

## *Essential Kafka*

### *Josephine the Songstress or The Mouse Folk*

**JOSEPHINE IS THE NAME** of our songstress. Those who have never heard her sing simply haven't experienced the power of song. Everyone who hears her is pulled out of him or herself, transported, and this is yet more of a mystery since our race as a whole has no love for music. Peace and quiet *{Stiller Frieden}* are what we yearn for more than anything—our lives are hard—such is the music that, generally, we love above all others, we just don't have it in us after another long day of work in which we strive to do our best in dispensing with a thousand and one cares, there's just nothing left over with which we might pull ourselves to the distant heights, so far removed, where music comes alive. But we don't generally shed any tears over this, not once do we go so far as to lament our loss, it's just—at least this is my personal opinion on the subject—it's just a minor irrelevancy. There's a certain sort of sly cleverness that kicks in here, one, indeed, that we need terribly: we consider this as being our greatest asset and we use it to laugh off any and all criticism and to console ourselves about everything. Such is our way, such cleverness in all things practical; indeed, it kicks in even should there be some yearning—though there isn't—but if there were to be such a yearning for the sublime happiness *{Glück}* that music may, perhaps, deliver. Only Josephine makes an exception, she loves music and knows how to deliver its power, and she's the only one, when she's gone then music too will disappear—and who knows for how long—right out of the midst of our lives. I've thought about this quite often, essentially what is it about music,<sup>29</sup> how does it come alive and touch us so deeply. After all, we're not particularly inclined towards music, indeed, we tend to be rather adverse, so how can it be that we have any understanding of Josephine's performances?... or, since she contends that we don't understand, why is it that we believe that we do? The simplest answer is quite simply that the beauty of her singing is so powerful that even the greatest antagonism is outdone, such sensibilities crumble in her presence—but this answer is hardly satisfactory, not at all. For if it really were to be true then one would always have to have a feeling for the other-worldliness, that something was sounding forth from out of her throat that we have never heard before, something that we don't, *truth to tell*, even have a

capacity for hearing; that we become capable of hearing it only when Josephine sings, she and she alone, nobody else delivers. But from my vantage I'd have to say that this just isn't so... at least I haven't had such an experience and I haven't been able to observe anyone else experiencing something like this either. In private conversations amongst trusted friends we admit this quite openly, that Josephine's songs aren't, as songs go, anything all that out of the ordinary, there's nothing essentially miraculous about them. And, *is it even song at all?* Despite our fundamental lack in things musical we do have a substantial history that has come down to us about singing; in earlier times our forefathers were musical—there are legends that inform us about all of this and, indeed, even still we have some of these songs though, to be sure, nobody has any idea as to how they're to be sung. I don't know why it is that in the course of centuries we became so thoroughly disinterested in any sort of music, that, indeed, we became fundamentally hostile towards it, perhaps this is due to our particular destiny, that somehow we were chosen for this: that we worship stillness, stepping back within ourselves and not really being committed and, so, in all actuality we don't have much choice in this. But however all of this may be, we still do have *some* premonition of what song is and our premonition, to be perfectly honest, goes against her artistry, what Josephine actually does when she's singing. For, taken in an absolute sense, is this really singing at all—perhaps, indeed, all that she really manages to do is a sort of whistling? And everybody knows whistling inside and out, this is the core artistry of our folk or, rather, it's not even deserving of the name "art," rather it's simply how you would characterize us, this is what we do: a soft kind of whistling with an undercurrent that hisses; and there's really just two sorts: the melancholic, ascetic, dreamy sort that typically is weak and pervasive; and then there's the triumphant, full-bodied tone that tends to have sharp contours. Thus, we're all natural born whistlers and nobody would ever think about labeling *this* as being art; sure, now and again somebody might do a bit of research into this propensity of ours and how it contributes to some particular topic, but in general everybody whistles without even thinking about it and, indeed, without even so much as noticing it and, moreover, it's quite certain that the greater majority don't even know that whistling is the one characteristic that defines who we are most intimately.<sup>30</sup> If, then, if it were to be true that Josephine doesn't sing but just whistles, and indeed, as it seems to me, that her whistling barely exceeds the bounds of the ordinary, that really her powers in whistling don't even extend into the triumphant sort mentioned earlier whereas the whistling of our typical laborer, someone who is quite down to earth

and who whistles the whole day long without any particular effort, that this just goes hand in hand with his earthly travails, well, if all of this were to be true then, indeed, Josephine's purported artistry would be refuted—but now, first and foremost, now we'd have to face up to this riddle as to why it is that her performances are so electrifying! And really, when you get right down to it, it's not merely whistling, this is not everything that Josephine exhibits in her performances—you need only place yourself in the back of the auditorium and listen attentively... or, better yet, test this out in the following manner: if Josephine is singing amongst a group of others and if you should give yourself the task of making her voice out from amongst these others then without fail you won't be able to distinguish anything else but a typical, middle-of-the-road sort of whistling that, at the most, is a bit sweeter or somehow softer and this is the only distinguishing characteristic that you might hear. But then, if you stand there in front of her so it's not merely whistling, there's yet another component that's absolutely required if one is to understand her art properly, namely that you don't merely listen to her, rather you also have to see her. Even if it were to be nothing more than our everyday whistling, still there's this oddity of how she presents herself, the drama and theatrics of her performance—that someone would put on such airs and then do nothing more than what's typical, the ordinary, middle-of-the-road sort of whistling. Cracking pecans doesn't entail any particular artistry, none whatsoever, hence nobody would be so daring as to gather up an audience and then for his performance that he would shell a pound of pecans. But, all the same, if one were to do just this and if one's performance were to be a great success, well then, obviously it couldn't possibly simply be a matter of cracking nuts! Or maybe it does have something to do with nut-cracking but it suddenly has become apparent that there's more to cracking nuts than meets the eye, that we've been overlooking something because we just happen to be so good at it and that only now its innermost essence has been put up on display whereby it is even quite conceivable that this might be a distinct advantage and quite useful, namely that the artist performing such a feat isn't really all that good at cracking nuts to begin with. Perhaps just this is the proper correlation for our appreciation of Josephine's musical performances: that we stand in awe before her for doing something that we do all the time ourselves without being amazed in the least. In any event, we're all on her side, we find ourselves totally 'at one' with her and we agree about this. Once I was present as somebody—as only might be expected—somebody was pointing out to her how our folk in general tend to whistle, and he was quite

modest and matter of fact in how he brought this up, like if someone would have been talking to somebody who is rich and might mention *by the way* that although he isn't rich himself, all the same, he isn't starving, and that by mentioning this one isn't trying to hurt this well heeled lolloper at all, that rather he should go ahead and enjoy his wealth without any worries about it. But for Josephine this was just *too much!*—she got so cheeky, such a superior, condescending smile played upon her lips such as, until then, I had never seen—she whose external demeanor is truly as sweet as sweet can be, that even in our folk where the fair sex always tend towards being affable, Josephine still stands out in her charming amiability... *but now* she seemed downright crude; it may be that due to her heightened sensibilities as an "*Artiste*" she noticed this right away too and, so, she got a better grip on herself. In any event, she denied that there might be any relation whatsoever between her art and whistling and for those who think otherwise all that she has is contempt and, most probably, pure hatred that, naturally, she tries to cover up and she won't even admit it to herself. And it's not as if she did this for her own benefit since these contrarians—to which camp I myself halfway belong—we don't find her performances to be any less amazing than everybody else, we're just as much amongst the overwhelming crowd of her admirers; *but Josephine*, Josephine doesn't want simply that she amaze her audience, rather she wants to amaze us in her own particular manner, amazement in itself doesn't mean a thing to her. And when you take your seat in her auditorium then you understand her position, opposition is only possible at a great distance; sitting there before her it's quite clear that what she's whistling is no whistling. Since whistling belongs amongst our unconscious habits, our second nature as it were, so you might think that people would whistle in her auditorium; after all we feel good in her presence and we tend to whistle whenever we're feeling good; but nobody whistles in her presence, rather, it's as still as still can be—quiet as a mouse—it's as if the peace that we yearn for and which our whistling would disturb, it's as if this peace were to be partially granted to us and, so, we stay silent. Is it her singing that so captivates us... or rather, much more, is it the celebratory sobriety of our stillness that encompasses her weak, little voice? It once happened that some small urchin, an innocent little thing, started into whistling during one of Josephine's performances. Now, it was quite the same as what we were hearing from Josephine there up in front—and totally unconcerned about this unexpected variation in her routine Josephine continued right on in her timid whistling and so here within the public this little chickabiddy having inadvertently forgotten herself was whistling

