

# A Psychological Perspective on Judgement in Franz Kafka's "The Judgement"

Mano Chitra. M, Dr. S. Karthika

<sup>1</sup>*Ph.D. Research Scholar Research Centre in English  
Sri Parasakthi College for Women (Autonomous) Courtallam - 627802  
(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli – 627012,  
Tamil Nadu, India.)  
[manomano0401@gmail.com](mailto:manomano0401@gmail.com)*

<sup>2</sup>*Assistant Professor Department of English Sri Parasakthi College for Women  
(Autonomous)  
Courtallam – 627802m (Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University,  
Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli - 627012, Tamil Nadu, India.)*

[dr.karthika27@gmail.com](mailto:dr.karthika27@gmail.com)

## Abstract

Suicide is the final defence and lasting solution for people who find that all other resources have failed them. People who suicide sometimes relate that harm to themselves is tantamount to harm to others who made them choose it. This may be translated into direct action, such as what occurs in homicide-suicide tragedies involving family members or lovers. Although suicide is a personal choice, which is driven by personal feelings, it is certainly manipulated by many factors, especially the structure of society. This paper is about the suicide committed by Franz Kafka's protagonist Georg Bendemann. It analyses the judgement given by his father that takes Georg's life.

**Key words:** judgement, suicide, drowning, father-son conflict,

## Full Paper:

*The Judgement* by Franz Kafka is about a day in the life of a young businessman named Georg Bendemann who commits suicide by drowning himself in the river. The only reason behind it is his father who sentenced him to "death by drowning". Georg writes a letter to his friend who is in Russia about the random happenings in his life as well as the surroundings. It is through the letter known that Georg has become a successful businessman within a short span of time. The engagement with Frieda Brandenfeld also indicates that Georg is moving to the next level in his life. But when his family life with his parents is taken, it is not so as in the other two life. Georg lost his mother two years back. Georg and his father sit together only for matters regarding business and not anything personal like a father-

son relationship. Since they meet up daily for business matters, Georg had no necessity to talk to him personally at the home. He even did not step into his father's room for months. Having lost his mother, his father spends most of his time alone in his gloomy room which his father prefers. Georg tries to connect with his father on good terms which is disliked by the father. Georg's action was misunderstood by the father, which results in the father giving a judgement of death by drowning his son.

Supposing his father to be male patriarchal, and his son to be female, faulty, and feeble, this judgment of his father can be revisited/interpreted. Although the father's abrupt actions are not understood, references from Franz Kafka's "Letter to My Father" make the story comprehensible since "The Judgement" is semi-

autobiographical. The father is characterized as a dominant, distinctive patriarchal man. His father's version of reality is always right solely by the virtue of authority and his son's always wrong by the virtue of submission.

When Georg said that he'll look after his father, he said in a way that he is a responsible son. But what the father thought was that Georg is incapable, and had to depend on others. Although he is productive enough or successful, he is timid in his father's eyes. He is frail. Basically, the father does not want to depend on anyone because is a typical patriarchal man who stands by conventions. That too, his son, whom he saw as a feeble, flawed character, it is unacceptable to the father. Georg always seemed preposterous in the eyes of his father where he doubts his capability saying that "You have no friend in Petersburg. You were always a joker, and you have also not spared me. How can you possibly have a friend over there of all places! I can't believe that" (The Judgement 549).

The machismo and dominant father do not seem to be so in the outer world. When the subject of his friend in Russia comes, his father supports the friend telling, him that he would have been like a son after his own heart.

Georg's need for his father in the business may also be the reason that Georg is incapable to do anything on his own. Georg himself admits that "I can't do without you in the business, you know that very well" which shows the need for his father.

Georg's sincere respect and care towards his father were misjudged by him. When he says, "if the business is going to undermine your health, I'm ready to close it down tomorrow forever" (The Judgement 55). Georg was not a person that alters his behaviour to favour others. But, when it comes to the father, he is even ready to close his entire business solely for the reason that his father is depressed by his mother's death he expressed "the death of our dear mother hit me harder than it did you" (The Judgement 548). Georg does really care for his father.

Whereas his father's response was that he is still much the stronger between the two. "All by

myself, I might have had to give way, but your mother has given me so much of her strength!" (The Judgement 552). On closer inspection, it almost looked, as if the care he meant to lavish there on his father might come too late.

His father suddenly became an introvert and started imagining things that did not happen in the first place. His accusing Georg of betraying his friend in Russia, disgracing the mother's memory and sticking up the father into bed shows that his father mistook Georg's action of a responsible son to be selfish.

The father portrayed Georg to be a flawed person, accusing him that just because Frieda lifted her skirts, he made up to her, and in order to make with her uninterrupted, he had disgraced his mother's memory, betrayed his friend in Russia, and also stuck the father into bed so that he could not move. The father shows all his aggravation to Georg that he had for years, where he goes into his mind of Georg and makes him believe that he is guilty. He says that all his life, Georg has known only about himself and nothing besides that. "An innocent child, yes, that you were, truly, but still more truly have you been a devilish human being!" (The Judgement 554). Precipitously, Georg urged to the river and drowns. The only thought that came to his mind when he was about to commit suicide was, "But I always loved you, dear parents" (The Judgement 554).

It is believed that drowning as a choice to commit suicide was chosen by most females than males to avoid bloodshed.

Higgonet remarks that with the advent of the age of reason, suicide is identified with weakness and mental instability. But by the nineteenth century, the act of suicide is completely associated with the feminized passive act.

The father looks down on his son as weak and that is why he opted for "drowning" as the verdict. It is not that he doesn't want his son to die in a painful way. It is that drowning is the least he could do to end his life. He is incapable to do the manly way of suicide.

But, if the decision of suicide is purely Georg's, then it comes under the Fatalistic type of suicide. Fatalistic suicide mostly occurs when people are controlled by authority with tight regulations, and has no life of their own. Where there is an extreme rule in order or high expectations set upon a person or people lead them to a sense of no-self or individuality.

Georg does not make the decision for himself. He just fits into the decision created by his father. In *Letter to My Father*, Kafka writes, "But for me as a child your every word was a command from heaven" (562). And that's why he acted according to his command and ended his life as instructed.

Probing into the gendered way of suicide, although the belief had prevailed that women were more prone to suicidal sentiments, the official data stated otherwise. Despite the fact that women were over-represented in Victorian psychiatric institutions, the number of females committing suicide proved to be far less than the number of men taking their own lives. This pattern was not just explicit in the British Isles but also appeared to be applicable to countries all over the world, as the Italian physician Henry Morselli argued. This led sociologist Emile Durkheim, often seen as the authoritative voice on self-destruction, to conclude at the end of the century that suicide is fundamentally a male phenomenon.

#### Works Cited:

1. Durkheim, Emile, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, The Free Press., 1951, p. 72.
2. Morselli, Henry, *Suicide: An Essay on Comparative Moral Statistics*, D. Appleton and Company, 1882, p. 189.
3. Kafka, Franz, Letter to My Father. *The Essential Kafka*, Williams John R, (trans.), Wordsworth Edition Limited, 2014.
4. Kafka, Franz. (2014). The Judgement. *The Essential Kafka*. Williams John R, (trans.), Wordsworth Edition Limited, 2014.
5. Higonnet, Margaret, *Speaking Silences: Women's suicide. The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary*

*Perspectives*, Harvard University Press, 1986.