KAFKA AS LITERATURE OF THE ABSURD

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Near the beginning of Franz Kafka's *The Castle*, protagonist K. meets two young men whom he not only met earlier that day, but whom he is supposed to have met before, as well:

> "Well, so who are you?" he asked, looking from one to the other. "Your assistants," they replied. "That's right, they're the assistants," the landlord quietly confirmed. "What?" asked K. "Do you say you're my old assistants who were coming on after me and whom I'm expecting?" They assured him that they were. "Just as well, then," said K. after a little while. "It's a good thing you've come."[1]

It is an absurd little scene. Not only does it anticipate later absurd literature: the male comedic duo reminiscent of similar duos in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953; *En attendant Godot*) and Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966); the illogic of being told that these are men you think you have only just met are in fact your long-time work companions; the comedy. But more fundamentally, it is absurd because a person's reason is thwarted by an unreasonable world, and because he readily accepts this illogic.

Kafka takes a prominent place within the history of both the philosophy and literature of the absurd. He engages with many of the precursors to the literature of the absurd of the 1950s and 60s: his diaries attest to his reading of Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky, and Nietzsche, for example. And he was an important figure to theorizations of the absurd. An essay on Kafka functions as an appendix to Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942; *Le myth de Sisyphe*), arguably the most important text in the philosophy of the absurd of the 20th century. He has also been engaged with by writers that have been generally considered to be part of absurd literature: from Jorge Luis Borges's multiple essays on Kafka to Alan Bennett's metafictional *Kafka's Dick*. And his influence is ongoing in a broad range of writers, who at least draw on some of the absurd aspects of his texts, from Lydia Davis's short stories to Rachel Yoder's *Nightbitch* or A. Igoni Barrett's *Blackass*. For those who are interested in

such connections, engagements, and adaptations, I point them to Neil Cornwell's chapter on Kafka in *The Absurd in Literature*.[2]

My task here, however, lies elsewhere. It is to show where and how Kafka's work does, and does not, anticipate that what has come to be known as absurd literature. In this chapter, I survey his three novels and several short stories including *The Metamorphosis*, through which I explore Kafka's approach to absurd literary qualities. Kafka's characters are at odds with their worlds. The absurdity lies in a life lived working to be able to live; in thwarted expectations; in thwarted logic and reason; in thwarted dreams. Like absurd literature, his novels are fragmented, circular, and often lack an ending; like in absurd literature his characters all but completely lack a back story; and like absurd literature his stories are often tragicomic. Nevertheless, Kafka's specific articulation of the absurd lies not in a world that is meaningless, but in different worlds whose meanings not only challenge his characters' understanding but are also out of reach for them. The absurdity lies in characters who continue to strive to understand, and belong to, worlds that will remain unreasonable and illogical to them.

***The Metamorphosis*: The Absurdity of Working Life**

The Metamorphosis (1915; *Die Verwandlung*), undoubtedly the most famous of Kafka's short stories, asks the question of what is most absurd in it. Kafka wrote the story in November and December 1912 and it became the longest pieces of fiction he published in his lifetime. It tells the story of Gregor Samsa, a travelling salesman, who awakes one morning to find himself turned into some kind of bug. If Martin Esslin discusses the theatre of the absurd as "reflections of dreams and nightmares," the premise of *The Metamorphosis* is a prime example.[3] But, what is strange is not just what Gregor turns into, but also the reactions that this transformation evokes both in himself and the immediate family members he lives with.

While Gregor is trying to understand how to move his new body, he seems most worried about having overslept. “What must his boss think?” “Can he still make the next train?” As Camus famously points out, Gregor feels only “slight annoyance” at his transformation.[4] The reaction of his family – his sister, mother, and father – are closer to what one would expect – disturbed, fearful – but they never ask how this transformation might have happened (and thus how it might be undone). That a person might turn into a bug from one day to the next is hardly challenged. Of course, the transformation is absurd in that it goes against reason. But it is the way in which Gregor and his family respond to this absurdity that seems most disturbing. Equally, even if Eugene Ionesco’s absurd play *The Rhinoceros* has a similar set up wherein villagers start turning into rhinos, such a venture into the realm of fantasy, as Bennett points out, is actually “a huge departure from other absurd writers.”[5] The transformation alone neither ties Kafka’s text most decisively to absurd literature nor marks the truly disturbing absurdity of *The Metamorphosis*. Rather, what seems most disturbingly absurd is how this transformation is dealt with.

