

Bestial Representations of Otherness: Kafka's Animal Stories

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The grotesque in Kafka is most evocatively expressed in his animal stories. In his use of animal protagonists, Kafka locates an opportunity to explore the tension between human and non-human—the same tension that exists between self and other. By playing off this tension between what is “the self” and what is “not the self,” Kafka is able to explore the ontology of otherness. He enlists animal stories in order to clarify the space between self and other that is critical to maintaining notions of identity.

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One of the most complex and befuddling characters in Kafka is Odradek. A thing more than a person, an idea more than a being, Odradek is so confounding that even the narrator of its story finds it impossible to adequately describe it. The best the narrator of “The Cares of a Family Man” can manage is to attempt an explanation for the existence, nature, and appearance of Odradek, for this character is not so much a static object as a dynamic presence, whose occasional and random appearances merely hint at the possibility of something meaningful. As a result, the fundamentally enigmatic character of Odradek presents as much a problem for the reader as it does for its narrator, mainly because it does not appear to exist within any traditional category or norm. It is described in terms of an inanimate object, but it is also given the ability to talk and converse. It appears both small and fragile, yet has the ability to appear and disappear of its own volition. It is, as far as one can tell, a tragic, unfortunate creature, yet also quite likely immortal. When the narrator poses the question of whether Odradek can “possibly die?,” he is forced to admit that since it has no direction, purpose, or goal in life it is unlikely to meet an end. This “flat star-shaped” object resembling a spool for thread is incomprehensible and absurd.

Odradek is all distortion and deformation. It is completely ludicrous and uniquely uncanny. It is a rejection of both classical form and conventional norms. And yet, there it is, placed directly on the doorstep of this modern “family man,” (in the German, *Hausvater*) who is compelled by its very presence to puzzle over the nature and purpose of such a creation. In Odradek, Kafka does not merely hint at

the presence or possibility of the grotesque, he meditates on the very riddle of its existence. The grotesque in Kafka is much more than literary experimentation or aesthetic choice; it is—I will argue—essential to his effort to explore the nature of otherness in the modern Western world.

The grotesque in Kafka is most evocatively expressed in his animal stories. In his use of animals as protagonists, Kafka finds the opportunity to explore the tension between human and non-human—the same tension that exists between self and other. In this “borderland between [hu]man and animal” (Caputo-Mayr 278), Kafka draws upon an extensive and ancient tradition of animal fables. Animal stories, as Egon Schwarz argues, have their “roots in a prehistory when consciousness had not yet learned to distinguish between man and animal, when people still believed the possibility of slipping from one to the other, entirely according to desire or need” (84). The animal story relies upon the notion that animals have specific, predetermined characteristics (e.g., dogs are obedient and apes are mimetic by nature), whereas humans are a dynamic complex of characteristics. The projection of animal characters onto human situations and predicaments allows for a measure of clarity on our own existential dilemmas by the displacement of human desires and weaknesses onto the “related but somehow inferior animal” (82). It is the “inalienable mixture of human and animal behaviour, of the strange and familiar, which accounts for the strong attraction that the [animal] fable has exerted” (84). It is this ambiguous dichotomy between animal and human “that animates the fable” (82) and allows for it to depict what Mikhail Bakhtin describes as “the potentiality of an entirely different world, of another order, another way of life” (48)—a world, order, and life that is eerily reminiscent of our own, and yet not our own.

By playing off this tension between human and non-human, between what is “the self” and what is “not the self,” Kafka is able to explore the *ontology of otherness* that clarifies the space between self and other. This space is critical to maintaining notions of self and identity. Kafka uses the grotesque as a means of illuminating the enviroing shadows that are not oneself and that allow for definition of self. The grotesque becomes, for Kafka, a device for explaining those aspects of reality whose very existence must remain in shadow in order to maintain a coherent and sustainable reality. As Wolfgang Kayser explains,

The grotesque world is—and is not—our own world. The ambiguous way in which we are affected by it results from our awareness that the familiar and apparently harmonious world is alienated under the impact of abysmal forces, which break it up and shatter coherence. (37)

The grotesque reveals that otherness whose existence and displacement is necessary to the illusion of a coherent authentic self.

