



*Reading Duncan Reading, Robert Duncan and the Poetics of Derivation,*

*The H.D. Book*

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Dear Franz

I know we've never met before.

And yet, I feel as though you're the friend I've been searching for

for those nebulous places within me  
that yearn for something  
resembling comfort.

But comfort isn't exactly what you instill—  
don't get me wrong—how can I explain it?

Maybe you would say it is realism  
over idealism,  
but with a sense of the fantastic  
intertwined through the fabric of necessity.

If you could have only known  
where the world was headed  
perhaps you never would have set pen to paper  
never  
gone to law school  
or kissed a woman without conscience.  
Maybe you would have realized  
that these chanceless epiphanies  
would overtake beauty  
with malice,  
regret, and  
destruction.

The gatekeepers now guarding the law  
not only are innumerable,  
but they no longer allow anyone  
even to reach the precipice.

I'm glad that you were not alive  
to live through the deaths of your sisters  
or witness your wishes being tarnished  
by trusted friends  
sharing your sacred scribblings  
of unfinished dreams  
and unwanted memories.

Maybe none of it could have been avoided,  
like waking up as an insect  
to only the turned faces of your loving family.

Nonetheless  
I am honoured with the happenstance  
of reading your words  
your musings  
and I can only take it in so far  
before I am lost amidst the intricate shadows  
of daily found rhetoric,  
hopeless catechisms,  
wasted believing. A starvation of sorts,  
ruminating between cold metal bars.

I can live in the retreats of your melodies  
hiding just so  
in an embrace that you can only give  
from underground.

I never told you that I visited you in Prague,  
under the veils of shaded leaves  
and silhouetted by stone. Though so close to you there  
I had never been soothed by your words,  
never had reached towards the barely shifting  
presence of my own  
stillness; or remembrance of someone  
I was never meant to be.  
Josephine's unknown song  
brushes past my impolite lips.

A subtle glance at you  
re-imagined as it would be,  
proved more fateful than beholden  
as I crawled with infinite delicacy  
and foraged through your mouthful of stories.  
I'll never know if you meant those words for me.  
You could have burned them all yourself  
knowing silently your wishes  
may be ignored,  
but you left them in the hands of another  
just as I find myself  
now entangled  
in your

language.

Please allow my words to quell  
that rhythm in your head  
keeping time throughout history  
and steadily pacing yourself  
while I whisper these verses in your ear.

And then when the blindness subsides  
I'll make up for all the time  
we've  
lost.

Rest well, my dear friend.

## Before the Law

Were the principles that Plato espoused  
so untouchable  
that a pursuit of justice  
resembled a journey through Dante's Inferno?  
Those gatekeepers of ridicule  
protect  
a seeming order of affairs  
that oppose access  
to anyone resembling a human.

Fraught with promise  
and empty avowal  
suits appear in anticipation  
unbeknownst  
that eternity awaits them  
arm in arm  
with  
disappointment.

Judgement  
still  
cannot pass.

The law:  
bedrock of reason  
and  
masterful  
futility.

## A Country Doctor

The blizzard gusts covered the ground  
as well as the commotion that ensued while finding a viable horse.  
You left her there, scarlet cheeks, despite your protests.  
The demand of the job—  
the demand of the protection of human life over human life.  
The thickness of air was a metronome calling each beat  
back and forth between obligation and supposition.  
An apparent telling sign when it is the doctor who feels sick.  
But your judgment becomes all  
that matters in this sacred time

## A Hunger Artist

Perhaps all the onlookers  
never meant that much to you anyways.

Perhaps it was always  
that measure of self-worth to come from  
a sense of pain and germane effort  
that would transport your life  
into significance.

There was something of the  
grotesque, mingled with poverty  
that featured you in the spotlight;  
angst and forbearance,  
knowing your beauty rested  
with approval and refinement  
of barren mouths.

Or could it have been  
the suspicious night watch patrolling you  
that made you feel some semblance of  
peace? Unaware of your obsessive  
patriotism, those observers  
could even break through  
your pseudo-meditative cause.

