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## ANALYSIS OF MASS PSYCHOLOGY AND THE THREAT OF FASCISM IN LÁSZLÓ KRASZNAHORKAI'S THE MELANCHOLY OF *RESISTANCE*

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### **Abstract :**

*The Melancholy of Resistance* by László Krasznahorkai is read in the present research paper as a critical analysis of the psychological foundations and workings of fascism. It is argued that Krasznahorkai stages how anxiety, rumor, de-individuation, and manufactured charisma combine to make a town—and consequently, modern society—susceptible to authoritarian seizure when the novel is read through the lens of classic mass psychology theory of Freud and Le Bon and contemporary political-psychological accounts of Arendt, Fromm, and Canetti. Fascism is both a top-down opportunism and a bottom-up psychological demand, as demonstrated by scenes of rumor, silent violence, and the emergence of cunning organizers. For close quotations and textual orientation, this paper uses the user's uploaded draft materials and primary text.

**Keywords :** Mass psychology, Fascism, László Krasznahorkai, *The Melancholy of Resistance*, Authoritarianism, Political psychology, Ritualized violence.

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### **Introduction :**

*The Melancholy of Resistance* by Krasznahorkai is frequently interpreted as an apocalyptic fable about an unnamed town plagued by an unexplained circus, a prince, and escalating violence. Beneath its macabre language and terrifying imagery, however, is an accurate psychological depiction of how fascism permeates daily existence. Krasznahorkai depicts fascism as a process of collective feeling, a change in the town's affective economy where fear, fascination, and boredom transform into obedience and cruelty, rather than merely as ideology or party politics. I use both classical and twentieth-century theories of crowds and authority in conjunction with close reading to make sense of this process: Sigmund Freud's description of group regression, Hannah Arendt's diagnosis of mass loneliness and the desire for certainty, Erich Fromm's study of authoritarian character dynamics, and Gustave Le Bon's observations on suggestibility and contagion. The tactile and sensory aspects of Krasznahorkai's mobs are enhanced by Elias Canetti's observations on crowds.



### **Crowd Mind and Psychic Demand :**

Seeing widespread support as an expression of deep psychic needs rather than as merely credulous or ignorant is a critical step in any psychological interpretation of fascism. According to Freud, a group “is led almost exclusively by the unconscious” and “has no will of its own,” which results in a “lowering of intellectual capacity” and a surrender to unconscious impulses. (Freud 40, 21–22). In his seminal account, Le Bon highlighted suggestibility and contagion: “every sentiment and act is contagious” in crowds, and individuals “readily sacrifice his personal interest to the collective interest.” (Le Bon 7). Arendt reframes the discussion by showing that the masses are isolated rather than just irrational. Their loneliness and lack of roots make them vulnerable to leader-cultures and totalizing narratives (Arendt 317, 351). Fromm and Canetti suggest that the authoritarian dynamic mixes sadistic dominance with masochistic submission in a social setting that rewards compliance and punishes dissent (Fromm 216–17; Canetti). These ideas give us a way to understand the recurring themes in *Krasznahorkai*: the rise of charismatic leaders through cynical manipulation and social need, mob silence acting as moral numbness, and rumor spreading like an emotional infection.

### **Rumor, Fear, and the Collapse of Authority :**

From the novel’s opening, *Krasznahorkai* shows how institutional authority breaks down and how rumor emerges as a powerful force. One striking passage highlights a character’s despair: “there was no authority to which she could appeal... she could hardly hope that the forces of anarchy having once been loosed could afterwards be restrained” (*Krasznahorkai* 14). This line captures both the feeling of helplessness and the idea that once collective forces are released, they gain their own momentum. Le Bon’s idea that the crowd gains “a sentiment of invincible power” from its sheer numbers (Le Bon 6) helps explain why rumors can become strong. Rumors do not need to be based on facts; they only require repetition, fear, and the support of others who believe. Arendt’s insight—that politically indifferent, isolated masses accept substitutes for civic judgment—explains why these rumors face little resistance (Arendt 313, 317). In *Krasznahorkai*’s town, rumors spread like emotional contagions: the focus is less on the story itself and more on how it changes relationships of trust and fear, creating an environment where extreme actions seem like normal precautions to many.

### **The Silent Mob: Dehumanization and Moral Suspension:**

*Krasznahorkai*’s depiction of violence often highlights a lack of spectacle and an atmosphere of “deathly calm” as a group attacks an individual “silently” (*Krasznahorkai* 23). This “silent mob” is essential; it represents not theatrical rage but the regularity of brutality, leading to a decline in empathy. Freud’s concept of regression in groups, where intellectual abilities decrease and unconscious urges take over, fits perfectly with these scenes (Freud 65). The novel’s crowds are not enthusiastically engaged; they are numb, indicating their moral awareness has been compromised. Canetti’s vivid descriptions of crowds, detailing how bodies press, move, and swallow up individuals, are relevant here. The crowd transforms



into a physical force that erases moral distance. Le Bon's observation that individuals in a crowd "acquire... a sentiment of invincible power" explains why cruelty occurs so easily: the feeling of collective strength silences the voice that would object, saying "this is wrong" (Le Bon 6, 7). Krasznahorkai's writing emphasizes the everyday nature of these changes: the silent mob is not an exception but rather the new normal for the town.