along too... But you better believe we hissed and whistled this disturbing non-entity back to silence and did so even despite the fact that this wouldn't really have been necessary for it's quite certain that the little thing would have been happiest if she could have crept away on all fours and hidden herself in some hole due to her shame and *angst* whilst in the meantime Josephine's vocal prowess started into whistling triumphantly and due to her self-satisfaction she became practically ecstatic, what with her arms splayed out to her sides and her throat that couldn't possibly be extended any further. In any event, all of this is simply standard fare for Josephine—any minor irrelevancy, some chance event, the most picayune disorder or bit of unruliness, a creaking noise coming from somewhere high up in the parquet, somebody who's gritting their teeth, even the slightest malfunction in the lighting, she uses all of these to heighten the effect of her performance, in her opinion she's singing to deaf ears anyway—though there's never any deficiency in spirited enthusiasm or applause—but then, in respect to any real understanding in the particular way that Josephine means it, well, this is just something that she's learned to do without and so all of these disturbances simply play into her hand, everything that conspires against the absolute purity of her voice, all of this is an easy battle, indeed it's no battle at all, simply by means of this contrast she comes off victorious, all of this helps her along to wake up the crowd, not that this would teach them any real understanding but still it teaches respect, it gives them a premonition of what's at stake. And it wouldn't be beyond the pale that one might think that she—just for instance—that she herself had somehow had a hand in instigating that the little tike formerly mentioned might pipe up *if only* this wasn't contradicted by her dreamlike, confused state that hasn't the least bit of concern nor any respect for doing anything in accordance to the normal strictures of cause and effect, rather she's always acting *the Artiste*. And if small co-incidences play into her hand how much more so would the great. Our life is so terribly beset by strife, every day brings its share of rude surprises, fears, hopes and shocking outrages—it's simply impossible that any one of us might bear it, fortunately the individual gains strength by being carried along day and night upon the shoulders of the community, but even so it's terribly bleak and difficult, often enough millions of our folk tremble beneath the weight of the burden that is placed upon just one. Then Josephine intuits that her time has come. Already she's standing there, the tender soul, there's a spot beneath her breast that in rapport to the *angst* of the times starts to vibrate, it's as if all of her powers were gathered up within her piteous song, as if everything that wasn't directly involved in her expressing

her song, all extraneous concerns, powers and possibilities were removed, that she's totally stripped, sacrificed and under the mercy and protection of angelic beings, as if she were so exposed that during this interval of her rapture whilst her inner being is so taken up in expressing song, well, a cold draft of air that simply might be passing by would be all that it would take to kill her. But it's precisely in such moments as these with this spectacle before us, it's then that we contrarians—and we're the first to admit our contrariness—it's now that we can't help but to remark to one another: She can't even manage to whistle decently, just look at how she winds herself into knots and *not* that she'd be singing—let's not talk about song—but just so that she might force out a smidgen of piping, the regular sort of whistling that's heard even in the most rustic parts of our homeland. So it seems to us, but, as I already mentioned, this is simply a momentary impression and one that is a necessary preamble but also one that passes very quickly. Already we're being enveloped by the receptive feelings of the multitude, the warmth of the crowd with one body pressed up upon the next, all so timid and listening in rapt attention and with bated breath. And that a crowd gather, us—we whose lives are always being thrown about this way and that, always in a great rush to get somewhere, though not that we'd have any clear conception as to what all the ruckus really means—and all that Josephine generally needs to do is throw back her head, open up her little mouth halfway, her eyes resting upon some visage up in the heights and, so, she assumes her stance that announces to us that *now* she's ready to sing. She can do this wherever she likes, it doesn't have to be in a spot that's particularly accessible, any hide-away will do, some corner that she's picked out just as her mood strikes her, some spur of the moment decision, any spot is as good as the next. The news that she's ready to sing travels fast and in no time the procession of listeners is streaming in. Now from time to time, indeed, there are hindrances that crop up; it's during times of calamity that Josephine loves to sing most of all and it's even then that our cares and urgent concerns become as wide-ranging as they can be and they drive us into paths that are utterly diverse; even with the best of wills it's not always possible to assemble a crowd on a moment's notice in accordance to Josephine's mood and, so, she's left standing there in her great pose for a longer period without having a sufficient audience... then, indeed, then she becomes enraged, livid—she'll start stamping her feet and cursing, the things that she says! unladylike in the extreme, indeed, she even bites. But, all the same, even this doesn't wreck havoc on her reputation, rather than try to talk sense into her everyone does their utmost to fulfill her

expectations, messengers are dispatched to expedite the gathering of an audience; but this isn't done openly, it's all kept hush-hush, one notices that sentries have been posted at various intersections and these clever accomplices have a special way of winking at you—that you'd better get moving a bit quicker—and all of this happens behind the scenes until finally a sufficient crowd has come together. Now, what is it that spurs our folk on, that we make every effort in satisfying Josephine's whims? This question isn't any easier to answer than the underlying question to which it's easily tied, to wit: What is it about Josephine's songs, why is it that we're so captivated by them? The first question could be struck out all together as being totally subordinate to the second, *if only* we were able to affirm that our folk really is committed to Josephine—be it because of her songs or due to whatever else—in an unqualified way. But then, this isn't the case either, there's hardly anything to which our folk is committed in an unqualified manner, we hardly know what we're to think of such limitless adoration; our folk, these critters that, indeed, love that sort of cleverness which, in itself, is quite harmless: childish whisperings, the chitter chatter that proves how well we're able to bring our lips into motion—how far is it from us that we'd ever say anything bad—such a folk is simply incapable of devoting itself to anything without *some* qualification... and Josephine has a feeling for all of this, she's nobody's fool and, indeed, it's even *precisely this* that she's up against, fighting against it with all of the strength she can muster with her weak throat. But now, naturally, one also mustn't go too far in such general platitudes, one always has to reserve one's judgment and, verily, our folk is devoted to Josephine, just not unconditionally. For instance, nobody would ever find it allowable to laugh at Josephine. One is permitted to admit this much: there's an awful lot about Josephine that tends towards the comic, in and of itself we all enjoy having a good laugh, despite all of the misery and absurdity of our lives we're always ready, at least to a certain extent, to crack a good joke about whatever it ever may be, but we don't ever crack jokes on Josephine's account. Sometimes I get the impression that our folk conceives its relationship to Josephine in the following manner: that she, this fragile, attention dependent, extra-ordinary—and in her own opinion extra-ordinary due to her singing—this entity, Josephine, would be entrusted to us and that it would be incumbent upon us that we take good care of her; whatever underlies all of this probably isn't particularly clear to anybody but still this fact remains apparent nonetheless. One simply doesn't make jokes about someone over whom you are entrusted; you can laugh about yourself but not about your fledgling, laughing about such a being would be

tantamount to breaking your pledge, a dereliction of duty; it is the extreme in maliciousness when those amongst us having malice inflict upon Josephine the following observation, an observation that I've heard from time to time: that when Josephine comes before us we lose our capacity to laugh. Thus it is that our folk cares for Josephine in the manner of a father who has taken on the burden of bringing up a child, a child whose arms are stretched out towards you, one doesn't know whether these hands are pleading or exacting. The overriding concern is unavoidable: do we have it in us that we tend our foster child as is required? But, in all actuality, in this particular instance we fulfill our responsibilities impeccably. I certainly could never do it alone, nor could anybody else do so as an individual, but what nobody is capable of doing alone we do manage—and most readily manage—to accomplish as a community. To be sure, the difference in power between the folk as a whole and their fledgling is so immense, it's already quite sufficient when we pull the tender thing within the warmth bestowed by our community, already this alone suffices and our fledgling is protected. Admittedly, nobody would dare to discuss such things with Josephine. "*Phoey* on your protection" she'd pipe up. "Yea, yea: whistle as you will"—that's what we'd think, but we'd never say it. And beyond all of this it's not truly a refutation when she acts so rebelliously, much rather this is simply what's natural and what one should expect from a child, this is the way that children demonstrate their thanks and, then too, it's in the nature of a father that he simply ignores the whole thing and goes his merry way. Now, there's a lot more in play here that's quite difficult to explain simply in hindsight to the relation sketched above, this relation between our folk and Josephine. Namely, Josephine is wont to take a position that is diametrically the opposite to this, she believes that it falls upon her and her alone, that *she* protects us, the community. The way that she sees it is that it's only through her songs that we are to be saved from all of the evil inherent in our political and economic reality, it's nothing short of this that underlies her singing, and even if it should be true that these songs are incapable of driving away and dispelling all of our misfortune and misery {*Unglück*}, the sad lot of our destiny, well at least they will give us the strength so that we might bear them. Indeed, she doesn't say it quite like this, nor would she say anything else but this, point of fact, she hardly talks at all, she remains silent amongst the blathering bimboes; but still, this is the fire that blazes from out of her eyes, this is what lurks behind her tight-lipped glare; but by us there's hardly a soul who can hold his mouth shut and refrain from chattering, but she can do this, it's writ large on her features. By every piece of