It seems that the strange reactions to the transformation are motivated by economic uncertainty, that is, by financial worries trumping worries about Gregor’s health. From Gregor’s perspective, what seems at least equally absurd to his transformation is his working life and the family existence that depends on it. The beginning of the story, in which Gregor is trying to understand his new situation, is interspersed by thoughts of the (dire) working life he cannot now perform: waking up at 4 am; co-workers who believe he is lazy; working the job to pay off his parents’ debts. An indication of this working life as an absurd sacrifice is suggested by the short story’s famous first sentence: “As Gregor Samsa woke one morning from uneasy [unruhigen] dreams, he found himself transformed into some kind of monstrous vermin [ungeheueren Ungeziefer].”[6] The three words in the original German with the negative prefix ‘un’ have often been commented on, not least by translators, but the word “Ungeziefer”

especially interests me here. Without the negative prefix, the word “Geziefer” is out of use in contemporary German, but the word derives from the biblical term for the kind of animal that is suitable for sacrifice. That is to say that Gregor is now not – or no longer – suitable for sacrifice. In light of his apparent work ethic, no longer being a sacrificial lamb suggests that what is challenged here is the absurdity of a life lived working. Indeed, when Kafka uses the word “creature” for the first time in the story, it is not for Gregor’s altered state, but rather for the colleague who Gregor thinks will come to ask about his whereabouts. The real creature, the story suggests, is the boss’s marionette. The real absurdity is that one is made to give up one’s life so that one can work to sustain one’s living.

We can find the absurdity of working life throughout Kafka’s texts.[7] In *The Castle*, for example, K. is trying to be allowed to do the job he (says he) was asked to do. Part of the dramatic tension in *The Trial* derives from Josef K.’s attempts at negotiating his working life with his “defense.” The tragicomic short story “Poseidon” condenses the absurdity of work in a few lines: it describes the mighty God Poseidon who, rather than roaming the oceans with his trident, is stuck doing the paperwork the job demands. Here too, life is swallowed up by work; even Gods are not free.[8] In Kafka’s stories, freedom is repeatedly challenged by a working life. *The Metamorphosis*, like so many of Kafka’s novels and stories, entangles the absurd in questions of work. Not the transformation seems most absurd; truly absurd is the way in which our attitude towards work eclipses any other concern. The transformation into an animal that is no longer ready to be sacrificed becomes an allegory for resisting the absurd realities of a life lived working.

***The Man who Disappeared*: The Unexpected and the Unfinished**

The Man who Disappeared (*Der Verschollene*), first published as *Amerika* (1927), was the first novel-length work Kafka wrote. Kafka wrote the majority of what remains of it between

September 1912 and January 1913. Unfinished as all his novels, it not only anticipates some of later absurd literature's aesthetic qualities, but also represents absurdity in thwarting the expectations of both reader and main protagonist. As the title *Amerika* (the title that Max Brod posthumously gave the novel) suggests, it is the one novel that is set in a clearly marked location. But it plays with this reference point – especially the United States of America's promise of the possibility of upward mobility. It is the story of the 17-year-old Karl Rossmann, who is sent to America by his parents because, apparently seduced, he has made a girl pregnant (the novel thus provides the kind of minimalist back story absent in Kafka's other novels and most absurd literature). If America is meant to promise upward mobility, here the very opposite is the case. Karl runs into his uncle, who is a successful businessman and who takes him in immediately. In New York, Karl lives on the sixth floor in wealthy conditions that were previously unimaginable to him. His uncle provides him with a piano and Karl takes riding lessons. But Karl soon makes a mistake. Contrary to the uncle's wishes, he stays the night at the house of his uncle's friend; during the stay the uncle lets Karl know not to return home. From then on, Karl's life enters a downward spiral, in part because of a dubious friendship with two men who use and abuse him. An ironic sentence at the beginning of Karl's stay at his uncle's house captures the reversed process and thwarted expectations: "In his uncle's house Karl soon got used to his new circumstances. His uncle, moreover, was very helpful in every detail, and Karl never had to learn from unpleasant experiences, such as usually make the beginning of one's life in a new country so bitter."[9] It's such unpleasant experiences, often stemming from bizarre circumstances, which mark most of the rest of the novel.