Some forty-odd days and nights  
though biblical,  
never mended your ffnd f (c)1rkO-trrf



## The Metamorphosis

Sometimes it's just too quiet.  
The mummer of muffled sentences  
of hushed nuances  
behind  
doors shut with intentionality  
emulate those which you once knew  
as familiar.  
And you can't quite make out  
each word or phrase—though you impliedly know  
that they speak about you,  
or shall I say,  
what used to be you.

You've missed the morning train.

That overcast city that was once so accessible  
has curtailed itself microscopically  
until all that remains  
is the imprisonment of four walls from which you trail blaze around  
in sinuous tracks,  
pausing and discovering evermore arduous cracks.  
And if fate would allow  
even the slightest reprieve,  
you would surely have commenced  
a means to garner your subdued beauty;  
and show them all the unfeigned reality.  
The long pause you left between your words  
to somehow denote  
more meaning,  
did nothing to ease away the twittering squeals  
from your tetrachromatic eye-view.

But you were still there.  
Unillusioned and underneath  
a hardened shell  
you eclipsed into that aforementioned  
humanity  
and it darkened as the drapes were drawn.  
Hour by offending hour,  
sleep was riddled with uncertainty.

And if you could have seen  
all of their faces  
as they left the room,



perhaps you might have been propelled  
into a different semblance  
of time—releasing misapprehensions  
of fallen hope;  
paled regret.

Probably so.

Hallowed forsakenness!  
For risking your obstinate shame  
and following now mutedly through days  
by slowly being forgotten in deliverance.  
The suffocation you felt  
was eased by the cool window pane,  
but not by hidden stares.

Innocuous life  
that transformed your regularity  
into vulgarity  
claimed damages through  
wicked apples  
thrown in haste.  
But there was no mistaking  
the image of your father  
in that darkness before your eyes.  
His interpretation  
was merely a weak translation  
ingenuously seeking some order  
amidst the commotion  
and seeing the pained look of lost fear and repulsion  
imprinted on your mother's face.

And yet, and yet—  
modes of caution kept them out;  
kept them far  
from believing any resuscitation possible.  
And your own desperation could not be weighed  
any more than that malingering, futile doubt.  
Angling from your wavering feet and  
scuttling around the bedroom ceiling,  
your dire hunger  
could not cure  
that distant trepidation stabbing your curved back.  
Instead, your appetite was submissive  
only by insistent refusal  
pouring its threatening guise amongst

cartilage and metacarpals,  
sinking your heart  
until it was finally  
quiet.

The morning train has come and gone on schedule.

## The Judgment

Duplicity falls quietly upon soft-felt ears  
so that it is seemingly impossible to tell who meets whom  
when your writing stretches out on the paper  
or when the proverbial blanket  
fails to fully cover a father's paradoxically withered limbs.  
I think I understand  
your timid musings of daily minutiae  
instead of parading the sustained reality  
to a feigned innocent onlooker.  
Nascent longings end up biting your coattails  
with the commitment to disarming your inhibited sentences.  
It's time to tell the truth.

Perhaps too many versions played over and over in your head  
before you pledged to impart your news—  
maybe those iterations could have prepared you.  
But you never predicted  
the complete trepidation  
that struck upon knowledge of displaced resentment.  
Forgetting would likely be too easy  
to coax one into acceptance  
and wile away during that moment before your eyes  
turned to stone.  
And isolation, such as your (alleged) friend enjoys,  
wouldn't be quite enough to suit your crime.  
Those small hindrances purge a remembered strength  
that would even weigh down your watch chain

so much so to pull time backwards again  
and again.

You must have kept her skirt around her waist  
to ensure the purity of your union.

Never could you have proffered a dishonest intention  
towards those strictly unassuming loved ones; or at least  
no one believes it to be so.

An uneven mattress gives way to those uneven lies  
ushering out thin lips or pencils or hand railings.

Your verdict comes down hard as though  
light had never stopped to breathe.

A jury comprised of foolhardy and trite vanity.

The sustained flood filtered through porous  
inevitability. Waves to mutilate and cleanse simultaneously:  
to engulf hatred and keep your crime at bay.