Kafka’s use of the grotesque is unique in both its depth and complexity. For Kafka, the grotesque is not simply a device or an aesthetic perspective. It is a profound expression of an ontological reality that indicates a precarious relationship between the self and the world. As Kayser has pointed out, “In Kafka’s universe

strangeness does not issue from the self, but from the nature of the world and the discrepancy between world and self" (146). In Kafka, the grotesque point of view is demonstrated as an unsettling *umwelt*, whose reality serves as the disquieting ballast for categories and norms of selfhood that are likely to ignore their determining environment.

The grotesque as represented by Kafka, therefore, becomes a subversive aesthetic capable of exposing what is hidden by (and in) traditional forms of representation. In his use of the grotesque, mimesis and verisimilitude are revealed as nothing more than producers of half-truths. Kafka's grotesque is a contradictory point of view in which traditional boundaries, categories, and norms are overcome; in which beauty, harmony, and symmetry are usurped by ugliness, dissonance, and irregularity. The grotesque world of Kafka's animal stories indicates that there exists something outside of (or in addition to) our "normal," "typical," "wholesome" world, that maybe there is an "other." Central to Kafka's use of the grotesque, therefore, is the task of depicting other(ness). It is the task of rendering the possibility of the "ontologically impossible" in terms of what Roman Struc describes as "the horror of the grotesque otherness" (151, 140).

Kafka's use—or more accurately, deployment—of the grotesque was necessary in order to portray the disconcerting tension between humor and fear that is central to existential conditions of other(ness). In the fusion of the comic and the monstrous that is the "essential dualism of the grotesque" (Caputo-Mayr 295), Kafka recognized the ability of the grotesque to elicit the same response as that of "the other." This "associating of incompatible entities" (140) produces terror and fascination simultaneously, and thus compels Kafka's readers to identify and to meditate on their response to other(ness). Such a response, as Bakhtin argues, can be liberating and regenerative, (49) but it can also be appalling and unsettling. It can provoke the disquieting realization that self-understanding and self-identity are built upon a "necessity" that we either try to dismiss with humor, or label as so appalling that it must be avoided at all cost. To encounter the grotesque is to realize the horror that resides just over the horizon. It is, as Kafka once described in his diary, to encounter "the perpetually shifting frontier that lies between ordinary life and the terror that would seem to be more real" (417).

Kafka conveys the ontological dimensions of otherness in his animal stories, which I contend are of seminal importance to understanding the whole of his work. Kafka's animal protagonists exhibit three essential features of other(ness). I label them here "entrapment," "examination," and "transformation." My use of these three labels should not be viewed, however, as definitive. Instead, I offer them merely as a heuristic device to illustrate three ontological dimensions of otherness most identifiable within Kafka's animal stories, and most illustrative of Kafka's use of the grotesque.

OTHERNESS AS ENTRAPMENT

But the most beautiful thing about my burrow is the stillness. Of course, that is deceptive. At any moment it may be shattered and then all will be over.

—“THE BURROW”

Kafka's animal stories evoke an overwhelming sense of entrapment experienced by their protagonists. There is more here than a recurrent theme. The isolation and confinement that dominates the experience of Kafka's animals suggests that self-understanding and one's sense of others, self-identity and others' identities, are necessarily defined in terms of the relationship between individuals and the socio-historical structure that traps them. As Kafka illustrates in these stories, a sense of entrapment experienced by the self and the other is not only a result of external circumstance, but is also internal and relational. Both the self and the other feel trapped within worlds that seek to confine every aspect of their existence. Both also feel trapped within identities that distinguish them. Moreover, relationships between external sociological constructs and internal psychological constructs define the existential condition of self and other in terms of obsessive need to maintain those constructs as a sole source of safety and solace. In this way, a feeling of being trapped becomes determinative for existential truth. As expressed by Kafka in his diary, “All is imaginary—family, office, friends, the street, all imaginary, far away or close at hand . . . the truth that lies closest, however, is only this, that you are beating your head against the wall of a windowless and doorless cell” (395).