Kafka thus plays here with the expectations that come both with the USA and with getting used to foreign places. This thwarting of expectations is illustrated in a potent image on the very first page. When in the first paragraphs Karl comes to New York per ship, he sees

the statue of liberty, but rather than the lady holding a torch, she holds a sword. It is the first sign that America will not offer Karl or the reader what is promised. If the absurd in Camus's sense arises from "the fact that human desire(s) is never met by the reality of the world," then a story about a boy who gets the very opposite of what is promised by, and expected of, the USA, fits the bill.[10]

If the expectation of upward mobility, of progress and learning, is promised, never delivered, and even reversed in the novel, this aspect is strengthened by an aesthetic which resonates with later absurd literature, and which it shares with Kafka's other novels, namely its circular and fragmented structure. Karl Rossmann repeatedly makes the same mistakes, trusting the same people who have already done him harm. There is no real development of character, little sense of lessons learned. This feeling of circularity is further strengthened by the fragmentary nature of the unfinished novel. It isn't always clear how these parts should fit together; whether they could not equally be in another order.[11] The "ending," if one can even call it that, feels especially out-of-place. Karl joins a travelling theater on a train which travels west (into the great unknown). As Bennett writes about the ending of Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano, Anti-Play*: "we are left with a new beginning and an untold end."[12] Thus, these elements that run counter to Aristotelian arcs – circularity, fragmentation, an "untold end" – anticipate the narrative structures of Ionesco's as well as other later absurd texts but are, in part at least, also the product of an unfinished manuscript.

***The Trial*: Language of Illogic**

The Trial (1925; *Der Process*) is undoubtedly the most famous of Kafka's novels. It tells the tale of Josef K. who gets arrested one morning without being told his crime. Indeed, throughout the novel, filled with unnavigable systems of law and administration, he never finds out what, if anything, he has done wrong and neither does the reader. Like *The*

Metamorphosis, and much of absurd literature since, it centers around a strange situation, and perhaps more than any other of Kafka's stories, it is tied most closely with our understanding of the "Kafkaesque". It has its elements of (a blind) authority or administration against which the individual is powerless, as well as its sense of "horror and bafflement."[13] But at least equally interesting here, especially in relation to literature of the absurd, is the way in which Kafka (often humorously) plays with language and logic.

While Josef K. does end up executed, the question remains whether he is innocent. The opening line of the novel brings in the ambiguity: "Someone must have been telling tales about Josef K., for one morning, without having done anything wrong, he was arrested."[14] What seems like a relatively straight-forward sentence, is far from. First, did anyone actually slander Josef? The logic of the sentence dictates that someone must have, because he had done nothing wrong. But why would one assume that slander must be the cause of a false arrest? Surely there are other reasons for a faulty arrest: a case of mistaken identity, for example. And the question of slander indeed never returns in the story. But, and this is the second question, did Josef K. indeed do nothing wrong? The subjunctive case of "hätte" turns this supposed innocence into reported speech rather than an objective statement of fact.[15] Moreover, in an opaque law system, and without a charge, can one even claim innocence in the first place?[16] This first sentence thus shows how a straight-forward statement in Kafka provides little clarity. A sentence that assumes a logical conclusion (if x then y) turns out to rest rather on opinion. Like the law system in the novel, which is talked about in logical terms by those who administer it, language here feigns logic while being opaque.