bad news, and on most days the bad news far outweighs the good, any number of horrible reports flow in upon us and each one of them overrunning the previous, and all of them born along amongst an awesome amount of lies and half-truths, when suddenly she gets the urge to rise up to the occasion—though on most days all of this just weighs her down closer to the floorboards—but now she's pulled herself up and is extending her throat out, she's trying to get an encompassing view over her flock just as if she were a shepherdess overseeing her sheep before an approaching storm. Certainly, there are also children who rebel against the ways of the world in such a wild, uncontrolled manner, but with Josephine this has a foundation that has a bit more substance. Though, indeed, she doesn't save us, nor does she supply us with any powers that might be decisive, it's all too easy to play the role of savior when you're dealing with such a folk like us: we're used to suffering, well acquainted with death, not given to pretense, fast in our decision-making, only apparently angst-ridden in this atmosphere of great daring and heroics in which we're constantly making do, living out our lives and, beyond all of this, our fertility is as legend as our audaciousness; it is so easy—as I've said—that one plays oneself off as the savior for such a folk, a folk that somehow or other manages to save itself though not, let us never forget, not without terrible sacrifices over which the historians, and in general we really do neglect doing all that much in viable historical research, the historians, as I say, those who preserve the actual in their memories of the past: their blood runs cold and simply paralyzes them due to the shocking horror, all of the horrors through which we've come! But still it is true that in the times of our greatest despair, this is when we listen most attentively to Josephine's voice. All of the forebodings, the threats that are gathering above us, all of this tends to make us calmer and more humble, we're more easily molded and responsive to Josephine's commanding presence, we're more than happy to gather together and press up against one another and even the more so due to the circumstance that our gathering is far removed from the major dilemma that torments us... It's as if we'd want a quick—true, all too true, speed is always paramount, this is something that Josephine is wont to forget all too often—a quick pick me up, to drink a cup from the fountain of peace before venturing out into the calamities of battle. It's not so much a vocal performance as it is an assemblage of the populace, an assemblage in which except for the slight whistling coming from center stage up front, besides this it's totally silent, the hour is far too serious for any idle gossip! Such a relation is not what is needed and it's impossible that this, indeed, would ever satisfy Josephine, nor is this even something that might

be maintained for long. Despite all of her nervous anguish that overcomes her, filling her with unhappiness due to her position that has never been clarified, there's a great deal that she, blinded by her self-consciousness, doesn't see, and it doesn't take all that much effort for her blind spot to be enlarged considerably, there's a swarm of her adherents who are constantly flattering her, egging her on, and in doing this they perform a useful function though, to be sure, all of this happens off to one side and out of the limelight, that she might sing for them in some remote corner, and were it not for them it's certain that she'd never have the nerve to pull off the sacrifice needed to sing, that she do so even despite the enormity of the undertaking. And it's not as if it were all for nothing for then her artistic performance doesn't remain unnoticed. Despite the fact that we're consumed with matters that are wholly '*other*' and that our stillness is not simply due to our devoted appreciation of hearing her sing, that there are quite a few of us who don't even cast our eyes her way, rather there are so many whose faces are pressed into the fur of their neighbor, and so it seems as if Josephine's performance was all for nothing, that her great effort would be futile, all the same one cannot deny it, something does force its way through, something of her whistling inevitably does strike us. Such a whistling that rises up where everyone else is required to remain silent, this just about comes off as a messenger of the folk to the individual, Josephine's diaphanous whistling right into the midst of the dead seriousness<sup>31</sup> of the decisive decisions, this is almost a metaphor for the impoverished nature of our folk's existence in the midst of the tumult of a hostile world, a world that, simply, is overbrimming with enemies. Josephine makes her stand, this excuse of a voice, this nothingness, this abysmal execution asserts itself and creates a path to us—it does one good to reflect upon this; were we to have a real artist, someone who actually *could* sing, if ever such a one might appear amongst us, it's quite certain that we wouldn't be able to bear it in times like these and with one voice we'd denounce the senselessness of such a performance. May Josephine be protected from ever recognizing this fact, the fact that simply by listening to her, this itself proves that her artistic performance isn't really song. Most probably she has some premonition of this—why else would it be that she's so insistent in denying that we'd be listening to her; but she always sings anyway, she whistles her tunes in spite of her premonition. But, all the same, there is yet a consolation for her for, indeed, to a certain extent we really do listen, probably in a similar manner as one would listen to a genuine artist, she achieves results that such an artist would be vain to attempt in our presence and that are only to be achieved quite specifically by

means that are insufficient. This, very probably, this is connected to the way that our lives are structured. In our folk nobody has any experience of youth, there's barely even any time for being a toddler. Now and again efforts are made in this direction, one should really let the children be children, they need their own special freedom, their own considerations, a protected space, they have a right to a carefree existence, a bit of romping about, some rolling and tumbling, a little playtime—everybody likes to agree with this, we all do what we can to bring this about, it's a grand promotion and there's practically nobody who says anything to the contrary, there's basically nothing that is worth promoting if this isn't—but, then too, there's also nothing that's so impossible to realize, such contradicts the reality of our lives; one agrees wholeheartedly with the promotion, one attempts to do what one can to fulfill the good sense that is inherent in it but before you know it everything has reverted back to the way it was before. Our life, simply, is as it is; a child, just as soon as it's learned to move about a little and as soon as it can differentiate amongst its surroundings, so it has to take care of itself just like an adult; all of the areas in which—due to the economic realities that govern our lives—we are forced to live our lives all scattered about, well, such a space is too big, our enemies are way too numerous, all of the dangers are beyond our powers of calculation... there's just no way that we could keep our children apart, secluded from the fight for survival, if we even were to attempt to do so this itself would mean their premature end. Beyond all of this, so sad as all of the previous is, there's yet another factor, something a bit more uplifting, the fertility of our tribe. Each generation—and every one of them is bounteous—each presses upon the next and drives them forth; the children simply don't have any time in which they might be children. It may well be so that with other folk the children are carefully tended, that schools are built for them, that the little darlings stream into these schools on a daily basis, that they're heralded as the future of the race, looking up beautifully towards the visage *{Anblick}* of the patriot,<sup>32</sup> so in such circumstances it's always the same children attending school for a longer period of time, going to school and coming back from school. We don't have any schools but in practically no time at all there come hoards and hoards of our children, you can't see any end to them, they come hissing or peeping for so long as they haven't learned how to whistle, they come propelled forward, waltzing along or rolling forth until they've learned how to run properly, clumsily they feel their way about through thick and thin until they've trained their eyes to see things properly—*our children!* And it's not as it was with the formerly mentioned schools, over and over the same children in

attendance, no no—it's always new ones, never ending, not even pausing, barely has a new child appeared and it's no longer a child, there are already new faces that are forcing their way through from behind, an undifferentiated mass in their teeming multitude and their hurry, pink in their blessed happiness {*Glück*}. Indeed, no matter how beautiful all of this may be and despite how envious others may be, and rightfully so, all the same there's simply no way that we would be able to provide our children with a viable childhood, one that is real. Naturally, there are consequences. There's a certain ever-present, not to be liquidated childishness that permeates our folk; this exists in stark contradiction to that which we hold as being our best trait: our practical matter-of-factness and considerable know-how which rises above all deceit. We often act in ways that are totally and utterly ridiculous and, indeed, precisely like children we do things that are crazy, letting loose with our assets in a manner that is bereft of all rationality, prodigious in our celebrations, partaking in a light-headed frivolousness that is divorced from all sensibility, and often enough all simply for the sake of some small token of fun, so much do we love having our small amusements. And even though, naturally, the extent of our power of having such childish joys is no longer as fulfilling as is the case with children, all the same it is certain that there's yet a bit of this that remains. Isn't it, perhaps, isn't it just this childishness of our folk from which Josephine, too, is profiting? But our folk isn't only childish, to a certain extent we also age prematurely, childhood and old age mix themselves differently with us than by others. We don't have any youth, we jump right away into maturity and, then, we remain grown-ups for too long and as a consequence to this there's a broad shadow of a certain tiredness and a sort of hopelessness that colors our essential nature, a nature that as a whole is otherwise so tenacious and permeated by hope, strong hope. This, no doubt, this is related to why we're so disinclined towards music—we're too old for music, so much excitement, so much passion doesn't sit well with our heaviness; with a wink our tired constitutions part ways from the music lovers, we've pulled ourselves back and find our contentment in whistling—a bit of whistling now and then, this is what is right for us. And who knows as to whether, even yet, whether there might still be some talent for music that lurks within us... if there should be such the character of our folk would have to suppress it, we would never allow its development within our midst. On the other hand Josephine can go ahead do what she pleases, whether it's whistling or if it should be singing or whatever she might want to name it—call it what you will, this doesn't disturb us, rather this is just what we need, we're quite able to carry this