Only then may we see the falsity of abject lies.

Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk

as she did with the influence she dusted on the crowd,  
one might suppose she would barricade herself  
without the ego pursed so tightly on her lips.  
Arrive into that banality and hurl it again  
onto scalded throats and ever-still truth.  
Generations will provide the memories instead.  
And try again to distinguish her music  
apart from other tides who only serve to crash in,  
it would closely resemble  
that sameness of befallen daily repetitive voices,  
calling on her to awaken weak and pointless iterations.  
Closing in on obsession with  
watching, while she chooses their innocuous lullabies,  
she must ignore those judgmental comparisons  
and feast instead with her own vain disposition.  
That awe and wonder so consistent with  
longing, moves softly through silent harbingers.  
Await, while the soul willingly presses itself onto purity.  
That fight that only a woman can inhabit  
breathes into her subtle grin,  
knowing simply too well that  
she will eventually forgive them all.

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*Demystified*

## Before the Law

Were the principles that Plato espoused<sup>5</sup>  
so untouchable  
that a pursuit of justice  
resembled a journey through Dante's *Inferno*<sup>6</sup>?  
Those gatekeepers<sup>7</sup> of ridicule  
protect  
a seeming order of affairs<sup>8</sup>  
that oppose access  
to anyone resembling a human<sup>9</sup>.

Fraught with promise  
and empty avowal<sup>10</sup>  
suitors appear in anticipation  
unbeknownst  
that eternity awaits them  
arm in arm  
with



disappointment<sup>11</sup>.

Judgement  
still  
cannot pass<sup>12</sup>.

The law:  
bedrock of reason<sup>13</sup>  
and  
masterful  
futility<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> At the end of the parable the gatekeeper finally allows the man to know the truth of the matter, why no one else has come to enter at the gate: "No one else could ever be admitted here, since this gate was made only for you. I am now going to shut it." (4)

<sup>12</sup> Implicit in the parable is not only that the man is not allowed to pass the gate to the Law, but also that nothing and no one is exiting from the gate either. Therefore judgement is never released from the Law, or perhaps it is a commentary about no escape once you're inside the Law.

<sup>13</sup> A further reference to Plato, and also to the contradiction between the experience of the man at the gate and the supposed intention of the Law.

<sup>14</sup> The man waited years at the gate to be let in and it was all for naught, as there was no way in which he could have been admitted. The hope that he was given at the beginning was a false hope. This is a social commentary on the labyrinth that the law has become in modern society; that it is useless to even attempt at having a fair and practical view of the system, since it is developed around failure to even access it.

## A Country Doctor

The blizzard gusts covered the ground  
as well as the commotion that ensued while finding a viable horse<sup>15</sup>.  
You left her<sup>16</sup> there, scarlet<sup>17</sup> cheeks, despite your protests<sup>18</sup>.  
The demand of the job—  
the demand of the protection of human life over human life<sup>19</sup>.  
The thickness of air<sup>20</sup> was a metronome calling each beat  
back and forth between obligation and supposition.  
An apparent telling sign when it is the doctor who feels sick<sup>21</sup>.  
But your judgment<sup>22</sup> becomes all

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<sup>15</sup> The story begins on a night with a strong blizzard and the doctor needing to find a horse to travel to attend to a patient ten miles away. His horse had died—which may be somewhat ironic that a doctor cannot even save his own horse or keep it in good health.

<sup>16</sup> This is referring to the doctor's servant girl, Rose. The groom who eventually provided the doctor with a horse gives the story strong sexual undertones, "A man, crouching on his hams in that low space, showed an open blue-eyed face. 'Shall I yoke up?', he asked, crawling out on all fours." (220) The groom, though helpful in acquiring the horses quickly turns the story when he ravages the servant girl: "Yet hardly was she beside him when the groom clipped hold of her and pushed his face against her. She screamed and fled back to me; on her cheek stood out in red the marks of two rows of teeth." (221)

<sup>17</sup> This is a reference to a shamed woman bearing a scarlet letter. The groom has defiled Rose, and there is strong inference in the story later on to concede that when the doctor is forced to leave her to stay with the groom that he was using her for sexual purposes.

