid and dissatisfied will that always exceeds the goal and always reaches beyond. To mis judge the nature of his "will," this need to wander, which is extreme in him, is to put oneself in the
position of not understanding anything about even the superficial intrigue of the narrative. For, otherwise, how can one explain that every time K. achieves a result, he pushes it away rather than hold on to it? No sooner does he obtain a room at the village inn than he wants to stay at the Herrenhof. No sooner does he obtain a small job at the school than he neglects it and is disdainful of his employers. The hotelkeeper offers him her intervention, he refuses it; the mayor promises him his kind support, he does not want it. He has Frieda, but he also wants Olga, Amalia, Hans's mother. And even at the end, when he receives an unexpected interview from a secretary, Bürgel, during the course of which the latter gives him the keys to the kingdom, an hour of grace when "everything is possible," the slumber into which he then slips and which causes him to pass up this offer is perhaps just another form of the dissatisfaction that always pushes him to go further, never to say yes, to keep a part of himself in reserve, secret, that no visible promise can satisfy.

In a small fragment that does not belong to the edition of The Castle, but obviously refers to the same theme, Kafka writes: "When you want to be introduced into a new family, you seek out a common acquaintance and you ask this person to intercede on your behalf. If you do not find this person, you are patient and you wait for a favorable occasion. In the small country where we live, this occasion cannot fail to present itself. If one is not found today, it will be found tomorrow, and if it is not found at all, you will not threaten the columns of the world for so little. If the family can manage without you, you can manage without the family just as well. This is obvious; however, K. does not understand it. He has gotten it into his head recently to make his way into the family of the master of our estate, but he refuses to employ the ways of life in society, he wants to reach it directly. Perhaps the usual way seems too tedious to him, and this is right, but the path that he is trying to follow is impossible. It is not that I want this to overstare the importance of our master. An intelligent, industrious, honorable man, but nothing more. What is it that K. wants of him? An employment on the estate? No, he does not want this, he himself has property and leads a life free of such worries. Is it that he loves his daughter? No, no, we cannot suspect him of this."

K., too, wants to reach the goal—which is neither the employment that he nonetheless desires nor Frieda, to whom he is attached—he wants to reach it without passing through the tedious paths of patience and measured sociability, but directly, an impossible path, with which he is not familiar and, furthermore, which he only senses, a feeling that leads him to refuse all other routes. Is this, then, his error, a romantic passion for the absolute? In one sense, yes, but, in another sense, not at all. If K. chooses the impossible, it is because he was excluded from everything possible as the result of an initial decision. If he cannot make his way in the world, or employ, as he would like, the normal means of life in society, it is because he has been banished from the world, from his world, condemned to the absence of world, doomed to exile in which there is no real dwelling place. To wander, this is his law. His dissatisfaction is the very movement of this error, it is its expression, its reflection; it is itself thus essentially false; yet, nonetheless, always to move further in the direction of error is the only hope that is left him, the only truth that he must not betray and to which he remains faithful with a perseverance that makes him thus the hero of inflexible obstinacy.

Is he right? Is he wrong? He cannot know, and we do not know. But he suspects that all the opportunities granted him are temptations from which he must escape, especially the more advantageous they are: questionable is the promise of the hotelkeeper; malicious, the benevolence of the mayor; the small job that he is offered, a chain destined to captivate him. And is Frieda's affection sincere? Is it not the mirage of his half-slumber, the grace that is offered him through the interstices of the law by the smiling secretary Bürgel? All of this is appealing, fascinating, and true, but true as an image can be true, illusory as an image would be, were one to become attached to it with the exclusive devotion from which the most serious of perversions, idolatry, arises.

K. senses that everything outside of himself—himself projected on the outside—is but an image. He knows that one cannot trust
images nor become attached to them. He is strong with a power of contestation without measure, whose only equivalent is a passion without measure for a single, indeterminate point. If such is his situation, if, in acting with the impatience that is his own, he is only obeying the rigorous monism that animates him, whence does it come that this impatience is precisely his flaw, as negligence would be the flaw of Joseph K.? It is because these images are nonetheless images of the goal, because they participate in its light and because to misrecognize them is already to close one's eyes to the essential. The impatience that escapes the temptation of figures also escapes the truth of what they figure. The impatience that wants to go straight to the goal, without passing through the intermediaries, succeeds only in having the intermediaries as goal and in making them not what leads to the goal but what prevents one from reaching it; obstacles infinitely reflected and multiplied.

Would it thus suffice to be good, patient, to follow the advice of the hotelkeeper, to remain beside Frieda with a peaceful and amiable heart? No, for all of this is but image, emptiness, the unhappiness of the imaginary, loathsome phantasms born of the loss of self and all authentic reality.

K.'s death seems to be the necessary term of this progression in which impatience pushes him to the point of utter exhaustion. In this sense, the fatigue from which Kafka intimately suffered—fatigue, coldness of the soul no less than of the body—is one of the forces of the intrigue and, more precisely, one of the dimensions of the space in which the hero of *The Castle* lives, in a place where he can only wander, far from all conditions of true rest. This fatigue that the actor, too vigorous for the role, tried to represent in the play with a spectacular exhaustion does not, however, signify the fatal slip toward failure. It is itself enigmatic. Certainly, K. tires himself out because he goes back and forth without prudence and without patience, spending himself when he should not, in activities destined not to succeed, and having no strength left when he needs it to succeed. This fatigue, the effect of a dissatisfaction that refuses everything, the cause of the stupor that accepts everything, is thus another form of the bad infinity to which the wanderer is doomed. A sterile fatigue, which is such that one cannot rest from it, such that it does not even lead to the rest that is death, because for the one who, like K., even exhausted, continues to act, the little strength that would be necessary to find the end is lacking.

However, at the same time, this lassitude, which is secret, moreover; which he does not display; which, on the contrary, he dissimulates through the gift of discretion that belongs to him—would it not be, as well as the sign of his condemnation, the way of his salvation, the approach of the perfection of silence, the gentle and insensible slope toward deep sleep, the symbol of unity? It is at the moment at which he is exhausted that he has, with the benevolent secretary, the meeting during the course of which it seems he will be able to reach the goal. This takes place in the night, like all interviews that come from over there. Night is needed there, the deceptive night, the succoring night in which mysterious gifts are enveloped in oblivion. What is it, therefore, in this case? Is it because of the exhaustion of fatigue that he misses the wondrous occasion? Or is it because of the solace and the grace of slumber that he is able to approach it? No doubt, both one and the other. He sleeps, but not deeply enough; it is not yet the pure, the true sleep. One must sleep. “Sleep is what is most innocent and a man without sleep what is most guilty.” One must sleep, just as one must die, not this unfulfilled and unreal death with which we are content in our everyday lassitude, but another death, unknown, invisible, unnamed, and furthermore inaccessible, to which it may be that K. arrives, but not within the limits of the book; in the silence of the absence of book, which, through a supplementary punishment, Brod's play has unfortunately come to disturb.