along—if there should be something of music within all of this, well, it has been reduced to a certain minimum, there have been allowances made for keeping up with a certain amount of our musical tradition, just as long as this doesn't have any real impact upon us, nothing that might be a burden and weigh us down. But Josephine brings to us, a folk that is tuned in this manner, something more. At her concerts, and most especially during troubled times, there's only a small few who take any interest in the songstress herself, such as she is—perhaps there's a fairly large group up there in the front rows who are curious as regards how she manages to pucker her lips, how she forces the air out from between her dainty little teeth, that they experience a bit of awe and marvel over how the tone fades away and how she is able to use this transient dissolution to her own advantage, how she practically dies, putting herself out and thereby firing herself up for her subsequent performance, her song that becomes ever the less understandable as it progresses, but the essential mass of the populace—this is very clear to see—the multitude have retreated into themselves. Here in the meager pauses between their battles the folk finds itself in a dream state, it's as if the limbs of the individual were finally relaxed, as if those who are bereft of peace and calm were finally allowed to throw themselves upon the great bed of warmth of the folk where, then, they might stretch themselves. And within these dreams Josephine's whistling rings out here and there—she calls this pearling, we call it stuttering—but in any event it belongs here more than anywhere else, this is its place where it might be received as, then, music hardly ever finds any particular attentiveness bestowed upon it, there's just nobody out there waiting for the next great song. There's something of the poverty of our shortened childhood in this, something of what has been lost and of the bliss that we'll never be able to find again... but there's also something of our active day-to-day existence, something of the small, inconceivable gaiety that is yet there and which refuses to die—and all of this, truly, all of this is not to be spoken using the great tones of brass instruments, rather it requires a light touch, a whisper, an intimate trust that sometimes talks a bit hoarsely. Naturally, it's a whistling—how else? Whistling is the language in which we speak, though there's many a soul who whistles away for the entirety of his or her long life and doesn't even once know it, but here whistling has become freed from the chains of our daily lives, the restrictions that life forces upon us and, so, this frees us too—if only for a little while. This is why we never wanted to miss these performances. Should it perhaps be that in this manner Josephine was right after all when she made her claim that she infuses new powers into us during troubled times? How else could

one explain it?—Josephine's contingent of flatterers piped up in their uncritical impertinence—how else was one to explain the great rush of the public, and especially under such dire circumstances that threatened us, a rush that, indeed, sometimes would prevent us from being able to mount a sufficient defense, that we do so in a timely manner! Now, the latter point is quite right but certainly *this* doesn't belong amongst Josephine's claims to fame, and most particularly not when one adds on that when her concerts were unexpectedly disrupted by an assault from our enemies and, indeed, there would be any number of casualties on our side, that many of us had to lay down our lives for the defense—and Josephine, then, she who was totally responsible and who bore the guilt, indeed it might even have been her whistling itself that attracted our enemy's attention and drew him our way, Josephine was always in the safest spot and she was also the first to disappear, whisked away hurriedly and quietly amongst her protecting contingent of admirers. But this too, everybody knows that this, fundamentally, is just the way it is and all the same this doesn't slow anyone down the next time around, whenever and wherever Josephine may get carried away and express her devotion to music, taking it into her head to rise up and give us another of her performances. From this—for this, indeed, is something that is extreme—from this one could make the deduction that Josephine's position is one that basically stands outside of the law, that she is permitted to do whatever she pleases and that everything will be forgiven. If this really were to be the case then Josephine's contentions would be totally understandable—yes, one could to a certain extent see in this freedom that the folk would have bestowed upon her, in such an extra-ordinary, uniquely privileged, this bestowal that—*truth to tell*—contradicts what the law requires, one could see a confirmation of the fact that, just as Josephine asserts, the folk doesn't understand anything at all of what she's about, that it stands helplessly in awe before her artistry, that it is unworthy and abashed by its incapacity and that as recompense for this 'wrong' that it has inflicted upon her, that all of these misunderstandings might be balanced out—or at least it strives to balance them out—that just as her art extends beyond their capacities of conceptualization, so too her person and her wishes are placed beyond their authority: that, in short, she is immune from the commands and from the powers of the ruling authority. Now, indeed, *this* isn't right—utterly and totally not; perhaps as individuals our folk is liable to capitulate to Josephine's whims all too quickly but just as our folk doesn't capitulate to anyone at all in an unconditional manner, so too it doesn't do so for her. And it's quite easy to prove this. Already for quite some time, perhaps

even right off from the beginning of her self-promotion as an *artiste*, Josephine has fought for the privilege of being excused from doing any other work other than her singing—that she should be released from all of the cares regarding the earning of one's daily bread and, likewise, from everything else that is somehow related to our struggle for survival, and that all of this should be placed, most probably, upon the shoulders of the entire community, upon our folk as a whole. There are idealists, people who are quick to grasp at the spirit—I do believe that even yet there are a few such amongst us—who simply due to the bold extravagance and oddity of such an assertion, that this spirited boldness all alone would be enough to convince them of the inner justification of such a stance. Well, our folk draws its own conclusions and doesn't waste a whole lot of time in calmly speaking its mind: *No way José*. It also doesn't spend much time or effort in attempting to refute the principles upon which her contention is grounded. For instance, Josephine might point out that all of the effort required in her taking care of her subsistence needs, all of this work simply detracts from her being able to train her voice, that her efforts, indeed, in doing this other work are relatively minor if you compare it to the efforts that are required for her singing, but that, all the same, this robs her of the possibility of recovering in an appropriate manner after all of the exertions that her singing requires and, then too, that she needs to strengthen herself so that she might reach ever new heights in her performances; in short—that she's stretched herself right to the edge of her capacities and that under such circumstances she will never be able to attain the heights that, otherwise, she would be able to attain. The folk give her a hearing—it all goes in one ear and right out the other. This folk of ours, an entity that often enough is so easily swayed, sometimes we aren't to be budged at all, not even the smallest bit. Our refusal is sometimes so harsh and abrasive that Josephine herself is staggered by it... she seems to be coming to terms with it, she continues along doing her work just like everybody else, and she also continues right along with her singing doing as well as she's able, but just for a little while, then she renews her struggle with new found powers—and for this there appears to be a reserve that's infinite. Now, it's really all too clear, Josephine isn't really and truly striving after that, what she has said literally in her words. She is, after all, a rational being, and she's not a bit shy about doing her fair share of the work—just as none of us is adverse to working, our folk has always been known as being exceptionally industrious. Indeed, she'd go on doing her work and living her life as normal even if we were to give in to her request, her work doesn't really interfere with her singing and her singing

wouldn't be improved, not one whit, it wouldn't become any more beautiful... no, what she's up to now is just another sort of publicity stunt, she's looking for something that demonstrates her uniqueness, something that will persevere throughout the ages, something that would lift her out from *the normal* in recognition of her artistic achievement. Whereas she seems to be capable of achieving most everything else, this stubbornly resists, there's no giving in here, there's not even any wiggle room, none at all. Perhaps she shouldn't have ventured down this road in the first place, perhaps she's finally become aware that this was a big mistake right from the get-go but now there's just no way back, reversing course would carry a stigma and be called: *being untrue to oneself*... now she has to stand or fall with this, her fate has become enmeshed with her petition. If she had any real enemies—as she says—then they could simply stand back and observe the battle without even having to lift a finger, then it would just be an amusement. But she doesn't have a single enemy and even if it is true that there may be a few of us contrarians who object to this or that, that we do have a few minor criticisms, all the same there's certainly no one who enjoys entering into this particular fray with her. Indeed, we steer clear of the whole topic since in respect to this our position is simply as firm as ice, nobody wants to be a judge in such a frigid matter, we're hardly ever to be found putting ourselves into such a position. And even if as regards this matter such a cold judgment is all that can be expected, nonetheless the very idea that our folk would relate to itself in such a cold manner, this precludes the possibility of anyone finding any joy in stating what's obvious. What we're dealing with here—and no matter from which side you might look at it, whether from Josephine's petition or if it should be from our side of denial—in either case it's not really the matter itself that's at issue but, more so, the basic idea that our folk might cut itself apart from itself and throw up such an impenetrable wall and, indeed, all the more impenetrable when you consider that Josephine is one of us, that we relate to her as a father and, indeed, as more than a father, as someone who is humbly taking care of its tender fledgling. Now, if there were to be one individual rather than the whole of our folk placed in such a position one might very well come to the belief that such a father figure would simply start giving in to all of Josephine's demands so that finally, after having allowed her far more than ever would be justified, finally a limit would have to appear all on its own, that by always saying "yes" to her unreasonable requests, by always allowing her more and more rope with which she might hang herself, well, sooner or later she'd reach the far end of her tether and the matter would become as clear as day; in short: that by giving in in

