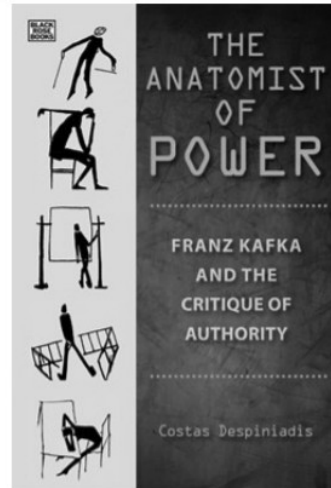


Costas Despiniadis,  
*The Anatomist of Power:  
Franz Kafka and the  
Critique of Authority*,  
Black Rose Books, 2019



In *The Anatomist of Power; Franz Kafka and the Critique of Authority* Costas Despiniadis propounds a new way of reading Kafka that critics have never before invited us to explore. Translated into English by Stelios Kapsomenos and published by Black Rose Books in 2019, this work analyzes Franz Kafka's most notable body of work through a lens that captures the anarchist ideas underpinning his literary creativity.

Despiniadis proposes concentrating on the elements in Kafka's work that deploy an anarchist criticism of power, bureaucracy, patriarchy, prisons, judicial authority, and law. Much of the basis of the argument in this text is confirmed by primary sources from Kafka's diaries, biographies and accounts from people associated with the writer who discuss his participation in the anarchist circles of Prague in 1909-1912. Despiniadis' criticism is divided into seven chapters with the first five chapters providing an analysis of *The Castle*, *The Trial*, *Amerika*, *The Metamorphosis*, *The Penal Colony*, and *The Burrow* respectively. Here, the critic provides a short summary of each work, so the reader does not have to be familiar with Kafka's literature, while providing direct quotations from the stories to advance evidence that confirms his argument.

The author develops his arguments in a style that is comprehensible, holds the reader's attention, and is not excessively verbose. In these chapters, Despiniadis discusses the historical context that Kafka was a part of as well

as writers who influenced him. These influences refer to anarchist authors such as Max Weber, Peter Kropotkin, and Arthur Holitscher. Many anarchist ideas are correlated in these chapters with diary entries such as one where Kafka divulges his wariness of marriage and patriarchy, a notoriously anarchist stance, which Despiniadis then uses as a means to an antipatriarchal hermeneutics of, for example, *The Metamorphosis*.

Despiniadis also uses other literary critics to support his arguments, such as Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), Deleuze and Guattari in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986) and Michael Löwy's *Franz Kafka: Subversive Dreamer* (2016).

Although there are some critics who acknowledge a left-leaning Kafka, *The Anatomist of Power* goes further to expound on Kafka's anti-socialist and anti-communist tendencies as well, on the basis of his dissatisfaction with all bureaucracy as well as his critique of the auxiliary persons it takes to run a State. In addition, the text aims to answer why this aspect of the writer's work and life has been greatly concealed or diluted in academic research thus far. The last two chapters deal with the writer's personal relationship with the anarchists of Prague. They include a draft written by Kafka, retrieved by Max Brod (Kafka's friend and editor), about a Utopian way to organize a work collective as well as accounts from those who participated with him in anarchist meetings.

The last chapter focuses on providing the reader with some history of the criticism of Kafka's work beginning with Brod. Although conscious of Max Brod's significance and important contributions, Despiniadis provides reasons to hold him accountable for beginning a biased and incomplete history of Kafka criticism. In addition, Despiniadis is critical of the overly psychoanalytical and theological interpretations as well as those of the New Criticism school of thought, or those that either completely ignore Kafka's politics or undermine them. The sources used in *The Anatomist of Power: Franz Kafka and the Critique of Authority* effectively support the interpretation proposed by the author as he correlates his claims and evidence in a logical,

convincing way. The reader is not left with the sense of an exaggerated or inflated argument, but rather with fresh insights into the Kafkaesque oeuvre.

**Victoria Eleanor Gaetan, journal Caietele Echinox, vol. 39, 2020**