While present within nearly all of Kafka's animal stories, the sense of entrapment that the other experiences (and that the self also experiences, but might disavow) is best exemplified by “The Burrow.” The story is an exhaustive first-person account of the obsessive efforts of a burrowing animal whose existence is devoted to the maintenance, preservation, and concealment of his burrow. Told almost entirely in the present tense, the story explores the passionate relationship between the protagonist and his construction, a structure that is subject to constant scrutiny and modification. The animal's goal is the production of “a completely perfect burrow” (*Complete Stories* 339), one that would provide total security, one that would offer him utter isolation and thus absolute serenity. And yet such a construction is impossible. It is merely a “dream” that calms the animal and allows him reprieve from his incessant concern for the inviolability of his structure. Throughout the story, the animal's constant state of preparedness is equally matched by his constant sense of danger. He is forever on guard against intruders, forever calculating the risk of discovery and the possibility of a breach. For this reason, he is obsessed with his burrow's design. He wants to ensure that the “labyrinth” in which he lives is the perfect projection of the theoretical construction that he envisions. The animal's identity with the very structure of the burrow reveals a correlation between the internal psychological structure that confines the animal and the external structure of the burrow whose production becomes his life-long effort. In this intertwining of the physical and the psychological, the external and the internal, the ontological

dimension of entrapment is revealed to be as much a product of “the other” as of the world in which “the other” lives. In fact, at one point in the story, the animal begins to address the burrow as if addressing a beloved. “What do I care for danger now that I am with you? You belong to me, I to you, we are united; what can harm us?” (342). This conflation of the burrow with the burrower, of the trap with its victim, eventually leads the animal protagonist to place the interests of the burrow before his own, even though pain and frustration result:

The joy of possessing it has spoiled me, the vulnerability of the burrow has made me vulnerable; any wound to it hurts me as if I myself were hit. It is precisely this that I should have foreseen; instead of thinking only of my defense. . . . I should have thought of the defense of the burrow. (355)

As Clayton Koelb has pointed out (350), the German title of the story, “Der Bau”—meaning both a building upward and a digging inward—suggests a tension between projection and introspection that is critical to understanding entrapment as an ontological dimension of selfhood and otherness. The trap both confines and protects. And even though the self and the other’s existence is defined by captivity, there is a certain sense of security in that captivity. Yet this sense of security is always infused with fear, because the structure that restricts and isolates the individual is essentially beyond his control. The animal protagonist in “Der Bau” is obsessed with controlling the burrow’s every aspect, precisely because he cannot control it.

Tension between introspection and projection manifests itself in a related, perhaps more graphic way through the evocation of an impending intruder. The second half of the story follows the reaction of the protagonist to signs that might indicate a real threat. It is the arrival of this threat, by way of “an almost inaudible whistling noise” (343), that leads the animal protagonist on a search to locate the origin of the disturbance. This search, as constructed by Kafka, plays out on multiple levels. In addition to the animal’s physical search through the burrow to locate the breach, there is also an internal struggle to calm the growing disturbance within the self. “I would be quite content if I could only still the conflict going on within me” (352). Thus, the growing threat from without is mirrored by the growing threat within. This threat takes the form of a “beast” whose inevitable conquest of the burrow, and the protagonist, is assumed.