<sup>18</sup> The doctor yelled at the groom but quickly reminded himself that the groom was helping him out and a stranger. The doctor thought the groom would be riding with him, but instead he stayed with the servant girl. To this the doctor said that he insisted that the groom come with him or he would not depart. Without notice, the groom prodded the horses to leave and the doctor was quickly out of sight, leaving the groom alone with Rose to do as he pleased.

<sup>19</sup> It would seem that the pressure of being a country doctor is that there is no choice in determining his own fate. He had to leave despite his better senses, and he never turned back to help Rose. In this sense the doctor has to sacrifice a life to save a life.

<sup>20</sup> Once at the patient's house, the doctor describes the environment: "in the sickroom the air was almost unbreathable; the neglected stove was smoking; I wanted to push open a window, but first had to look over my patient." (221) Again here the doctor is succumbing to his obligations rather than his own comfort.

<sup>21</sup> "in the narrow confines of the old man's thoughts I felt ill..." (222)

<sup>22</sup> Interesting to note in this story is that the doctor's prognosis of the boy wavers. At first glance the doctor thinks there is nothing at all wrong with him: "I confirmed what I already knew; the boy was quite sound, something a little wrong with his circulation, saturated with coffee by his solicitous mother, but sound and best turned out of bed with one shove. I am no world reformer and so I let him lie" (222). Shortly thereafter, the doctor realizes after seeing

that matters in this sacred time  
when God only knows if Hell awaits  
or prayers are heeded<sup>23</sup>.  
And that contradiction of your intentions versus your forbearance  
seems to be no consolation.  
You presume that the monotony of patient visit  
after patient visit<sup>24</sup>,  
like rhythmic window-washing  
may absolve you of any misgivings<sup>25</sup>—  
of any need for acquitting yourself for breathing a diagnosis.  
Of course healing is impossible if you are past the point of saving.  
But none of this is your fault<sup>26</sup>.  
A doctor stripped naked<sup>27</sup> is the one in which reliance is bared,  
and upheavals and officiousness may never change that.  
Shame lies waiting amidst the promises of cures<sup>28</sup>.

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a blood-soaked towel that "I was somehow ready to admit conditionally that the boy might be ill after all." (223)



## A Hunger Artist<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps all the onlookers  
never meant that much to you anyways<sup>32</sup>.

Perhaps it was always  
that measure of self-worth to come from  
a sense of pain and germane effort<sup>33</sup>  
that would transport your life  
into significance<sup>34</sup>.

There was something of the  
grotesque<sup>35</sup>, mingled with poverty<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> It is interesting to note here that he is referred to by the narrator, and impliedly himself, as an "artist". Though this is not strictly a typical art form that our society has come to know, it seems generally accepted in the story that he is, in fact, an artist. And we may be able to draw parallels here with the fact that he can only "perform" his art through the witnessing of others to his talent, therefore invoking the audience that art demands. And so too there is a certain measure of honing his skill that is reminiscent of how one must practice to become an artist. Later in the story the narrator remarks, "Just try to explain to anyone the art of fasting! Anyone who has no feeling for it cannot be made to understand it." (276)

<sup>32</sup> This is the sense one gets from the text that the hunger artist is chained to his art and can't actually escape from it—regardless of whether it is popular to watch the performance from the public—he feels that he must fast and is compelled to it ever so.

<sup>33</sup> "he was never satisfied; it was not perhaps mere fasting that had brought him to such skeleton thinness that many people had regretfully to keep away from his exhibitions, because the sight of him was too much for them, perhaps it was dissatisfaction with himself that had worn him down." (270)

<sup>34</sup> The narrator gives a glimpse of the grandeur that the hunger artist used to feel when it was still apparently a fashionable trade. There is reference to the fact that "We live in a different world now" (268), inferring that there used to be a special significance to the way the hunger artist would receive praise for his work: "At one time the whole town took a lively interest in the hunger artist; from day to day of his fast the excitement mounted; everybody wanted to see him at least once a day; there were people who bought season tickets for the last few days and sat from morning till night in front of his small barred cage." (268) It seemed that he would really live for their acknowledgement of his talent.

