

PREFACE

The detailed readings of three extremely detailed novels that follow explore the non-stop verbal ambiguities of Kafka's three novels in a way that seeks to emulate his own lucidity, for there would be no gain in translating such pellucid texts into any less accessible discourse. They are accordingly notes, often of a very detailed linguistic kind, towards an interpretation of the text of Kafka's three novels, understood as tantamount to dreams in which there is one central character (Henry James's 'centre of consciousness'), of whom all the other figures are projections. The novels involve an ever more intricate portrayal of the inner life of this central figure, each reflecting the problems and preoccupations of their self-critical creator. In theory the aim of literary interpretation is to construe a complex of meaning that takes adequate account of the author's perceptions and (insofar as they can be established) intentions, in other words, to attempt to reconstruct the author's meaning. The Introduction explains how far from simple such an undertaking is. Notwithstanding the fact that in Barthes' terms these fascinating novels are 'unreadable', my aim is to show that, properly read, they are entirely, albeit ambiguously, readable. In the pages that follow I have sought to read and interpret them in as much detail as seems practicable and sensible. To analyze every word, every image, and every metaphor and counter-metaphor is clearly impossible. To do so would not only make impossible demands of publisher and reader alike; it would also mean losing sight of the wood for the trees, which would in turn mean allowing oneself to be caught in the deadliest of the snares embedded within the text of these novels. My aim is simply to keep both wood (the general meaning of the text) and trees (its very considerable detail) in sight at the same time. The squaring of the hermeneutic circle is discussed in the course of the Introduction. To aid the reader by keeping as close as possible to the text, the book has been split up into chapters (regardless of length) corresponding to the chapters of the novels in the new *Originalfassung*, with footnotes numbered continuously in order to avoid confusion. Quotations appear within quotation marks; German and other foreign words and phrases that do not actually appear in the text are italicized. This applies particularly to words and phrases generated by the verbal association which is such a feature of these texts.