What is most compelling about this struggle against “the beast” is how Kafka manages to conflate the animal’s speculation about the external threat with the animal’s ceaseless conjecture concerning his own role in producing the threat. Kafka never unveils his beast, or even gives any clear information about it. The mounting terror that infuses the protagonist is the product of his incessant imaginings. The second half of the story is devoted almost entirely to the efforts of the protagonist to “unriddle the beast’s plans” (358). His many theories reach their most absurd and yet possibly their most telling point with the proposition that “perhaps I am in somebody else’s burrow . . . and now the owner is boring his way toward me” (356). In this way, the threatening “other” that endangers the protagonist and his burrow

is both a reflection of the self and a projection of the self. The threat, while vague and indeterminable, nevertheless exacts a clear toll on the animal. He is affected by the threat, regardless of whether or not the beast ever finds him. As a result, the protagonist is trapped by this beast, even if the beast is nothing more than a product of his imagination. And if we understand “The Burrow”’s protagonist as “other” in relation to ourselves, then we can see that the protagonist mirrors our understanding: just as the animal protagonist is offered to us as an “other,” the imaginary beast is the protagonist’s other.

The sense of entrapment that pervades “The Burrow” (written in 1923, a year before his death) often found earlier expression in Kafka’s personal writings. In 1904, while still a university student, Kafka explained the process of introspection in a letter to Max Brod in terms that show a striking similarity to “Der Bau.” “We burrow through ourselves like a mole and emerge blackened and velvet-haired from our sandy underground vaults, our poor little red feet stretched out for tender pity” (*Letters* 17). Such reflections on the overwhelming need he felt to understand his self were not unusual for Kafka. He often attempted to convey the “tremendous world I have inside my head” (*Diaries* 222). It was this troubling world that Kafka would describe to a new-found love as an inescapable labyrinth that disguises itself as the road to human being. It is “a road one keeps following, happier and happier, until arriving at the realization some bright moment that one is not progressing, [but] simply running around inside one’s own labyrinth, only more nervously, more confused than before” (*Milena* 17). In his personal writings, Kafka frequently explored the precarious continuum between human and animal that he felt defined his existence. He sought to become fully human, to escape those structures that defined him (anti-semitically) as something less than human, and therefore, as something more like an animal.

OTHERNESS AS EXAMINATION

Solitary and withdrawn, with nothing to occupy me save my hopeless but, as far as I am concerned, indispensable little investigations, that is how I live.

—“INVESTIGATIONS OF A
DOG”

For Kafka, one essential task of the self is the obligation to continually and compulsively examine its identity and its relation to others. Such investigation is a critical component of the existential condition of other(ness) because it allows for the constant measuring and re-measuring of the self—and, therefore, of other(ness). Kafka attempted to explain the complexity of this obligation to self-examination in his diary, where he speaks of “This inescapable duty to observe oneself: if someone else is observing me, naturally I have to observe myself too; if none observes me, I have to observe myself all the closer” (397). One’s self turns out to be another; and incessant examination of self as other is necessary because definitions of self

and other are neither definitive nor stable. Nevertheless, definition is compulsory. The result of this compulsion can be debilitating. Just two months after Kafka composed the entry in his diary cited above, he experienced what he described as “something very like a breakdown” in which it was “impossible to sleep, impossible to stay awake, impossible to endure life, or, more exactly, the course of life” (398). The cause of this breakdown was Kafka’s compulsive introspection spiraling out of control. In his diary, Kafka strained to define this experience, which he understood as the fracture between his internal and external worlds. “The clocks are not in unison; the inner one runs crazily on at a devilish or demonic or in any case inhuman pace, the outer one limps along at its usual speed” (399). A week later, he again attempted to explain the distressing affects of the obligation to examine the self.

My development was a simple one. While I was still contented I wanted to be discontented, and with all the means that my time and tradition gave me, plunged into discontent—and then wanted to turn back again. Thus I have always been discontented, even with my contentment. (405)

Compulsive self-examination produces a confusing inability to locate a stable or coherent understanding of self. There is only discontented speculation, never contented conclusions, either about one’s own identity or about what is other in relation to that identity.