<sup>35</sup> To the reader, the idea of watching someone starve to death would seem morbid, and yet, the narrator paints the picture of the amazement by speaking of how the children took to the entertainment: "the children stood openmouthed, holding each other's hands for greater security, marveling at him as he sat there pallid in black tights, with his ribs sticking out so prominently, not even on a seat but down among straw on the ground... perhaps stretching an arm through the bars so that one might feel how thin it was... staring into vacancy with half-shut eyes" (268)

that featured you in the spotlight;  
angst and forbearance,  
knowing your beauty rested  
with approval and refinement  
of barren mouths<sup>37</sup>.

Or could it have been  
the suspicious night watch<sup>38</sup> patrolling you  
that made you feel some semblance of  
peace<sup>39</sup>? Unaware of your obsessive  
patriotism, those observers  
could even break through  
your pseudo-meditative cause.

Some forty-odd days and nights<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> This is a reference to the linkage between starvation and impoverishment. Perhaps having the hunger artist as an attraction for the public it reveals that people would rather watch those in need as a spectacle, in showing that they are not without.

<sup>37</sup> No one could possibly watch the hunger artist continuously, day and night, and so no one could produce first-hand evidence that the fast had really been rigorous and continuous; only the artist himself could know that, he was therefore bound to be the sole completely satisfied spectator of his own fast." (270)

<sup>38</sup> There were members of the public who were selected to keep watch of the hunger artist throughout the "day and night, three of them at a time, in case he should have some secret recourse to nourishment." (268) This reinforces the fact that the hunger artist had permanent eyes watching him—he was never alone, always surrounded by people for approval of his art.

<sup>39</sup> The narrator actually tells us the opposite in the text, that "nothing annoyed the artist more than such watchers; they made him miserable; they made his fast seem unendurable; sometimes he mastered his feebleness sufficiently to sing during their watch for as long as he could keep going, to show them how unjust their suspicions were" (269). However, he goes on to contradict this in saying that with other watchers, "he was quite happy at the prospect of spending a sleepless night with such watchers; he was ready to exchange jokes with them, to tell them stories out of his nomadic life, anything at all to keep them awake and demonstrate to them again that he had no eatables in his cage and that he was fasting as not one of them

<sup>39</sup> (e inlimtheeren)1 amys the prt reveals TDem[ (e illow(ere s (e artist )TJ-7.23 -1T[n h) TD[y)-ys.224 lly teme was

though biblical,  
never mended your failed expectations<sup>41</sup>  
and never was deliverance so near;  
a daily devotional of emptiness.

But all you were doing  
was something so inhuman  
that positioning you in close proximity to the  
animals could be the only gauge  
to which you might be seen.  
Perversion, or something of the sort,  
used to compel the audience near<sup>42</sup>.  
But all too soon does the attention dissipate,  
and a panther looms over you  
ready to crush you deeper underground<sup>43</sup>.  
Falling to despair,  
ridicule to ridicule,  
dust to dust—  
misunderstood<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> In actuality, the hunger artist failed to see why the time limitation was imposed, and he yearned to fast for longer. "His public pretended to admire him so much, why should it have so little patience with him; if he could endure fasting longer, why shouldn't the public endure it?" (271)

<sup>42</sup> The triumph of such a feat used to be marked with much pomp and glory: "the flower-decked cage was opened, enthusiastic spectators filled the hall, a military band played, two doctors entered the cage to measure the results of the fast, which were announced through a megaphone, and finally two young ladies appeared, blissful at having been selected for the huvthed (lp)1 .271)







## The Metamorphosis

Sometimes it's just too quiet<sup>52</sup>.  
The mummer of muffled sentences  
of hushed nuances  
behind  
doors shut with intentionality  
emulate those which you once knew  
as familiar<sup>53</sup>.  
And you coyy