such an exorbitant manner the final refusal would be sped up and it would then resound with a short, crisp finality that couldn't be mistaken. Now, certainly, this isn't an accurate portrayal of how this relation is structured, our folk hasn't any need of such clever tactics and, beyond this, our respect for Josephine is long-standing and couldn't be any more earnest and, moreover, Josephine's request is so blatantly black and white that any child you might ask wouldn't have the least bit of hesitation in telling you what the outcome would be; but in spite of all of this it may well be that Josephine already has a grasp of this matter, that she has a clear premonition of all of this and that this simply plays into it, leaving a bitter aftertaste on top of the indignity of our refusal. But, be this as it may, whether she has such a premonition or not, this doesn't instill any fear into her or keep her from plunging into this battle. Indeed, as of late she's even intensified her attack... whereas before she was content to pursue her objective merely through verbal means, just through words, now she's starting to expand her repertoire, extending her fight into domains that she believes may be more efficacious, but it's our opinion that her new tactics are more likely to backfire right back in her face and prove to be more dangerous for herself. There are many of us who believe that Josephine is becoming so adamant about this whole escapade because she's beginning to feel old, that she hasn't all that much time left before her voice will start to weaken and, thus, it's high time that she enter into this last decisive battle for achieving the recognition that's due. But I don't believe it. Josephine wouldn't be Josephine if this were to be true. For her there's no such thing as "getting old," and her voice will never weaken. If she's demanding something so what's behind it all are inner principles, she'd never allow herself to be swayed by any external considerations. She's grasping for the highest wreath not because it so happens that it's momentarily hanging a bit lower, rather simply because it is *the ultimate*—if it should lie within her powers she'd hang it higher yet. Such a noble regard for the spiritual doesn't, however, keep her from stooping down and using means that are most base. Her right to do just as she pleases, this is something about which she's never had any doubts. What difference does it make which means she uses just as long as she's able to obtain her objective—and, indeed, particularly when you consider that the way she judges the world there's simply no way to get there if she were to restrict herself to doing things in the ways that are respected. Perhaps it's even for this reason that she's switched in her tactics and no longer pursues her goal merely from the realm of song, that rather she's shifted to an arena that is less dear. Her circle of admirers has been letting it be known that Josephine has a definite

feeling that she's able to sing in such a manner that the entirety of our folk in all of its divisions—and even right into the most entrenched opposition—everyone would find real pleasure in hearing her... and she's not meaning "real pleasure" in the typical sense of our folk, our folk has always asserted to have found pleasure in listening to Josephine; rather she's meaning pleasure in a sense all her own, pleasure in the sense of her striving. But, she's quick to add on: since there's just no way that she might ever prove to be false to that which is highest, nor could she possibly stoop to a level that would flatter the commoners, well, matters are simply going to have to remain just as they are. But then, in respect to her battle of becoming free from doing any work, here things are different; indeed, this too is basically a fight over her song but in this fight she's not limited to the immediate tools of her trade, her most valuable weapons, rather there are other means available here and it's for this reason—I believe that this, perhaps, is the line that her reasoning takes—that she's quite able to use means that are really ugly. So, for example—there's this rumor going around that Josephine intends upon shortening her *coloratura*... Now, I've never even noticed any *coloratura* in her singing and in general the voices of our folk tend towards being rough and untamed; our nature probably precludes any training that would allow for such refinement... but now Josephine is threatening to shorten her *coloratura*, not that they'd be eliminated entirely, just shortened. It's quite likely that she's followed through on this though I can't say that I've noticed any particular differences in the way that she sings versus how it used to be. Our folk as a whole has continued on listening just as we listened earlier; there haven't been any comments made as regards the *coloratura* and we haven't altered our stance in the least as regards her petition—indeed, nothing seems to have changed. Just as Josephine has always been so charming in her bearing {*Gestalt*}, so too—there's no denying it—her thinking is also, often enough, quite charming. Thus, for instance, after one of her performances with the abbreviated *coloratura*—as if her resolution, really, had been all too hard on us—so she announced that next time around she'd resume doing her full repertoire, a full-blown concert with all of the extras. But, then again, right after the next concert she changed her mind once again and declared that from here on out there wouldn't be any *coloratura* at all and that this was her final, irrevocable decision and, moreover, she didn't even want to discuss the matter any further. Now, the folk listened along to all of these clarifications, decisions and counter-decisions just like it always pays attention to the tantrums of a young child... we all wished for the best outcome but none of this seemed to have any connection to reality.

But Josephine wouldn't let up. Next thing you know she's claiming to have injured her foot whilst working and this injury would make it extremely difficult for her to stand during her performances and since it was necessary for her to sing standing up, well, so now she doesn't have any other choice other than shortening her concerts. Despite the circumstance that she'd now come limping to center stage and that she allowed her entourage to help her along, despite all of this there wasn't a single one of us who believed that she had really hurt herself. Although we're all quite willing to admit that Josephine is a bit more sensitive than the rest of us, all the same as a folk we're very well known for being exceptional in our industriousness, we're hard workers one and all and Josephine, no matter what she says, Josephine is one of us. If everyone were to start limping about every time he or she would scrape up their knee, well, we'd all be limping about constantly. Now, whether or not she allows herself to be led about by her admirers and no matter how often she appears before us in such a piteous manner, we don't let any of this have the least effect on how much we admire her performances, we go on listening to her singing exactly the same as always, with thankfulness and rapture... and we don't make a big deal out of the length or brevity of her performance.

Since she's not able to go on limping forever she discovers something else—sometimes she claims exhaustion, sometimes she says that she's "not in voice," and sometimes she claims that she's just too weak. Besides her singing we now get to enjoy these theatrics! We take note of how her admiring entourage is encouraging her backstage, they're all pleading with her and practically down on their knees begging her to step forward and sing. She says that she'd really like to do so but she can't. They all do their best to console her, they do everything possible to flatter her, they practically pick her up and carry her forward to the spot where she's known to appear, the spot where she's wont to perform and it's there that the crowd has gathered. Finally, and amidst an inexplicable outbreak of tears, finally she gives in, but then despite her best intentions and just as she's about to start into her song—limp, her arms hanging down at her sides, not splayed out as they typically would be but rather hanging down as if they were dead appendages, and at seeing them one easily gets the impression that somehow they've shrunk—and just then as she's drawing in her first breath... it's obvious that she can't manage, her head jerks to one side and in the last moment she crumbles before us. But then at the very last moment, indeed, she's managed to pull herself together again and she's singing... I don't believe that it sounds any different

than the usual, perhaps if one has an ear for distinguishing such subtleties, perhaps one might hear a bit more enthusiasm, a little more excitement that blends in quite well. And then, after she's finished she's a good deal less tired than when she began, it's with a firm step that she distances herself from us—that is if you call the way she pitter patters about as possibly having any firmness—she turns down all the assistance that is being offered her by her contingent; it's with a cold stare that she testily examines the crowd that respectfully draws itself back, making way for her exit.

That's how her last performance ended but the most recent news is that her gala encore has fallen through totally, she didn't even show her face, she's disappeared entirely. Not only are her admirers out searching for her, there's a goodly number of us who are out looking for her too—it's all for naught, she's disappeared entirely, she won't sing any more, she won't even allow us so much as to beg her for a performance, she's left us completely in the lurch. It's odd how poorly her reasoning functions, this clever *artiste*, how mistaken and how contradictory—one would have to believe that she doesn't reason at all, that rather she's merely being driven on by her destiny... a destiny that amongst us can only forebode ill. She has removed herself from practicing her art, she herself has destroyed the power that enabled her to take charge over our inner being. How could she ever have attained this ability seeing as how she understands so little about us, the depths of our soul. She's hidden herself away and won't sing—but our folk, ever calm, without showing the slightest sign of disturbance, practically in the guise of the master—a mass that is at one with itself and essentially an entity that despite all appearances to the contrary, an entity that can only give gifts to others but is never able to receive any, not even from the likes of Josephine, our folk continues along its path.