Kafka’s most compelling narrative articulation of the duty (and dilemma) of self-examination was written in 1922, shortly after his “breakdown.” The allegorical narrative, “Investigations of a Dog,” presents another autobiographical account of an animal protagonist. Unlike “The Burrow,” however, “Investigations of a Dog” does not focus on the present situation of the protagonist but on the events from his life that led him to where he is now. The reader is presented an overview of a life spent seeking answers to the fundamental questions of a canine existence. Central to the dog’s investigation is the relationship of the individual to the community. The dog understands himself as an outsider within his dog community. And yet he seeks to address the narrative account of his inquiries to dogdom. His impatient “thirst for knowledge” (*Complete Stories* 289) about the existential realities of being a dog is, as he understands it, directed toward a higher cause. The dog, in fact, is convinced that a proper and thorough investigation of the “race of dogs” (289) will provide a key to understanding all reality. “All knowledge, the totality of all questions and answers, is contained in the dog. If one could but realize this knowledge, if one could but bring it into the light of day, if we dogs would but own that we know infinitely more than we admit to ourselves!” (289–90). If only the “whole of the dog community” could work together toward these answers, they could escape from what he claims to be “this world of falsehood” (312). As he explains, “the hardest bones, containing the richest marrow, can be conquered only by a united crunching of all the teeth of all dogs” (291). The problem, however, lies in the pervasive silence that frustrates the efforts of dogs who search for some solution to their estrangement.

Certainly the fate of types like mine must be a strange one, and the existence of my colleagues can never be of visible help to me, if for no other reason than that I should scarcely ever be able to recognize them. We are the dogs who are crushed by the silence, who long to break through it, literally to get a breath of fresh air; the others seem to thrive on silence. (297)

This “fresh air” that he speaks of refers to the goal of his inquiries, for at the end of the story the animal protagonist is quite clear that what is at stake is freedom. Indeed, the dog is convinced that all dogs would “ascend into the lofty realm of freedom” and be set loose from the “wretched life” in which they live if they could simply find a way to break through the silence (290).

Juxtaposed with the epidemic of silence that plagues the community of dogs in this story are two extraordinary musical encounters the canine protagonist experiences, the second of which promptly persuades the narrator to investigate the nature and function of music within the dog world. The first of these encounters, however, is cited by the narrator as the impetus behind his life of inquiry, and in many ways is the more telling of the two. In fact, he claims that the enormity of an experience in his youth “robbed me of a great part of my childhood” (286). This event appears to have indeed shaken the narrator from his life of canine conventionality, and from that point forward he was compelled seek a solution to the silence.

The event in question is an almost surreal encounter with seven dogs, whom Kafka labels *Musikerhunde*. These “musical dogs,” however, do not sing or appear to perform music. Instead, music mysteriously accompanies them. “They did not speak, they did not sing, they remained generally silent, almost determinedly silent; but from the empty air they conjured music” (281). The musical dogs’ silence asserts itself in dramatic tension with “this blast of music which seemed to come from all sides, from the heights, from the deeps, from everywhere, surrounding the listener, overwhelming him, crushing him” (282). The silence of the musical dogs is, moreover, inexorable. Throughout his experience with the *Musikerhunde*, the narrator continually seeks to engage them. First, he attempts to learn from them how they produced their music, and then later he questions how they are able to withstand the overwhelming sensory experience that engulfs them. Both efforts, however, are decidedly rebuked by the imposing silence of the narrator’s auditors. This silence in many ways proves more powerful than the music of the *Musikerhunde*. So much so, that when reflecting on the experience, the narrator will later claim that the musical dogs’ “silence seemed to me still more significant” than “their affrighting music” (315).

In creating this juxtaposition of music and silence, Kafka creates an impenetrable paradox. If what the canine protagonist seeks more than anything is to overcome the silence, then how is it that the dogs’ music serves only to fortify their silence? How is it that the music fails to allow any of the dogs to find their voice, to engage their world, and—most importantly for this essay’s line of argument—to express a self? In music, the silence of the dogs is not overcome, but reinforced. In

music, the individual dog-self is compelled to function within the group to produce a spectacle that hides the individual self within a uniform group. Music serves as nothing more than a mask behind which the *Musikerhunde* present dog-ness to the world. In this way, music is merely a mask of the other, or for the other, and simultaneously baffles or erases the individual self.