That overcast city that was once so accessible<sup>56</sup>  
has curtailed itself microscopically  
until all that remains  
is the imprisonment of four walls from which you trail blaze around  
in sinuous tracks<sup>57</sup>,  
pausing and discovering evermore arduous cracks.  
And if fate would allow  
even the slightest reprieve,  
you would surely have commenced  
a means to garner your subdued beauty;  
and show them all the unfeigned reality<sup>58</sup>.  
The long pause you left between your words  
to somehow denote  
more meaning,  
did nothing to ease away the twittering squeals<sup>59</sup>

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reported his failure to turn up." (69) Gregor had a fierce sense of loyalty to his occupation, and even in his altered state he was trying to figure out how to meet his obligations.

<sup>56</sup> Gregor has a window that he looks out of into the city. This is an important aspect to Kafka's writing—the difference between the internal and external, the nexus of the outside world and the internal struggles. Gregor "leaned against the window panes, obviously in some recollection of the sense of freedom that looking out of a window always used to give him. For in reality day by day things that were even a little way off were growing dimmer to his sight; the hospital across the street, which he used to execrate for being all too often before his eyes, was now quite beyond his range of vision, and if he had not known that he lived in Charlotte Street, a quiet street but still a city street, he might have believed that his window gave on a desert waste where gray sky and gray land blended indistinguishably into each other." (97)

<sup>57</sup> Gregor occupied some of his days just crawling around his room: "so that for mere recreation he had formed the habit of crawling crisscross over the walls and ceiling. He especially enjoyed hanging suspended from the ceiling; it was much better than lying on the floor; one could breathe more freely; one's body swung and rocked lightly; and in the most blissful absorption induced by this suspension it could happen to his own surprise that he let go and fell plump on the floor" (100) Therefore he is showing signs of becoming more inhuman.

<sup>58</sup> Unable to communicate with his family, he was unable to show them that he was still alive and that the insect was still himself. He clung to the fact that they would love him unconditionally, but eventually realizes at the end that he has just been more of a tragedy than anything else. He comes to know that he is unable to provide for them any longer, and he "felt so hot with shame and grief" (97), but was unable to let them know.

<sup>59</sup> At the beginning of the story Gregor tries to communicate through the door with his family. His mother asks, "Did you hear how he was speaking?", and the chief responding "That was no human voice" (79). Gregor realized that "The words he uttered were no longer understandable, apparently, although they seem clear enough to him, even clearer than before, perhaps because his ear had grown accustomed to the sound of them." (79-80)

from your tetrachromatic<sup>60</sup> eye-view.

But you were still there<sup>61</sup>.  
Unillusioned and underneath  
a hardened shell  
you eclipsed into that aforementioned  
humanity  
and it darkened as the drapes were drawn.  
Hour by offending hour,  
sleep was riddled with uncertainty<sup>62</sup>.

And if you could have seen  
all of their faces  
as they left the room<sup>63</sup>,  
perhaps you might have been propelled  
into a different semblance  
of time—releasing misapprehensions  
of fallen hope;  
paled regret<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> This is in reference to the way an insect would be able to see, as a compound eye with many lenses.

<sup>61</sup> When his mother and sister came into his room to move furniture, his mother was whispering to his sister, and Gregor mused that “for she was convinced that he could not understand her words”, and she said to Grete, “doesn’t it look as if we were showing him, by taking away his furniture, that we have given up hope of his ever getting better and are just leaving him coldly to himself? I think it would be best to keep his room exactly as it has always been, so that when he comes back to us he will find everything unchanged and be able all the more easily to forget what has happened in between.” (102) At this point in the story, there is still some hope that the transformation is reversible and that Gregor is still there.

<sup>62</sup> Gregor seemed to have trouble sleeping, and even in the first sentence of the story, he had awoken from an uneasy sleep. This could show that perhaps the fantastic nature of the story could be through a dream-like state.