The Trial is full of such faux-logical and illogical statements that have become part of absurd literature. In discussing his "arrest" with his landlady, Josef K., while saying he agrees with her suggestion that the arrest is "something scholarly," proposes an entirely different analysis: "At least I agree with you to an extent, only I take an even harsher view of the

matter, I don't see it as something learned but simply as nothing at all."[17] And, when Josef K.'s advocate explains that lawyers are not allowed into the court hearings: "They wanted to eliminate the defence counsel as far as possible, everything should depend on the accused alone. Not an unreasonable point of view, basically, but nothing could be more wrong than to conclude that lawyers were unnecessary for the accused."[18] As Ritchie Robertson points out about these sentences, part of Kafka's (still often overlooked) humor lies in part in such illogical statements. And an attention to this humor, gives nuance to "the horror and bafflement usually associated with the term 'Kafkaesque'".[19] Moreover, they certainly veer into the direction of what Esslin calls absurd theatre's "incoherent babblings."[20] But what strikes me about these sentences as well is that, through them, characters try to negotiate their sense of logic with their wish to belong, or for comradeship. Kafka's characters linguistically try to solve this friction with illogical statements. "I don't agree with you, but I wish to." "I don't have an important part to play in the judicial system, but I want to." If Camus's sense of the absurd lies in the confrontation between "rational man and the indifferent universe," then here the confrontation is really between rational man and his wish to belong.[21]

***The Castle*: Waiting for Freedom?**

The Castle (1926; *Das Schloss*) shares many of the characteristics of *The Trial* regarding the individual faced with a seemingly illogical authority. A land surveyor called K. comes to a village to do a job for the castle. But neither is K. allowed to do the job he went there to do, nor does he find a true home in the village. K. seems existentially lost. He cannot physically reach the castle, nor can he make sense of its bureaucracy. Meanwhile, he seems to make a mess of his life in the village.

There is a chapter in *The Castle* called "Waiting for Klamm" ("Das Warten auf Klamm"), in which K. goes to an inn that is frequented by officials from the castle to look for

an official named Klamm. Klamm is supposedly in charge of his case. When K. arrives to the inn, he is informed that Klamm is about to leave: “The sleigh is waiting for him in the yard.”[22] K. makes his way immediately to the yard where a sleigh with two horses is indeed standing. “There was no one in sight but the driver, whose presence at this distance and in the dark K. guessed at rather than actually seeing him.”[23] In the cold, K. waits in the cold for Klamm’s appearance, eating some food that Frieda prepared for him. The driver says, “could be a long time yet” – “what could be a long time yet?” – “before you leave.”[24] Indeed, it takes a while. The scene contains both slapstick and stubbornness typical of Kafka’s characters. Invited by the driver to take some cognac from the inside of the sleigh, K. decides to wait in the sleigh which is full of furs and blankets. He stays there drinking cognac, but, when he is startled by the lights suddenly turning on in the yard, spills the cognac all over the furs. K. quickly makes his way out of the sleigh to encounter another man, clearly another official, who tells him to follow him, but K. wants to wait for Klamm. The man responds that whether he waits for him or not, he will miss him. K. decides to wait anyway. K.’s stubbornness is made to seem non-sensical, especially as the man orders the driver to unhitch the horses. Once everyone has left, and all the electric lights have turned off, K. feels free, but he also realizes that such freedom is useless:

> it seemed to K. as if all contact with him had been cut, and he was more of a free agent than ever. He could wait here, in a place usually forbidden to him, as long as he liked, and he also felt as if he had won that freedom with more effort than most people could manage to make, and no one could touch him or drive him away, why, they hardly had a right even to address him. But at the same time—and this feeling was at least as strong—he felt as if there were nothing more meaningless and more desperate than this freedom, this waiting, this invulnerability.[25]

It is difficult not to read this scene in light of Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*: the waiting for someone in charge or with power; the slapstick comedy; the questions of freedom and senselessness. But the last lines are especially curious. How did we get from K. waiting for Klamm to his reflections on freedom and its meaninglessness? Wasn’t he exactly waiting

for someone? Did he not have a very clear task for himself? Why has he now tried to get rid of everyone? Like in *The Trial*'s illogical sentences, we find here a negotiation between the wish to assert what is right and reasonable and the wish to belong. But, in K.'s reflection on his own desire for freedom, what is senseless is not the world so much as his own stubbornness. K.'s behavior in this scene is perhaps best captured by Camus when he writes about *The Castle* that "Kafka's world is in truth an indescribable universe in which man allows himself the tormenting luxury of fishing in a bathtub, knowing that nothing will come of it."[26]