As regards Josephine there's no hope left, her time is over and I'm already able to see the last word regarding her existence—the last dying whistle of her tune as it fades into silence. She's merely a small episode in the never-ending saga of our folk, a bit of history, and we'll be able to rise above our loss, our folk shall continue on. But then, it won't be that easy—how are we to assemble together in total silence? Indeed, we weren't all that silent even when she was with us... was her actual whistling louder and more lively than our memory of it... am I saying anything in posing such a riddle? And was it ever anything more than a memory even when she still lived, rather isn't it much more the case that our folk in its wisdom, our folk rated her song so

highly even due to this, because it was something that bespoke what is immortal, something that we'd never lose. Perhaps then, perhaps we won't be missing her all that much. But Josephine, Josephine who has now been released from all of our earthly travails—travails that lie in wait for anyone who dares to lift him or herself up from out of the mundane—it is with joy that she shall become lost in the countless multitude who make up our heroes, the heroes of our folk; and soon, seeing as how we're such awful historians, soon she shall be forgotten along with all of her brothers and sisters... it seems that there's just no limit as to what we're capable of forgetting.

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<sup>29</sup> *"wie es sich mit der Musik eigentlich verhält"*

<sup>30</sup> *"die gar nicht wissen daß Pfeifen zu unseren Eigentümlichkeiten gehört."*

<sup>31</sup> *"mitten in den schweren Entscheidungen"*—see endnote #4 regarding the word *"schwer,"* page 64.

<sup>32</sup> "And after this, when it's time to be sent to school, so they encourage that the teachers be particularly sharp in their attentions to their childrens' moral upbringing, that this task is yet more urgent than the care lavished on the reading skills and how well one plays the lyre. The teachers, thus, respect this desire and once the children have learned how to read and are able to understand the written word as well as music, which is taught first, then they are given at their desks the poetry of the very best poets, that these poems are read and learnt by heart – and in these poems there are contained not only many lessons in righteousness and much clarification but also high praise and great admiration for the ablest men of yesteryear, so that the adolescent's sense of wonder is awakened and that they might strive to imitate these and become such themselves."—from Plato's *Protagoras*, 326a.



## *Essential Kafka*

### Postscript

This translation of Kafka has a dual purpose—for starters it intends to provide English readers with a better translation: that Kafka's prose should find a more fitting analogy in '*modern (American) English*' whereby it should come to life to a greater degree; and that his underlying philosophy—and I say philosophy in the *greater* sense—thus, should be grasped more readily. The second purpose is to explore issues regarding translation *per se*: what is the proper role of the translator? and why are so many translations done so poorly? The second of these objectives is rather fraught with danger and the first seems to be nothing more than a matter of taste, perspective or what have you.

Shouldn't the translator just do his job and then shut up? Isn't such analysis little more than advertising and self-promotion? If the translation really is significantly better, well, *time will tell*, as they say. Perhaps. Unfortunately, I'm not so optimistic, at least not in the short run; I've become rather mistrustful having seen how what is, without a doubt, one of the greatest translations of the world's greatest philosophy has been subjected to wanton and infamous rewriting.<sup>33</sup> I might also mention, by the way, that Kafka, likewise, hadn't any great misgivings about the "*Hohe Herrn von der Akademie*" and he did a fine job of letting them know it—those of them, namely, who are able to read between the lines. And so, I'd just as well assume this risk for to remain forever silent on such a burning issue, this seems to me to be even worse than the awful sin of self-promotion.

Why is this "such a burning issue"? You need only consider that without decent translations of great literature the *general reader* is denied access to the wealth of world literature, unless of course he or she is ready and able to learn any number of foreign languages. And nowadays, how many Americans don't even appear to be capable of appreciating the great literature that's been written in their own language! Moreover, and perhaps even more importantly, for our times English is *the world language*; translations into English are not just for those having English as their first language, rather such translations are likewise quite critical for the hundreds of millions of

people having English as their second or even third language. It's time for waking up. A leadership role in world history is not simply maintained through having a great military, primarily it has to be realized and maintained through a strong proclivity towards truth. And "truth," naturally, includes history; and then history, naturally, includes literature—some understanding of the changing states of human consciousness that underlie all human existence, a real appreciation of our *shared heritage* and, ultimately—assuming that teleology really is a valid concern<sup>34</sup>—the “whither and whence” of mankind. Poor translations are a warning sign of a diseased culture, and not really caring one way or the other is simply the whipped cream placed on top of the festering cake.

Perhaps I should step back a little here and note that I'm only concerning myself directly with translations from German into English—two languages that, as languages go, are really very close to one another. Moreover, I'm also only going back a short time in history, for Kafka less than one-hundred years; if one is to include Schleiermacher than this is still less than two-hundred years. The most, shall we say, interesting issues would have to do with translations of works that go back many hundreds—or even thousands—of years to languages that are removed to a much more significant degree. Point of fact, if we can't *truly* rely on the greater majority of translations that only attempt to move us back one hundred years and do so wholly within the context of European culture, how on earth are we supposed to have much faith in translations that extend over millennia to cultures that are so alien to our own?

A few examples are obligatory. As always, it would be excessively tedious to go into more than a few, these examples should merely indicate a pattern—patterns are rather important. The first and most obvious issue is one of style. In my opinion Kafka's style is not to be imitated, at least not in a superficial way. Kafka's sentences are often quite deceiving, tending towards being simple, he never uses italics or anything particularly unusual, understatement is his strong suit, foreign words are quite rare. I've noted that most translators do their best to imitate this, I don't think that *such* imitation works well, my style is basically my own, what I believe captures Kafka's *intent*—my English is allowed to conform to whatever I feel as being necessary, even to capitalize “OBSERVATIONS” in *The Burrow* (p. 135), and to italicize freely. If you wish to admire Kafka's style, his remarkable ability to ‘drench’ simple prose with complex nuance, learn German; if, on the other hand, you're wanting to understand Kafka as best you

might in English, perhaps this book will be more helpful than others. Likewise I've noted that most other translations tend towards being too literal, "*Menschenzimmer*" which can be found in the second paragraph of *Metamorphosis* seems to always be translated as "human room"—*whatever* this is supposed to mean!—to really understand it you would have to know German, "his room that was quite typical," I think, does better at capturing what Kafka intends.<sup>35</sup> For some reason every translation that I have looked at changes "*Kanapee*" to be a sofa or a couch; the word "*canapé*" is in the English dictionary, if one is too lazy to look it up I have provided the translation in the very next sentence (p. 27), it's hard to understand how Gregor would even fit underneath a regular sofa! Moreover, the fact that Gregor has a *canapé* *and* a leather sofa in his room is lost if one generalizes the *canapé* so that it becomes just another sofa, as is the fact that there's *yet another* expensive, high legged French sofa in the living room—where Mr. Samsa tosses his cap before chasing Gregor about the room. Money\$\$ is at issue here,<sup>36</sup> *canapés* tend to be expensive, as are credenzas—(sideboards are less dear, where the fruit bowl sits which is full of the little apples that Mr. Samsa uses to bombard poor Gregor). One last and I would say, telling mistake is to be found where Gregor is musing beneath the *canapé* (p. 30): "so he had to let it suffice that all he'd hear now would be the sighs and holy imprecations that sister tended to utter whenever she entered his room." The Muirs, Corngold and Pasley all translate what I call "holy imprecations" with "appeals (or invocations) to the saints." There are not any appeals to any saints in this story, neither to the blessed St. Peter, nor Paul nor John!—what one finds is: Gregor—*Ach Gott*; Grete—"*Gott*"; mother—"*ach Gott!*" And then finally father's final 'mock tribute' of thanks as he looks upon Gregor's corpse. The godlessness which underlies our times is all too apparent when every member of the family is continuously taking *the name of the Lord* in vain and the translator's job is muffed when he downplays this by referring to "the saints," and this is true despite that this would be *the more literal* translation of "*Anrufe der Heiligen*"!

When translators change words that shouldn't be changed or don't come up with new ways of expressing the ideas that can't simply be carried over in a literal way, essential content is lost. The translator's conundrum is actually three-pronged: (1) what *has to* 'stay,' (2) what *has to* be changed, and, most importantly of all: (3) what is one going *to do* about it. Of the three of these the third is, of course, the most contentious.

