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Window's in Kafka's *The Trial*

“But then he saw that apart from the chair by the window, there was nowhere in the room that he could sit.” (8) Why does K. cannot sit by the coffee table in Mrs. Grubach's room? Why not the bed? Since her entire Apartment is being absurdly exploited for the arrest of Joseph K. Why does Kafka insists that he had only this chair available to him? Especially when the window gives a perfect view of the one in the opposite apartment, in which an old couple is actively observing the whole scene as if they were part of the conversation. Kafka explores the window's transparency which gives no chance of privacy to the human experience, K is forced to be seen and to see, the boundaries are nonexistent as the thin glass even includes the voyeurists neighbors into the conversation; “No, said the man at the window, who threw his book down (...) “You can't go away when you're under arrest” (7) We can even argue that the frame of the window could represent the tough and cruel law, unjustly framing K and not letting space for individualism. We will firstly argue about how Kafka uses windows as a narrative tool to guide the reader's focus, how they serve a metaphorical purpose connecting the feeling of claustrophobia to the negative impact that bureaucracy has on our individuality.

Windows in literature is a recurrent theme, authors tend to give different meanings for the same thing. For example in *Wuthering Heights*, windows are often a representation of freedom and the desire to evade, but also an obstacle to one's true desires. In Virginia Woolf's *To The*

*Lighthouse*, windows serve as lenses, passively observing time passing and the world-changing. Of course, interpretation can vary and for Kafka's *The trial* the allegory for windows can have multiple aspects.

“Once in his youth in Prague, he showed a friend (Thieberger) the view from his front room window (...) since every path he took in completing his daily rounds was visible from the window, he suggested that it was the frame of his entire life.” (Kurt J. Fickert. 2)

There are three different windows in *the Trial*, the window as part of the decor: the glass and the frame that K notices when he enters a room. The second is the action of seeing through a window and the third is the concept of being seen through it.

The first window is used to conceptualize Kafka's story in different places. As the story unfolds and K. navigates through different rooms, meeting people in relation to his upcoming trial, windows are an essential tool for Kafka's narration. In every room that K enters in, the window in an architectural sense is described; whether the room has a double glazed window, or a very small one that you can see through only if someone helps you to it, a window that cannot be opened... Even if he is on the street the first thing he will take notice of is who is at the windows. This creates a pattern, windows are used to announce the tone of the upcoming scene, for example, if the window is impossible to open it will foreshadow how the scene and the characters in the room will give us a sense of overwhelming tension. If the window is too wide it reflects the sensation of being scrutinized.

The second window has a bit more symbolism to it, as K seems to see windows as an escape and as something unrelated to the scene taking place. For instance, in the passage where he discovers the two policemen that arrested him being beaten absurdly, he seeks an escape when he gets overwhelmed by the situation (Franz's scream triggers this response). “Now K remained at the

window, he did dare go back in the junk room, he did not want to go home either” (92) Looking through this window was for Joseph K a pause, an evasion from this violent injustice, and evasion from his guilt as he is indirectly responsible for the beatings. Another example would be when he wants to avoid a conversation with his uncle by looking through the window to which the uncle reacts with; “You’re staring at the window!” (97)

Now, what does K. see when he looks through those windows? The one near the junk room, he sees a rectangular garden surrounded by officers, the one near his apartment he sees a square, the one near the cathedral he sees another square and precisely; “He had noticed that all the houses in the narrow square had their curtains closed.” (210) every time he looks through the window K sees somehow the form of a square, this gives a sense of borders and limitations may be to emphasize the idea of everything closing and shrinking gradually on him, intruding his personal space. The squareness of the law, as the frame of a window, has a connotation of something uncreative, not giving a chance for artistic expression.

The third window is the one that you get seen through; this window is possibly the most disturbing. The scene of K’s arrest is perhaps where the concept of being seen is most put forward as Kafka uses the absurd to make the neighbors almost part of their intimate conversation. K is disturbed by their presence and even though they are far away, they seem to be more a part of the room than himself. The fact that they can hear each other accentuates how a window or even a wall is no boundary in this world; this world has no escape. When K screams at those unwanted observateurs, “They did not disappear entirely, though, but seemed to be waiting for the moment when they could come back to the window being unnoticed. “Intrusive, thoughtless people! Said K. The supervisor might have agreed (...) But it was possible that he had not even been listening (...) seemed to be comparing the length of his fingers.” (18) Kafka

subtly uses humor to show that only K seems to be aware of the intrusion, the supervisor seems undisturbed and finds this natural; he is a part of this invasive society and Kafka uses humor to reflect on how his ignorance of the intrusion shows how the law is unbothered when it comes to intimacy.