Short Stories: Subjunctive Tragicomedy

If the absurd arises from the mismatch between human desire and what the world offers, as we have seen in *The Man who Disappeared*, Kafka's very short stories are also often exemplary. A great example lies in Kafka's use of the subjunctive case and conditional clauses. Stories of "if/then" and "if only" appear often in combination with the subjunctive. These are often tragicomic stories, an aspect that aligns them with later absurd literature. Kafka is indeed funny (and from a personal perspective: *laugh-out-loud* funny).[27] There is always a "but" attached to the idea that Kafka is funny, but there should not be. If he is not immediately laugh-out-loud funny for everyone, one may at least ask, with Sonja Boos discussing Gregor Samsa's attempts at getting out of bed: "Who can resist smiling?"[28] Indeed, I think this lack of critical attention to Kafka's humor is a result of a critical attention historically focused on the larger works, such as *The Metamorphosis* and the novels. If there is certainly a lot of humor in those texts as well, it is in his short stories where Kafka is at his funniest. I concentrate here on three tragicomic short stories that tell a developing story of the absurdity – in the sense described by Camus above – of Kafka's subjunctive constructions.

The first story of the three, “Wish to Become a Red Indian” (1912; “Wunsch, Indianer zu werden”), is a one-line fantasy of becoming an American Indian:

> Oh to be a Red Indian [wenn man doch ein Indianer wäre], ready in an instant, riding a swift horse, aslant in the air, thundering again and again over the thundering earth, until you let the spurs go, for there weren’t any spurs, until you cast off the reins, for there weren’t any reins, and you scarcely saw the land ahead of you as close-cropped scrub, being already without horse’s neck and horse’s head![29]

It is a story of speed, seemingly mirroring vorticist paintings. It portrays the longing (see “doch” [if only]) for the (freeing) experience of speed. Everything around one merges and finally disappears. The story in and of itself seems neither particularly tragic nor comedic. Nevertheless, it seems to contain the kernel of a tragedy (especially in that word “doch”) of someone who believes he or she will never achieve the kind of heroic freedom that the fantasy of the American Indian represents. Indeed, might the disappearing horse not be a sign of the fantasy fading as the narrator speaks?[30]

This tragicomedy is spelled out more clearly in “In the Gallery” (1920; “Auf der Galerie”). It suggests, in only two lines but totaling 288 words, that if a girl in the circus would be treated badly a young man would intervene:

> If some frail, consumptive circus rider were being driven in a circle around the ring for months without cease, on a faltering horse, before an unflagging audience, by a remorseless, whip-wielding ringmaster, pirouetting on a horse, throwing kisses, swaying from the waist, orchestra and ventilators into the ever-widening grey future, accompanied by the falling and fresh-rising clapping of applauding hands that are really steam-hammers – perhaps then a young gallery-goer would rush down the long set of steps through all the rows, dash into the ring, and cry ‘Stop!’ through the fanfares of the ever accommodating orchestra. [31]

Kafka paints the picture of a mistreated girl and the young man who wants to save her. But then, in an even longer sentence, we get the tragicomic twist: “But as that is not the way it is […] the gallery-goer lays his head on the railing, and sinking into the final march as into a deep dream, he weeps, without being aware of it.”[32] The ellipses that I inserted here are in the story filled with the care, love, and pride of the circus director for his happy circus rider.

There is no damsel in distress and that means that there is no heroic role for the visitor. Here, as in the fantasy of being an American Indian, life is not like fiction. If only it were.

The story is overly dramatic in its first sentence with the seemingly endless subclauses of horrible torture the girl must endure. The “turn” brings us readers, and especially the not-to-be-hero, back to reality. Like in the previous story, the subjunctive works fantastic here, but if in the other story one is allowed to keep this fantasy alive – even if the disappearance of the horse also keeps reminding the reader of the fact that it is a fantasy – in this story the fantasy is abruptly broken and the reader’s attention is brought to the distraught dreamer. Life doesn’t give us what we want. Kafka’s subjunctive constructions are about fantasies and thwarted dreams, hopes, and expectations. They are a comment, too, on the fictions that structure our fantasies.