*Imagination*, universally accepted as the author's finest asset, is viewed with a great deal of suspicion when it is enlisted for service by the lowly translator! Accuracy is what is wanted... but contradictions abound for languages are *living entities* and each one has its own beauty and, not to forget, its own strange inconsistencies—the warp and woof, as it were. Beyond this, every manuscript poses its own particular set of challenges, and the more insightful the original document the greater these challenges become. Sometimes a word is so full of meaning in the original that one hasn't much choice {*if one is going to do one's job well and give the "reader" what he or she needs*} but to put it in parentheses, *Logos* comes to mind as the ultimate example from Greek; *Gestalt* and *angst* are obvious German examples, words that, indeed, don't need to be put into parentheses since they have migrated into English simply due to the fullness of their meaning in German. It seems quite apparent to me that as a language German has a greater density than English. *Nouns*, always capitalized, may be masculine, feminine or neuter; *People* are either addressed formally or familiarly (*Sie* or *Du*); and even a bowl in German can be a bowl that, generally, is for animals {*Napf*}. All of this is *just* the tip of the iceberg, the cascading and interpenetrating issues that cause the translator no end of consternation: sentences need to be stretched out somewhat, circumlocutions become very necessary, Gregor's "bowl" gets to have his initials inscribed upon it, just to mention a trivial, a rather minor instance and how I have gone about giving the English reader a better feel for the German word, "*Napf*." When the translator is so bold as to play Beethoven's *Sixth* symphony for the first 'herding scene' in *Metamorphosis*—or when he goes so far as to translate "*rot Peter*" [red Peter] with "*Robespierre*" as the ape's name in *Report to the Academy*—despite how fitting and humorous such changes may well be... *well, perhaps he has gone a little too far?*... Could it possibly happen that the translator has, in a few instances, even improved upon the story over the original! What an idea. This would presume that the translator has actually understood the story well enough so that he might add his own bit of flair: certainly this is sinful!—what a lack in compunction, what an excess, and what would Kafka say? On a more serious note, who is to say when the translator has stepped over the line, that he has shifted from being a 'respectful messenger' into the role of an 'interpreter,' someone who may well be pushing the envelope too far and reading his own content into 'works' and, thus, using their stature as a stage upon which he might beat his own drum? Unfortunately, this simply begs the question, and to leave the answer up to the discretion of the academic community is—as I noted initially in this Postscript—not

necessarily leaving it in hands that are free from conceit. At the same time, leaving the issue to the masses and the free market to decide seems likewise to be placing it upon a rather turbulent sea. When all is said and done there doesn't appear to be much that one can rely upon other than simply being true to oneself and simply taking on the risks that life, in any event, places before one, and this, to finish a sentence that perhaps never should even have been begun, is what I have resolved to do. It is simply my contention that most other translations are lost in a **sort of formalism**<sup>37</sup> (one that *typifies* our age and which, I might note, does amazingly well when it comes to investigating any number of mind-boggling characteristics that are found in 'black holes' and 'multi-dimensional space-time,' yet it tends to overlook itself in the process, being fixated upon the other) which by trying to stay close to Kafka have, in all actuality, proven to be untrue to him and the essential message that underlies his stories.

One final *general* point that I'd like to insert here is that with both Kafka and Plato one finds, I believe, another major problem: there are, typically, either *too many* stories or *too few*, either one gets all of Kafka's shorter prose works, or just one story and a great amount of commentary. The end result being that although one might initially become very enthused about Plato or Kafka, still unless one learns Greek or German this initial enthusiasm is bound to peter out into dismay due to the confusion offered one by the profusion of so many interpretations!

The stories in this book are very carefully chosen so that they fit together. In my opinion the reader should be able to come away from reading this book with a significant grasp of Kafka's underlying 'philosophy.' I use this word with a great deal of caution, but I use it nonetheless—nothing else quite catches what I think needs to be said. Literature for Kafka was not simply a matter of entertainment, it was practically a religious experience. Philosophy in its classical sense means that which is *most relevant*, a sort of wisdom to which one relates as a 'lover.' Naturally, Kafka's prose is not your typical philosophical text. All the same, it is hoped that just as is true with philosophy, so too here: it doesn't hurt to read the stories multiple times. Perhaps the younger reader may even get a yearning to learn German and thus be able to appreciate Kafka—and many other great authors—in the original, something that, *truth to tell*, can only be approximated in any translation.

Returning now to issues of philology—my *final particular* criticism—the most significant contention that I have has to do with the German words: *eigen*, *eigentlich*, *eigentümlich* and *Eigensinn*. The interplay between the internal truth and the external actuality seems to be lost on most other translators of Kafka. Perhaps my training in philosophy underlies my bias here. For me *The Burrow* is a beautiful meditation upon the ego,<sup>38</sup> but Kafka's dialectical play with *eigentlich* and *wirklich* seems to be lost in the Muirs' standard translation: already the second sentence by Willa and Edwin Muir simply drops this critical word: "All that can be seen from outside is a big hole; that, however, really leads nowhere;" The "*eigentlich*" is totally lost: "*Vom außen ist eigentlich nur ein großes Loch sichtbar, dieses führt aber in Wirklichkeit nirgends hin,*"—the dialectic is destroyed. "There is," I would like to echo Kafka, "something at hand here that is well worth one's while, deserving the most thorough investigations." I have little doubt that the Muirs' command of German was better than mine, too bad that this isn't the *sine qua non*; Josephine seems to have a feeling for what I'd like to indicate, she may not have been the best amongst the *Mouse Folk* at cracking nuts but she was on to something that others oversee entirely, as she asserts: "they just don't get it."

Indeed, the crux of the matter relates to this inner relation between truth and subjectivity. This is key to finding *the essential*—be it in Kafka, Plato, or any great author. So long as academia is slave to the mistaken idea that truth has to be something that is purely "objective," so long will their treatises flounder in a morass of pompous pretentiousness, true knowledge will be impossible and man will be descended from apes, the spirit that underlies all being will never shine through. Funny that Plato himself was the first to spell this out, that truth lies within—that *the word* has to be enlivened so that humanity may approach that for which it *may* prove to be destined, that everyone has to do so in a consciously self-conscious manner, swallowing this bitter pill and opening himself or herself for that which is greater. The hole of self-consciousness is not empty, rather it is the doorway to the spirit.

In any event, what I've already said above should suffice to place me alongside the crackpots. For a final flourish I should like to quote from Kafka's diary—as this entry from his meeting with Rudolf Steiner informs us as regards Kafka's mode of composition: (first in German):

*"Er beginnt mit einigen losen Sätzen: Sie sind doch der Dr. Kafka? Haben Sie sich schon länger mit Teosophie beschäftigt? Ich aber dringe mit meiner vorbereiteten Ansprache vor: Ich fühle wie ein großer Teil meines Wesens zur Teosophie hinstrebt, gleichzeitig aber habe ich vor ihr die höchste Angst. Ich befürchte nämlich von ihr eine neue Verwirrung, die für mich sehr arg wäre, da eben schon mein gegenwärtiges Unglück nur aus Verwirrung besteht. Diese Verwirrung liegt in Folgendem: Mein Glück, meine Fähigkeiten und jede Möglichkeit irgendwie zu nützen liegen seit jeher im Litterarischen. Und hier habe ich allerdings Zustände erlebt (nicht viele) die meiner Meinung nach den von Ihnen Herr Doktor beschriebenen hellseherischen Zuständen sehr nahe stehen, in welchen ich ganz und gar in jedem Einfall wohnte, aber jeden Einfall auch erfüllte und in welchen ich mich nicht nur an meinen Grenzen fühlte, sondern an den Grenzen des Menschlichen überhaupt. Nur die Ruhe der Begeisterung, wie sie dem Hellseher wahrscheinlich eigen ist, fehlte doch jenen Zuständen, wenn auch nicht ganz. Ich schließe dies daraus, daß ich das Beste meiner Arbeiten nicht in jenen Zuständen geschrieben habe. –Diesem Literarischen kann ich mich nun nicht vollständig hingeben, wie es sein müßte, und zwar aus verschiedenen Gründen nicht. Abgesehen von meinen Familienverhältnissen könnte ich von der Literatur schön infolge des langsamen Entstehens meiner Arbeiten und ihres besonderen Charakters nicht leben; überdies hindert mich auch meine Gesundheit und mein Charakter daran, mich einem im günstigen Falle ungewissen Leben hinzugeben. Ich bin daher Beamter in einer socialen Versicherungsanstalt geworden. Nun können diese zwei Berufe einander niemals ertragen und ein gemeinsames Glück zulassen. Das kleinste Glück in einem wird ein großes Unglück im zweiten. Habe ich an einem Abend gutes geschrieben, brenne ich am nächsten Tag im Bureau und kann nichts fertig bringen. Dieses Hinundher wird immer ärger. Im Bureau genüge ich äußerlich meinen Pflichten, meinen innern Pflichten aber nicht und jede nichterfüllte innere Pflicht wird zu einem Unglück, das sich aus mir nicht mehr rührt. Und zu diesen zwei nie auszugleichenden Bestrebungen soll ich jetzt die Teosophie als dritte führen? Wird sie nicht nach beiden Seiten hin stören und selbst von beiden gestört werden? Werde ich, ein gegenwärtig schön so unglücklicher Mensch die 3 zu einem Ende führen können? Ich bin gekommen Herr Doktor Sie das zu fragen, denn ich ahne, daß, wenn Sie mich dessen für fähig halten, ich es auch wirklich auf mich nehmen kann."*