<sup>63</sup> “This made him realize how repulsive the sight of him still was to her, and that it was bound to go on being repulsive, and what an effort it must cost her not to run away even from the sight of the small portion of his body that stuck out from under the sofa. In order to spare her that, therefore, one day he carried a sheet on his back to the sofa—it cost him four hours’ labor—and arranged it there in such a way as to hide him completely, so that even if she were to bend down she could not see him.” (99)

<sup>64</sup> After showing himself to his mother and sister, “Gregor was now cut off from his mother, who was perhaps nearly dying because of him; he dared not open the door for fear of frightening away his sister, who had to stay with her mother; there was nothing he could do but wait; and harassed by self-reproach and worry he began now to crawl to and fro, over everything, walls, furniture and ceiling, and finally in his despair, when the whole room seemed to be reeling round him, fell down on to the middle of the big table.” (106)



And yet, and yet—  
modes of caution kept them out<sup>68</sup>;  
kept them far  
from believing any resuscitation possible<sup>69</sup>.  
And your own desperation could not be weighed  
any more than that malingering, futile doubt<sup>70</sup>.  
Angling from your wavering feet and  
scuttling around the bedroom ceiling,  
your dire hunger<sup>71</sup>  
could not cure  
that distant trepidation stabbing your curved back<sup>72</sup>.

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what she saw was Gregor screamed in a loud, hoarse voice: 'Oh God, of God!' fell with  
outspread arms over the sofa as if giving up and did not move." (106)



The Judgment

Duplicity<sup>75</sup>



your timid<sup>79</sup> musings of daily minutiae<sup>80</sup>

instead of parading the sustained reality

to a feigned innocent onlooker.22 9.pT (tgned i)fim90 3ent (ustalong1 (tead1 (o)1 e (teadd up(s)1 (ustab (i)-

the complete trepidation  
that struck upon knowledge of displaced resentment<sup>83</sup>.  
Forgetting would likely be too easy  
to coax one into acceptance<sup>84</sup>  
and wile away during that moment before your eyes  
turned to stone.  
And isolation, such as your (alleged) friend enjoys,  
wouldn't be quite enough to suit your crime<sup>85</sup>.  
Those small hindrances purge a remembered strength  
that would even weigh down your watch chain<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> This resentment that shows through is a reference to the father's proclamation about his wife's death and his declining hand in the family business, that Georg has taken over: "Since the death of our dear mother certain things have been done that aren't right. Maybe the time will come for mentioning them, and maybe sooner than we think. There's many a thing in the business I'm not aware of, maybe it's not done behind my back—I'm not equal to things any longer, my memory's failing, I haven't an eye for so many things any longer. That's the course of nature in the first place, and in the second place the death of our dear mother hit me harder than it did you." (82) It would seem as though Georg had no idea about his father's actual thoughts surrounding both, as he was not prepared for such a retort.

<sup>84</sup> The story's exchange between the father and son would be one that could not be forgotten. It is clear from the words and actions that ensued that recovering from such a place of disarray would likely be impossible. Perhaps Georg had already realized this when his father finally told him how he felt: "Georg shrank into a corner, as far away from his father as possible. A long time ago he had firmly made up his mind to watch closely every least movement so that he should not be surprised by any indirect attack, a pounce from behind or above. At this moment he recalled this long-forgotten resolve and forgot it again, like a man drawing a short thread through the eye of a needle." (85) Additionally, there are multiple parts of the story where Georg is intent on trying to forget, or unconsciously doing so, when Georg realized that his father had pockets in his shirt, "and believed that with this remark he could make him an impossible figure for all the world. Only for a moment did he think so, since he kept on forgetting everything." (86)

<sup>85</sup> The father places judgment on the son, but it had to be such that would fit the crime. It is almost incomprehensible to understand what exactly the crime was that he committed. It might have been the dishonesty to the friend, or the way in which Georg had treated his father since the death of his mother, or for being selfish. His father said, "So now you know what else there was in the world besides yourself, till now you've known only about yourself! An innocent child, yes, that you were, truly, but still more truly have you been a devilish human being!—And therefore take note: I sentence you now to death by drowning!" (87)

<sup>86</sup> When Georg was carrying his father to his bed to lay him down, when the father was still showing as a weak old man, Georg thought: "It gave him a dreadful feeling to notice that



Your verdict comes down hard as though  
light had never stopped to breathe<sup>92</sup>.  
A jury comprised of foolhardy and trite vanity.  
The sustained flood filtered through porous  
inevitability<sup>93</sup>. Waves to mutilate and cleanse simultaneously:  
to engulf hatred and keep your crime at bay.  
Only then may we see the falsity of abject lies<sup>94</sup>.