### **Charisma, Myth-Making, and the Construction of a "Prince":**

The novel presents a subtle view of leadership. Krasznahorkai rarely shows a clear ideological or programmatic leader. Instead, he features figures whose charisma seems created or recognized in hindsight. One exchange in the book highlights a man's "magnetic power" and describes the title of "prince" as a "business decision." This illustrates the manufactured nature of charisma: "His followers will not forget who he is... The title of prince was one I bestowed on him as a business decision..." (Krasznahorkai 141, 142). This passage serves as a commentary on how propaganda works. Titles, myths, and emotional projections build an authority that people see as natural. Both Freud and Le Bon explain charisma as a way to weaken critical thinking. Freud notes that "prestige entirely paralyzes our critical faculty" and that the group "accepts the will of the leader" as if it were their own (Freud 148, 21, 22). Le Bon makes a distinction between acquired prestige and personal prestige. Krasznahorkai illustrates how leaders can gain personal prestige through ritual, rumor, and spectacle (Le Bon 81). Fromm discusses the masochistic desire for surrender. This helps explain why followers dislike the uncertainty of independence and choose a leader who offers a sense of belonging and clarity (Fromm 169). In the novel, the "prince" represents not an ideological genius but a focal point for the town's wishes: someone onto whom their scattered worries and needs are projected.

### **Elite Manipulation and the Opportunistic Organizer :**

Krasznahorkai highlights the role of elites and organizers who take advantage of public sentiment. The character of Mrs. Eszter, who sees the town "spread at her feet" and feels she is "plotting and directing their course" (Krasznahorkai 254–55), illustrates the practical mindset of those who turn disorder into power. This reflects a key tension in the rise of fascism: it develops from a mutual connection between mass psychological readiness and elite self-interest. Arendt's argument that totalitarian movements depend on mass support, not just propaganda aimed at the uninformed, applies here. Organizers succeed when they find allies in the needs of the masses (Arendt 351). Fromm's focus on social character and economic conditions helps explain why some individuals are ready to seize power: they view social chaos as a business opportunity, using myth and spectacle to justify their authority (Fromm 207–08).

### **Deindividuation, Ritual, and Quasi-Religious Fervor :**

Krasznahorkai's crowd scenes often carry ritualistic overtones. The crowd "drifts" like a "solemn flood" and experiences "moments of exaltation" (Krasznahorkai 75). This language presents collective action as something close to religion—a way of offering oneself



to a communal force. Le Bon describes how collective suggestibility and contagion allow rituals to heighten emotional sharing. This changes personal shame or fear into a shared sense of exaltation (Le Bon 7). Canetti highlights how crowds create enemies and establish sacred spaces. This shows how normal social boundaries can disappear, allowing terrible acts to be seen as communal purification. This ritualized loss of individuality is central to Krasznahorkai's view of political psychology. The crowd is not just a tool of power; it is also a source of identity. For many characters, giving in to the mass offers a break from loneliness. The novel thus illustrates a paradox: the social pain that should drive people to resist authoritarian takeovers often becomes the very force that enables those takeovers.

### **The Collapse of Moral and Social Order due to Fascism :**

Toward the end of the novel, Krasznahorkai shifts from specific scenes to a broader, almost cosmic reflection: "The realm that existed once... had disappeared forever, ground into infinitesimal pieces by the endless momentum of chaos... consumed by the force of some incomprehensibly distant edict." (Krasznahorkai 280). From a psychological perspective, fascism seems like a type of disorder. It shapes human life not through law or justice, but through panic, rumors, and fake authority. Arendt cautions that the danger of totalitarian delusion always exists; it reappears when social conditions create a sense of rootlessness and a desire for false beliefs (Arendt 351, 353). Therefore, Krasznahorkai's ending serves as a warning: fascism is not just a historical oddity but a recurring threat whenever community ties break down.

### **Conclusion :**

Krasznahorkai's novel urges us to think about fascism not just as an ideology, but also as a mental and social setup. The book focuses on themes like rumor, silence, created prestige, and self-serving leaders. These ideas connect closely with traditional crowd psychology and also incorporate Arendt's thoughts on social isolation and Fromm's views on personality. The warning is significant: communities that accept fear, overlook the weakening of institutions, or idealize togetherness may replace moral judgment with the need to belong. This shift can lead to authoritarian control.

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