Which I would translate roughly so:

(Steiner): "You must be Dr. Kafka, have you been concerning yourself with theosophy<sup>39</sup> for long? — But I forge right on into the speech that I had prepared:"

(Kafka): "I have the feeling that to a great extent my inner self has a striving in this direction, but at the same time I also have the greatest trepidation. Namely, I'm fearing that devoting myself to theosophy will end up making me even more confused than I already am... and that this would be disastrous since my current state of confusion is about all that I can bear. My confusion basically is made up from two sides. All of my happiness {*Glück*}, my abilities and where I perceive my purpose in life—all of this lies within literature. And indeed, in pursuing this I have experienced moments (not many, but a few) that would be in line with what you describe as enlightened or supersensible perception, or at least they approach what you've described. When I go into such states I'm totally immersed and live within them—but they also live within me and fill me... and so I feel not only that I'm on the border with *my* ultimate limit, rather that I'm at the ultimate limit of what human beings can experience. Only I haven't found the calm tranquility that, it seems to me, belongs together with such supersensible states—at least not in the full measure that I'd expect, I've only experienced a little of it. I've drawn this inference because I haven't produced my best works from within these states. — Now, I'm not able to give myself up fully to my literary aims, not like it really should be, and indeed there are multiple reasons why this isn't possible. Even if you don't bring my difficult family situation into the mix, still the great amount of time that is required for my writing as well as its unusual character, all of this precludes my finding a livelihood as a writer. Beyond this my poor health and my character don't allow me to take on this risk of devoting my life just to writing—a risk that even in the best of circumstances generally is a major gamble that often leads to misery. Hence, I've taken on a bureaucratic position within a large, state-run insurance company. But now these two contending professions are at sixes and nines with one another, they don't mix well at all. The smallest success and progress in the one invariably leads to great problems in the other. If I've managed to write well over the course of an evening so the next day I'm simply all burnt out and I'm unable, really, to accomplish anything of substance. This back and forth is becoming ever more problematic, it's really quite impossible. It seems that I'm able to fulfill my *external* responsibilities at the office—what people expect of me—but this doesn't really mean much, I see that I'm not actually fulfilling my *internal* responsibilities, and every failure to do my work

as it should be done, this becomes a thorn in my side, it's something that doesn't ever leave my consciousness [as people's lives are at stake]. And now to these two contending professions I'm supposed to add theosophy on as a third pursuit? Wouldn't it be in contention with both of the others and wouldn't each of them be in contention with it! Shall I, seeing as how I'm already in such a quandary, one that, let's be honest, one that makes me miserable—shall I really be able to devote myself to theosophy as it deserves? I've come here to ask you this question, Dr. Steiner, for I have a premonition that should it be that you think me capable, well, then I would have to listen to you and to what you might say."

If Rudolf Steiner answered Kafka's question, the answer is not—to my knowledge—to be found in his diary. However, I would also have this to say about that: the answer is really quite obvious and Kafka's continued efforts in literature should itself be a testament that there are many paths to follow, though only one goal.

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<sup>33</sup> I am referring to Friedrich Schleiermacher's Plato translation. The sins of the publishing industry are legion, the sins of the scholars, likewise. The most flagrant example that irks me no end being *Rowohlt's Klassiker* re-ordering of these very dialogues. If the scholars in charge of this re-issue of 'Plato' had had any *genuine* understanding for what Schleiermacher was up to his order would never have been touched. See my introduction to my first book: *Tallyho ~ The Hunt for Virtue: Beauty, Truth & Goodness*, AuthorHouse, 2005.

<sup>34</sup> If there is no 'real sense' inherent in the universe and mankind simply a chance aberration upon a chance planet, it seems to me that there's no particular reason to do anything more than, perhaps, consume a vast amount of alcohol ... I don't even know on what basis, given the above conjecture, the topic might even be rationally discussed since rationality itself require some ultimate touchstone of "sense" and, being a somewhat of a Platonist, I can only understand the lower through the higher, not vice versa. I should perhaps note the "never-ending battle between the realists and the idealists"—see Plato's *Theaetetus*, 179e—181c. The view which parades itself as being totally "detached" and free from "feelings" is simply displaying its monstrous disattachment from reality!—real thinking embraces both feeling and will, it couldn't exist without a "feeling for truth," nor without the will to overcome sloppy self-conceit. Were it honest to itself it would do more to embrace history and tradition, that e.g. for which both Newton and Einstein had a great amount of reverence.

<sup>35</sup> Although some may find my views odd, it seems to me that they are fully grounded by tradition—I'd like to simply quote from two fine sources both of which are to be found in the book: *The Translation Studies Reader* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition): first, from the *Letter to Parramchius* (p. 23):

“V. Up to now I have spoken as if I did change the letter somewhat, arguing that a simple translation can have mistakes without being criminal. But truly, since the letter shows the sense had not been changed in the least, nor anything added that counters orthodox doctrine, my accusers, as Terence says, ‘seeking to understand, understand nothing’ and wishing to prove another’s ignorance, expose their own. Indeed, I not only admit, but freely proclaim that in translation from the the Greek I render not word for word, but sense for sense. In this matter I have the guidance of Cicero, who translated Plato’s *Protagoras* and Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* and the two most beautiful orations that Aeschines and Demosthenes delivered against each other. How much he omitted, how much he added, and how much he changed in order to display the properties of another language through the properties of his own, there is not enough time to say. It suffices for me to quote the authority of this translator, who writes in his prologue:

‘... I have not thought it necessary to pay out one word for another in this process, but have conserved the character and the force of the language. Nor have I thought it fitting to count them out to the reader, but to *weigh* them out.’ ”

And then, secondly from Schleiermacher’s *On the Different Methods of Translation* (pp. 44–45):

“The more, however, the author’s own particular way of seeing and drawing connections has determined the character of the work, and the more it is organized according to principles that he himself has either freely chosen or that are designed to call forth a particular impression, the more his work will partake of the higher realm of art, and so too the translator must bring different powers and skills to his work and be familiar with his author and the author’s tongue in a different sense than the interpreter. Every negotiation that uses an interpreter involves, as a rule, setting down a particular state of affairs within a specific framework; the interpreter is working only for the benefit of participants sufficiently familiar with these affairs, and the phrases that express them in both languages are determined in advance either by law or by usage and mutually agreed-upon conventions. Quite a different matter are the sorts of negotiations that, although often similar in form to the conventional ones, are intended to establish new frameworks. The less the latter can themselves be considered specific instances of a recognized general principle, the more scientific knowledge of technical details and terminology needed for the translator to carry out his task. Upon this twofold ladder, then, the translator ascends higher and higher above the interpreter until he reaches the realm most properly his, namely, those works of art and science in which the author’s free individual combinatory faculties, on the one hand, and the spirit of the language

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along with the entire system of views and sentiments in all their shadings represented in it, on the other, count for everything; the object no longer dominates in any way, but rather is governed by thought and feeling; indeed, it often comes into existence only through being uttered and exists only in this utterance.”

Again, both quotes are from: *The Translation Studies Reader, Second Edition*, Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group), New York and London, 2004.

<sup>36</sup> And I place Money in *Imprint MT Shadow* font as it's no great secret how essential it seems to be, that, indeed, this may well have an awful lot to do with why there are so many poor translations “on the market.” One can only wonder as to whether most translators get paid ‘by the word count’?—but that's not such a nice question to raise.

<sup>37</sup> like, e.g.: *Never use BOLD!* But, on a more interesting tack: as regards *formalism* as a defining characteristic of our times and the general tendency in academia to accept things ‘only up to a certain point,’ I might recommend the book: *A World Without Time, The Forgotten Legacy of Gödel and Einstein*, by Palle Yourgrau, Basic Books, 2005.

<sup>38</sup> Indeed, just as Plato's various dialogues have subtitles that almost certainly do NOT come from Plato (*Phaedrus*: On the Soul; *Lysis*: On Friendship; *Parmenides*: On the One; etc.) so too one could make the same mistake with Kafka: e.g.: *Metamorphosis*: On the human condition; *Report to the Academy*: The essence of ‘being human’; *In the Penal Colony*: On Justice; *The Burrow*: Meditation on the Ego; *Josephine*: On Art and Civilization—though at least this gives one something upon which to think. However, just like with Plato, this is far too simplistic and the whole relates to the parts in multi-various ways. Thankfully, with Kafka there is, at least, no issue as regards the proper chronological ordering.

<sup>39</sup> At this point in time Rudolf Steiner was the head of the German branch of the Theosophical Society. Later he would split from the theosophists and found his own school of spiritual science, Anthroposophy.