If, in these two stories, protagonists can only fantasize about being heroes in worlds that don’t allow them to be, another short story shows what it might be like to be a hero. “For Gentleman-Riders to Think About” (1912; “Zum Nachdenken für Herrenreiter”), again involving a horse, imagines the winner of a steeplechase.[33] As may be expected, the reality of being a winner in Kafka, of a horse race to be precise, is not as good as one imagines. If one thinks about it, so the story says, nothing could tempt one to want to come in first in a horse race. Our friends will either be more occupied by having won money by betting on us than to celebrate our achievement, or they will be too upset for not having placed their bet on us. The losers act like this race didn’t matter anyway and they were unlucky or some injustice had been done to them. To girls – whom the winner is presumed to be interested in – this winner would look only laughable: pompous, yet awkward in not ably dealing with the all the ceremony.[34]

Not only then are heroics out of reach in Kafka’s short stories, remaining fantasies, but the very fantasies are said to be false even if one were to reach such a status. The humor arises

from the frustration of readers' expectations and characters' hopes and dreams. And it arrives from the intervention, especially in the last two stories, of a more distant laconic voice of reason: the narrator telling the kid his dreams will never come true and will suck even if they do. Not unlike the negative prefixes in the first sentence of *The Metamorphosis*, these if/then constructions *ex negativo* show what is not and will not be.

Conclusion: Boundaries of Perception

Kafka's novels and stories seem to rest on the wish to belong, or understand, a foreign system of meaning – another culture in *The Castle* and *The Man who Disappeared*, or the system of law in *The Trial*, or the fantasy heroics in some of the short stories. Hence, his novels are often talked about in terms of quests or detective novels. And this striving is the reason that for Camus, who understands absurd literature as the *embrace* of life's absurdity, Kafka is ultimately "probably not absurd."[35] The absurdity in Kafka's novels seems often a case of foreignness. Kafka's novels, like, as I argue elsewhere, many German modernist novels, start with characters discovering an unfamiliar culture or system.[36] The absurdity derives from a meaningful system outside of them. Kata Gellen has recently, in more detail, made a similar argument about Kafka's animal stories such as *The Burrow*:

> our knowledge has invisible walls: we are limited by our place in the world, which is determined by our species membership. We are mentally incapable of conceiving of a realm external to this, in which our modes of sensation and rules of understanding do not apply, yet we are periodically confronted with bits and pieces of information, fragmentary impressions, and perhaps even partial insights into other worlds. We have no way to order or understand these data; often we do not even sense them properly or fully. They are fundamentally unassimilable to human knowledge even as they exist at the margins of experience.[37]

Thus, she writes about animals and their perception of sound in Kafka's stories that "they do not dissolve meaning; rather, they reveal new horizons for its discovery."[38] As I have argued elsewhere, I think Gellen's argument can be productively extended to Kafka's stories about

humans, that is, beyond *species* membership to *cultural* membership.[39] Kafka’s humans are not presented with the sights and sounds of other species, but those of other cultures. The unfamiliar cultures in which Kafka’s protagonists, especially in his novels, find themselves, then do not present worlds devoid of meaning, but rather new or different ways “of inhabiting space.”[40] Extending Gellen’s argument in this way suggests that it is not merely Kafka’s animal characters that run into the boundaries of perceptual systems, but also his human characters that run into the perceptual boundaries of the cultural systems in which they have grown up. What is absurd in Kafka is not so much the misfit between humanity’s strive for meaning in a meaningless world, but rather the fact that we are (ever more) confronted with new horizons of meaning, different human practices, and, while incapable of assimilating these truly, keep trying. In Kafka, humans, like animals, wish to belong, or at least understand, the foreign, but cannot. Kafka’s stories perceived in this way in terms of the boundaries of perception and understanding thus go back to the Latin derivation of “absurd”: as Peter L. Berger points out: *absurdum* “literally means out of deafness.”[41]

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[1] Kafka, *Castle*, 19. "'Wer seid ihr?' fragte er und sah von einem zum andern. 'Eure Gehilfen', antworteten sie. 'Es sind die Gehilfen', bestätigte leise der Wirt. 'Wie?' fragte K., 'Ihr seid meine alten Gehilfen, die ich nachkommen ließ, die ich erwarte?' Sie bejahten es. 'Das ist gut', sagte K. nach einem Weilchen, 'es ist gut, daß Ihr gekommen seid.'" Kafka, *Schloß*, 31.