The deeper we advance into Kafka's story the most it is challenging to open a window. The first time K has difficulty opening one, is at the law office/habitation, as soon as it is open a carbonized substance comes out. This building is part of Kafka's absurd; the law lives with the citizen and it's no wonder that K cannot open the window; the boundaries are nonexistent and private life is lost in bureaucracy. Later, in the bank when Joseph struggles to open his open "for no particular reason, just avoiding his desk for a while" when he succeeded "the mixture of fog and smoke was drawn into the room, filling it with a slight smell of burning." (139) The escape through the window that K seeks seems to be more and more difficult to obtain, first, there is a burned substance coming out and then it worsens with the smoke into the room and smell of burning. As K gets close to his trial and closer to the law he gradually suffocates and this is represented to literal fire coming alive. The oppression of his trial is metaphorically surrounding him, there is nowhere he can go, not in his office, not in his home. Even when K is visiting the painter, the window cannot be opened, creating gradual anxiety. "The thought that here he was entirely cut off from the air made him feel dizzy". (160) No windows would probably mean intimacy, however, a group of women is observing their every move through the spy hole.

As the story ends and K gets closer to his murder, he sees the last window with someone reaching his hands at him; "Who was that? A friend? A good person? Somebody who was taking part? Was he alone? Was it everyone? Would anyone help? (...) Where was the judge he'd never

seen? Where was the high court he never reached?" (234) His use of parallelism of rhetorical questions as he is near his death reflects on how humiliated he would feel of being brutally killed, with no judgment, no trial, and no possible redemption. Is the person at the window a godlike figure? since it is higher up looking down at him just before he dies. Possibly, K is trying to reach his hands to him but instead, they get to his killer; that could signify how religion has failed him as well. When he met the priest in the previous passage, there is an insinuation that even the priest is corrupted. When the institutions that are supposed to guide and lead a population are corrupt and focused on power, who are we to turn to?

To be killed "Like a dog". in "Kafka's Jewish Languages: The Hidden Openness of Tradition", Allen tiber's point out how the use of violence is often related to animals in Kafka, as when Franz gets punished K justifies his pain, it was just "a dog howling in the yard." (92) And here at his death, K is violated like an animal. Allen says:

"Josef K. 's dying declaration—"like a dog!"—uttered when it "seemed as though the shame was to outlive him" thus recalls a mystical ritual, directed at submissive spirits who must be purged. In the version quoted by Gershom Scholem, the final hymn sung in kabbalist ceremony bidding farewell to the Sabbath Bride celebrates an "exorcism" of the canine spirit of obedience that would prevent her authentic spirit from flourishing in the world (93)"

Kafka's Jewish cultural background is reflected in his work and the allegory to the Kabbalist ceremony gives us a clue to understanding why K is being sacrificed. He is guilty of something; K is submissive, he gives in to the authority and to the oppressive dictatorship in which he was framed. Violence is related to dogs in the story as it reflects upon a dog's obedience without revolting. By going to see a lawyer and investigating his arrest, K accepts the conditions in which he is treated, he accepts the absurdity of those penal formalities (ex; the painter's theory with the first, second, and third form of acquittal), he also accepts the absurd world in which he lives where a judge lives in someone's attic or in which a client sleep at a lawyer's house; where

the boundaries are not respected. But as the trial judges K, Kafka judges the law. “Josef K.’s guilt creates a radical shift in focus, allowing Kafka to judge the Law more than having it judge him.” (M. Kavanagh)

The law is depicted as an oppressive presence that asserts its dominance by giving K and others nowhere to hide as even walls or windows do not give enough intimacy. Kafka describes a dictatorship and how one exerts its power to reign; by suppressing one’s identity to make one submissive.

With the development of industrialism came the feeling of alienation from this changing world. Kafka’s work seems almost autobiographical as he lived as a Jew in Prague under Germany's ruling, the alienation he must have felt reflects on K’s journey from his arrest to his death; investigating and trying to make sense of a world obsessed with hierarchy and power. This story speaks to all of us, it must have resonated during WWII when innocents were arrested without proper trials or reason, and the oppression of having nowhere to hide. It can resonate with us today, growing in this capitalist society, under corrupt politicians, or this constant need for competition that we are taught. Kafka chose to use something as banal, something hiding in plain sight; a window to express his feelings about bureaucracy and the law, his feelings about hierarchy, intimidation, and obedience. Through the use of metaphors representing the many aspects a window can have; a guide, an escape, or a burden, K is forced to sit at the window and to listen to his arrest without trying to find out why he is guilty. But what K should not do is sit by the window, by doing so, he is obeying to a dictatorship successfully exerting its authority through violence and no respect for one’s individuality. Because of his submission, he ends up being “killed like a dog” with not even the decency of a proper trial.

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