The narrator of "Investigations of a Dog" will eventually ask, "But is not everybody silent exactly in the same way?" (301). One's silence expresses, for Kafka, an inability to engage the world as anything other than other. It is a sign of chronic failure to bridge the gap between self and other through an expression of what amounts to one's particular selfhood. For those who might "thrive on the silence," this mask can serve to define one's existence. For those "crushed by the silence," as Kafka's dog-narrator is, this mask becomes an object of absolute fascination and never-ending investigation. Either way, the result is a psychological reality that can provide purpose and meaning to existence, but never fulfillment or comfort. As Kafka would write in his diary,

Everything appears to me to be an artificial construction of the mind. Every mark by someone else, every chance look throws everything in me over on the other side, even what has been forgotten, even what is entirely insignificant. I am more uncertain than I ever was, I feel only the power of life. And I am senselessly empty. I am really like a lost sheep in the night and in the mountains, or like a sheep which is running after this sheep. To be so lost and not have the strength to regret it. (*Diaries* 237)

It is probably safe to assume that while writing this story, Franz Kafka was reminded of a warning his father had provided him in 1911, when Franz had befriended Yitzhak Löwy, the leader of a traveling Yiddish theatre troupe. Hermann Kafka told his son, "Whoever lies down with dogs gets up with fleas" (*Diaries* 103). Löwy and his troupe had come from the heart of Eastern Europe. For the Kafkas, an assimilated bourgeois Jewish family, the *Ostjuden* (as they were called) represented a dangerous otherness that might invade and destroy their hard-won, if only partial, acceptance into Western European society. The *Ostjuden* represented everything the assimilated Western Jew had tried to overcome. They were the other's other. The irony—or tragedy—of Hermann Kafka's warning was that even though he was an accepted and successful member of his community, he was a Jew. This fact was not negotiable. And even after emancipation, in a society in which he shared full protection under the law, Hermann Kafka was never fully accepted into his community. He was, just like his son, fundamentally an "other." Unlike his son, however, Hermann Kafka was one of the dogs who ultimately "thrive on the silence." For him, the prospect of self-examination left him doggedly mute.

What is clear in "Investigations of a Dog" is that Kafka is not only attempting to portray the obsessive introspection that dominated his life, but also the alienating other(ness) that defined his existence. This need to define the self—and consequently, this need to define other(ness)—was a chronic attempt to search for a reason or a cause for his position as other in European society. The paradox faced by the other, however, is that the indeterminacy of other(ness) militates against

cooperative efforts to define not only other(ness) but also (and necessarily) the self. Because there is nothing about other(ness) to enter into a conversation about, there is no remedy for silence. Other(ness) has no clear or stable definition. Other(ness) is neither preventable nor resolvable. As a result, the self too has no stable or resolvable definition. There is no self-understanding to be had from self-examination.

OTHERNESS AS TRANSFORMATION

I had no way out but I had to devise one, for without it I could not live.

—“A REPORT TO AN
ACADEMY”

Can the other be transformed into the self? Are self and other available to a metamorphosis or transformation that might resolve the difficulties dramatized by “The Burrow” and “Investigations of a Dog”?

Other(ness) is a radically distinct entity, but the other also desires to be something other than other. It is essential to the self-other antithesis that what is “other” is not the self, and that what is “other” wishes to be transformed into *a* self. A dialectic between self and other would lead Kafka to proclaim his desire “to escape from myself” (Wagenbach 51), a desire he readily admits at the same time is an impossibility. Toward the end of his impassioned affair with Milena Jesenska, Kafka attempts to explain to her the true reason they cannot be together.