[2] Cornwell, *Absurd in Literature*, ch. 7.

[3] Esslin, *Theatre of the Absurd*, 4.

[4] Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus*, 129.

[5] Bennett, *Cambridge Introduction*, 82.

[6] Kafka, *Metamorphosis*, 29. "Als Gregor Samsa eines Morgens aus unruhigen Träumen erwachte, fand er sich in seinem Bett zu einem ungeheueren Ungeziefer verwandelt." Kafka, *Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, 115.

[7] Angelos Koutsourakis's AHRC-funded project at the University of Leeds entitled "Kafkaesque in World Cinema" explores some of these important relations between work and the so-called "Kafkaesque" in cinema.

[8] Kafka, *Complete Stories*, 434-5. Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente II*, 300-302.

[9] Kafka, *Man who Disappeared*, 29. "Im Hause des Onkels gewöhnte sich Karl bald an die neue Verhältnisse. Der Onkel kam ihm aber auch in jeder Kleinigkeit Freundlich entgegen und niemals mußte Karl sich erst durch schlechte Erfahrungen belehren lassen, wie dies meist das erste Leben im Ausland so verbittert." Kafka, *Verschollene*, 54.

[10] Bennett, *Cambridge Introduction*, 75. See also Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus*, 28.

[11] This fragmentation was initially tempered by Max Brod, Kafka's friend and executer of his will, who edited the novels into more coherent texts for publication in the 1920s. Only with the Critical Edition of the novels from 1982 onwards, and new translations based on these soon afterwards, did the fragmentary nature of the unfinished manuscripts become available to a general audience.

[12] Bennett, *Cambridge Introduction*, 84.

[13] Robertson, *Short Introduction*, 45.

[14] Kafka, *Trial*, 5. "Jemand mußte Josef K. verleumdet haben, denn ohne daß er was getan hätte, wurde er eines Morgens verhaftet." Kafka, *Proceß*, 1.

[15] For a great overview of the use of the subjunctive in this first sentence and elsewhere in *The Trial* and Kafka's work (as well as the difficulties of translating it), see Els Andringa, "Kafkas Konjunktiv."

[16] Michael Wood writes: "if the court is wrong to accuse without naming the crime, you must be wrong, for the same reason, to proclaim your innocence." Wood, *Franz Kafka*, 84.

[17] Kafka, *Trial*, 19. "[…] wenigstens bin auch ich zum Teil ihrer Meinung, nur urteile ich über das ganze noch schärfer als Sie, und halte es einfach nicht einmal für was Gelehrtes sondern überhaupt für nichts" Kafka, *Proceß*, 33-34.

[18] Kafka, *Trial*, 82. "Man will die Verteidigung möglichst ausschalten, alles soll auf den Angeklagten selbst gestellt sein. Kein schlechter Standpunkt im Grunde, nichts wäre aber verfehlter als daraus zu folgern, daß bei diesem Gericht die Advokaten für den Angeklagten unnötig sind." Kafka, *Proceß*, 153. In *The Castle* we a find a similar joy in "illogical" statements, such as the repetition (in different forms) of "your assistants bother you" (Kafka, *Castle*, 58; "Die Gehilfen […] sind Ihnen also lästig"; Kafka, *Schloß*, 99).

[19] Robertson, *Short Introduction*, 45.

[20] Esslin, *Theatre of the Absurd*, 4.

[21] Jean Paul Sartre qtd. in Solomon, *Existentialism*, 183.