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<sup>92</sup> The father plays judge and jury, ushering out the death sentence without allowing Georg any opportunity to defend himself. This is a continuing social commentary with Kafka with respect to the law not being fair and equal, that the process of the law is not accessible to people.



Melody intertwining amongst rapt attention  
from those begging in anticipation for some resolve.  
She will allow grace notes<sup>101</sup> as embellishments, but  
saves sympathy only for those who cannot hear.  
She performed behind the veneer of grandiosity<sup>102</sup>,  
contouring her face just so<sup>103</sup>,  
revealing nothing more than plain shackles  
tethering her to the community's standards<sup>104</sup>.  
Maybe it was all just a joke after all<sup>105</sup>.

And she starts to cry when no one is looking<sup>106</sup>.

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<sup>101</sup> The narrator speaks of a rumor that Josephine was threatening to cut her grace notes short if the community did not allow her demands against daily work. To the people, this meant practically nothing, for they were not aware of what grace notes were to begin with, and noticed no difference in her singing at all. She quickly changed her mind and stated that the taming of grace notes was too severe a punishment and let them back into her singing. But her sacrifices and allowances are paid no attention.

<sup>102</sup> The attention Josephine receives from the community holds her in high esteem: "One could argue from this that Josephine stands almost beyond the law, that she can do what she pleases, at the risk of actually endangering the community, and will be forgiven for everything." (371). This sentiment is brought up again at the end of the poem, but in the reverse, that she forgives the community for their shortcomings and for their mistreatment of her. The story is rife with contradictions, and the poem is attempting to also reveal this push and pull of admiration and dejection.

<sup>103</sup> The (perhaps) unintentional look on her face, as described by the narrator, as "a smile so sarcastic and arrogant as she then assumed I have never seen...he 1 (or)1 (y)-1 ( )1 (-1 (T8.)TjEM;l )1 (of adm)-1 ( at Josephine T8.mT8.lhat dot m that

A penny thrown into a well  
might produce some longed-for wish  
of that delightful sound found only in standing ovation<sup>107</sup>.  
Another day merely leads to open wounds further,  
granting only the grind of useless work and  
congealing around the misery of being misunderstood<sup>108</sup>.  
At long last, art engulfs the sphere,  
destroying remnants of numb pasts and forgetting  
the trials embedded in the assembly line of toil<sup>109</sup>.  
This is the tantrum<sup>110</sup> she throws on everyday life.

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entrusted to their care and they must look after her; the reason for this is not clear to anyone, only the fact seems to be established" (365). Additionally, there is a moment in the story, closer to the end, where Josephine breaks down. Her supporters are pushing her and encouraging her to sing. "They comfort and cress her with flatteries, they almost carry her to the selected spot where she is supposed to sing. At last, bursting inexplicably into tears, she gives way, but when she stands up to sing, obviously at the end of her resources, weary, her arms not widespread as usual but lifelessly hanging down... just as she is about to strike up, there, she cannot do it after all, an unwilling shake of the head tells us so and she breaks down before our eyes." (375) Here she shows the mouse folk more of who she actually is than she ever had: she is showing them her fallibility and her weakness.

She knows all<sup>111</sup>. She can see into eternity. And yet,  
she would just as soon destroy it<sup>112</sup>.

Try to escape now<sup>113</sup>



without the ego pursed so tightly on her lips<sup>115</sup>.  
Arrive into that banality and hurl it again  
onto scalded throats and ever-still truth.  
Generations will provide the memories instead<sup>116</sup>.  
And try again to distinguish her music  
apart from other tides who only serve to crash in,  
it would closely resemble  
that sameness of befallen daily repetitive voices,

longing, moves softly through silent harbingers

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*Franz Kafka: The Complete Stories.*

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