I can't explain to you or to anybody what it's like inside me. How could I begin to explain; I can't even explain to myself. But even this is not the main thing; the main thing is obvious: it is impossible to live like a human being around me; you see this and yet you don't want to believe it? (*Milena* 221)

Milena, the Christian European, cannot understand Kafka, the Jewish “other.” He cannot even understand himself. Moreover, his inhuman otherness is a danger to her selfhood, to her very ability to define or understand her self. She cannot know this, and he cannot know otherwise.

In “A Report to an Academy,” we find a third autobiographical account of an animal protagonist. Here Kafka uses the grotesque to explore the conflicted perspective of otherness. In this extraordinary narrative, the named protagonist, “Red Peter,” details the long and arduous journey from his days as an ape in the jungle to his present life as member of society. In this account of his transformation, given as a speech to an assembly of academy members, this “former” ape details his metamorphosis from ape to not-ape. Kafka is particularly careful never to allow his protagonist to claim a level of human-ness, but merely an ability to learn and mimic “the cultural level of an average European” (*Complete Stories* 258). Moreover, the fact that this animal protagonist is named (unlike the protagonists in “The Burrow” and “Investigations of a Dog”) is especially significant. In his arduous efforts to escape his animal-ness, Red Peter has, at least to some extent, claimed an identity other than other. He can now be named. In fact, Red Peter’s performance of humanity

is so genuine that he can claim to his human audience that he is possibly more evolved than they. "Your life as apes, gentlemen, insofar as something of that kind lies behind you, cannot be farther removed from you than mine is from me" (250). His claim, while bold, fits well with a hard-earned arrogance that would appear to be a necessary part of his performance as human. Indeed, Red Peter is not interested in the judgment of his newly-won peers. He does not need their acceptance, simply their acquiescence.

The purpose of Red Peter's report to the academy, while never overtly stated, stems from his desire to announce his clear intentions to never return to his ape status. Red Peter has always, and only, sought one thing: a "way out" (253). Red Peter, in fact, goes to great lengths to explain that he does not identify a way out with freedom. He tells his audience, "I deliberately do not use the word 'freedom.' . . . No, freedom was not what I wanted. Only a way out" (253). He later emphasizes the point further. "I repeat: there was no attraction for me in imitating human beings; I imitated them because I needed a way out, and for no other reason" (257).

Red Peter's single-mindedness is central to the animal stories' powerful depiction of the overwhelming existential predicament of the other. The goal of Red Peter is transformation, but that goal lacks any specific configuration or contour. The goal of transformation is really just an insatiable desire *to become*. It is a hope for process, for progress, for change. As an "other," the individual is a static construct incapable of becoming. It is the fixed point of reference whereby the self establishes its contrastive identity. Again, Kafka's stories pose the difficulty of grasping a possible transformation whereby self and other can mutually become a resolution of antitheses.

Shortly after his capture—and while still very much a captive ape—the animal protagonist of "A Report to an Academy" was first presented the opportunity of transformation by a man who saw fit to confront the other(ness) of the still unnamed ape. As recounted by Red Peter, this "teacher" was obviously intrigued by his presence, but could not understand him, even though he quite obviously "wanted to solve the enigma of my being" (*Complete Stories* 256). Over time, this man became instrumental in Red Peter's transformation, but in so doing, this unnamed teacher placed his very self in danger. In fact, as Red Peter explains in his speech, the very process by which he was transformed also nearly transformed his "teacher."

And so I learned things, gentlemen. Ah, one learns when one has to; one learns when one needs a way out; one learns at all costs. . . . My ape nature fled out of me, head over heels and away, so that my first teacher was almost himself turned into an ape by it, had soon given up teaching and was taken away to a mental hospital. (258)

In order for the animal protagonist to become something other than other—to become a self—it was necessary that his becoming acquire some fixed point of reference. In order for his otherness to be overcome so that he might emerge as a self, Red Peter needed to transform his teacher into an other. It was the only way to maintain the necessary dichotomy of self-other that promotes the process of becoming a self.

In "A Report to an Academy," the "way out" is only a possibility of transformation. It is the hope to become something other than other—at any, or all, cost. At the end of his report, Red Peter explains what it is like to come home each evening after performing his humanity for an audience.