[22] Kafka, *Castle*, 90. "[D]er Schlitten wartet schon im Hof." Kafka, *Schloß*, 160.

[23] Kafka, *Castle*, 91. "Bis auf den Kutscher, den K. auf die Entfernung hin jetzt in der Dämmerung mehr vermutete, als erkannte, war niemand zu sehn." Kafka, *Schloß*, 161.

[24] Kafka, *Castle*, 91. "'Das kann noch sehr lange dauern' […] 'Was kann denn lange dauern?' […] 'Ehe Sie weggehn werden.'" Kafka, *Schloß*, 162.

[25] Kafka, *Castle*, 95. "da schien es K. als habe man nun alle Verbindung mit ihm abgebrochen und als sei er nun freilich freier als jemals und könne hier auf dem ihm sonst verbotenen Ort warten solange er wolle und habe sich diese Freiheit erkämpft wie kaum ein anderer es könnte und niemand dürfe ihn anrühren oder vertreiben, ja kaum ansprechen, aber – diese Überzeugung war zumindest ebenso stark – als gäbe es gleichzeitig nichts Sinnloseres, nichts Verzweifelteres als diese Freiheit, dieses Warten, diese Unverletzlichkeit." Kafka, *Schloß*, 169. This ties into the debate between Sartre and Camus as discussed by Bennett: "In 1938, Camus wrote of Sartre's La Nausée that it was a philosophical abstraction in which Sartre was unable to attach purpose to the freedom achieved by his characters." Bennett, *Reassessing*, 11.

[26] Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus*, 129.

[27] See also Wallace, "Laughing with Kafka."

[28] Boos, “Reading Gestures,” 829.

[29] Kafka, *Metamorphosis*, 15. “Wenn man doch ein Indianer wäre, gleich bereit, und auf dem rennenden Pferde, schief in der Luft, immer wieder kurz erzitterte über dem zitternden Boden, bis man die Sporen ließ, denn es gab keine Sporen, bis man die Zügel wegwarf, denn es gab keine Zügel, und kaum das Land vor sich als glatt gemähte Heide sah, schon ohne Pferdehals und Pferdekopf.” Kafka, *Drucke zu Lebzeiten,* 33-34.

[30] See also Duttlinger, *Cambridge Introduction*, 23-4.

[31] Kafka, *Hunger Artist*, 18. “Wenn irgendeine hinfällige, lungensüchtige Kunstreiterin in der Manege auf schwankendem Pferd vor einem unermüdlichen Publikum vom peitschenschwingenden erbarmungslosen Chef monatelang ohne Unterbrechung im Kreise rundum getrieben würde, auf dem Pferde schwirrend, Küsse werfend, in der Taille sich wiegend, und wenn dieses Spiel unter dem nichtaussetzenden Brausen des Orchesters und der Ventilatoren in die immerfort weiter sich öffnende graue Zukunft sich fortsetzte, begleitet vom vergehenden und neu anschwellenden Beifallsklatschen der Hände, die eigentlich Dampfhämmer sind – vielleicht eilte dann ein junger Galeriebesucher die lange Treppe durch alle Ränge hinab, stürzte in die Manege, rief das – Halt! durch die Fanfaren des immer sich anpassenden Orchesters.” Kafka, *Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, 262.

[32] Kafka, *Hunger Artist*, 18. “Da es aber nicht so ist […] legt der Galeriebesucher das Gesicht auf die Brüstung und, im Schlußmarsch wie in einem schweren Traum versinkend, weint er, ohne es zu wissen.” Kafka, *Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, 262-3.

[33] Kafka, *Metamorphosis*, 14; Kafka, *Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, 30-31.

[34] Kafka, *Metamorphosis*, 14; Kafka, *Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, 30-31.

[35] Camus, *Myth*, 136.

[36] Peters, “Re-Inhabiting Modernism.”

[37] Gellen, *Kafka and Noise*, 188.

[38] Gellen, *Kafka and Noise*, 194.

[39] Peters, “Review.”

[40] Gellen, *Kafka and Noise*, 194.

[41] Berger, *Redeeming Laughter*, 175. See also Cornwell, *Absurd in Literature*, 3.