Nearly every evening I give a performance, and I have a success that could hardly be increased. When I come home late at night from banquets, from scientific receptions, from social gatherings, there sits waiting for me a half-trained little chimpanzee and I take comfort from her as apes do. By day I cannot bear to see her; for she has the insane look of the bewildered half-broken animal in her eye; no one else sees it, but I do, and I cannot bear it. On the whole, at any rate, I have achieved what I set out to achieve. But do not tell me that it was not worth the trouble. (250)

It would make no difference for Red Peter to explain further the cost of trying to escape one's otherness. It could not be made any more clear. The presence of this "other" ape-like animal in his home presents him with a perfect foil for defining the self. In so doing, he makes perfectly clear the price one must pay to keep the spectre of otherness at bay. In his diary, Kafka would betray his own attempts to thwart the disturbing presence of the other(ness) that haunted him. "What have I in common with Jews? I have hardly anything in common with myself and should stand very quiet in a corner, content that I can breathe" (252).

ODRADEK REVISITED

In Kafka, the grotesque and the other are interrelated and interdependent. The grotesque is how other(ness) manifests itself. The grotesque, therefore, makes the invisible visible. It is what we see when the mask of the other is removed. The unmasking reveals a haunting and distorted reflection that the self finds both incomprehensible and inexplicable. Through his deployment of the grotesque, however, Kafka does more than simply re-present the other and otherness. He gives it voice. Moreover, he reorients his reader to the other's voice, and makes audible what had been rendered mute. He thus forces the reader to move beyond observing the grotesque as a point of fascination and terror, toward exploring the very process in and through which otherness emerges in our "normal" world. As Kayser explains it, in the grotesque we observe "a soul in the process of being estranged from itself and thus ineluctably bound for destruction" (Kayser 143). In Kafka, however, we do not merely observe this process, but also find ourselves within this process as it is taking place.

Kafka's animal stories provide access to an existential reality that stands in tension with traditional narrative perspectives. A traditional perspective is one that (re)affirms the notion of a stable, coherent self—a self whose stability and coherence is a product of the silence of the other. In a Kafka, narrative otherness becomes a subjective point of view to be explored and experienced. Kafka's animal stories, therefore, function within a tradition while simultaneously challenging the reality of that tradition. As a result, the grotesque in Kafka is a subversive aesthetic meant

to disturb, shock, and confound its audience. Kafka enlists the grotesque to demonstrate the other(ness) that lies within the self. It gives voice to that other(ness) that had always already been rendered silent. The intrusion of this other's voice into our quotidian world is what Kafka represents in the character of Odradek. Here, Kafka's everyman protagonist, the father of the household, is disturbed, shocked, and confounded by the presence of a creature whose emergence into his reality indicates the possibility of an other(ness) that is something other than other. Odradek is the spectre of the other haunting the "family man." This creature that goes unseen "for months on end," only to appear for no reason and with no cause, leaves the family man almost flustered, and wary that his presence, while erratic, is also in some way more profound than his own. Moreover, it is the possibility that Odradek is in some way more permanent than the family man that troubles him most. "He does no harm to anyone that one can see; but the idea that he is likely to survive me I find almost painful" (*Complete Stories* 429). For the unnamed narrator of Kafka's story, the permanence of Odradek represents something foundational, something static over against which the self becomes dynamic. To remove or overcome that permanence would mean to ultimately destroy the possibility of selfhood. Odradek, as Kafka's fundamental expression of the grotesque, is his most pointed commentary on the relationship between self and other.¹

Notes

1. I imagine that to go without mentioning "The Metamorphosis" would be, given the intentions of this article, a little like discussing Shakespeare's tragedies without mentioning *Hamlet*. The stories discussed here, I would argue, are attempts to explore further the ontological dimensions of otherness first explored in "The Metamorphosis" (1912). Thus, they provide a "re-view" of Kafka's initial effort to define the ontology of otherness through the genre of animal fables.

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