
“A Hunger Artist” by Franz Kafka: A thematic analysis

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Abstract

"A Hunger Artist" is a short story by Franz Kafka first published in *Die neue Rundschau* in 1922. It is a story about starvation artists and the changing attitude of society towards art. He tries to break his 40-day record and his successes. \ Finally, it led to his death, and inhumanly, his body burned with straws. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Thematic analysis is a method for analyzing qualitative data that involves reading through a set of data and looking for patterns in the meaning of the data to find themes. It is an active process of reflexivity in which the researcher's subjective experience is at the center of making sense of the data. The main themes identified were death, art, cage, isolation, asceticism, spiritual aspect, clock, and Panther. Like the other works of Kafka, "A Hunger Artist" is also full of existentialist and absurdity concepts in symbolic form. We can see the form of Kafkaesque from different angles.

Keywords: death, art, cage, isolation, asceticism, spiritual aspect, clock and panther

"A Hunger Artist" (German: "Ein Hungerkünstler") is a short story by Franz Kafka first published in *Die neue Rundschau* in 1922. The story was also included in the collection *A Hunger Artist (Ein Hungerkünstler)*, the last book Kafka prepared for publication, which was printed by *Verlag Die Schmiede* shortly after his death. The protagonist is a hunger artist victimized by society at large. "A Hunger Artist" explores themes such as death, art, isolation, asceticism, spiritual poverty, futility, personal failure, and the corruption of human relationships.

Franz Kafka, born on July 3, 1883, in Prague, Bohemia, Austria-Hungary [now in Czech Republic]—died June 3, 1924, in Kierling, near Vienna, Austria), was a German-language writer of visionary fiction whose works—especially the novel *Der Prozess* (1925; *The Trial*) and the story *Die Verwandlung* (1915; *The Metamorphosis*)—express the anxieties and alienation felt by many in 20th-century Europe and North America. Kafka reluctantly published a few of his writings during his lifetime. These

publications include two sections (1909) from *Beschreibung eines Kampfes* (1936; *Description of a Struggle*) and *Betrachtung* (1913; *Meditation*), a collection of short prose pieces.

Kafka's work represents an extreme example of contemporary concern for the position of the individual in society, and as modernization drives people out of the fixed meanings and family networks of traditional society, Kafka reveals the emptiness, and even the perniciousness, of a world that is not just fixed in its position. It doesn't make sense, but it is malicious towards individuals. A society lacking a transcendental source of value is threatened with meaning, not a place of hospitality. For Kafka, it was about showing the absurdity of the world through everyone's lens. He wanted to show how confusing, frustrating, and completely random the world can be. And he did this simply by writing about the struggles of ordinary people trying to make sense of the world around them. For one, he was a big proponent of absurdism, which is the belief that the human condition is fundamentally irrational and meaningless. Kafka also incorporated absurd ideas into his work. For him, the human condition is essentially one of loneliness and isolation. We are all alone in our own little world, struggling to make sense of an ultimately incomprehensible universe.

Kafka's relationship with existentialism is much more complex, mainly because the label "existentialist" by itself is rather meaningless. Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard all have a certain existentialist dimension in their writings, as do Camus, Sartre, Jaspers, and Heidegger, with whose works the term existentialism has been more or less equated since World War H. These various people have rather little in common concerning their religious, philosophical, or political views, but they nevertheless share certain characteristic tenets present in Kafka.

The summary of the story is that a man known only as the "hunger artist" who makes his living by fasting travels from city to city in Europe with his manager. In each city, starvation artists choose a public place and parade in locked cages lined with straw, where they fast for up to 40 days. During the Hunger Artist's heyday, people from all over the region flocked to see him perform. The artist's aim was to fast for more than forty days. But it was not allowed. Then he changed the troop. Here, he got the permission to fast as much as he liked. But citizens lost their interest in them, so he was disappointed. At last, he dies inside the cage like a creature. Watchers took the body of the hunger artist along with straw and burned it. Then, the cage was transferred to a new panther.

METHOD

For the study, the original short story "A Hunger Artist" was used. Further data identified using Google Scholar, MEDLINE, Embase, PsycINFO, CINAHL, Applied Social Sciences Index, and Sociological Abstracts Eligible studies will include original, empirical,

peer-reviewed qualitative evidence published in English. Data will be analyzed using the 'best fit' framework synthesis approach, drawing the topic.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Thematic analysis is a method for analyzing qualitative data that involves reading through a set of data and looking for patterns in the meaning of the data to find themes. It is an active process of reflexivity in which the researcher's subjective experience is at the center of making sense of the data. The main themes identified are death, art, cage, isolation, asceticism, spiritual aspect, clock, and Panther.

DISCUSSION

Hunger artists, or starvation artists, were common in 18th, 19th, and early 20th century Europe and America and were performers who starved for long periods of time to entertain paid audiences. This phenomenon first appeared in the 17th century and reached its peak in the 1880s. Fasting artists, most often men, traveled from city to city, performing well-publicized fasts of up to 40 days. Several hunger performers were found to have cheated at their performance. The phenomenon has been relayed to modern audiences through Franz Kafka's 1922 short story "A Hunger Artist," contained in the collection of the same name. Death, art, isolation, asceticism, spiritual poverty, futility, personal failure, and the corruption of human relationships are the main identified themes in this story; it is marked by a senseless, disorienting, often menacing complexity. Existentialism emphasizes the importance of personal responsibility as a means of creating a sense of meaning in life, while absurdism emphasizes the acceptance of the inherent absurdity of life as a means of acquiring a subjective and relative form of meaning. Both can be seen in Kafka's writing.

“Death”

In 'existentialism,' death allows humans to know themselves and makes them solely responsible for their actions. Before existential thinking, death had essentially no personal meaning. Its meaning was cosmic. Death had a role for which history and the universe were ultimately responsible. Death has no meaning, but it is our responsibility to make it meaningful. More than existentialism, Kafka uses the absurdity of death here in this story. Kafka's world is chaotic. It is a world shrouded in melancholy and devoid of happiness, often lurking in the darkest corners of our minds. Kafka's world and how he manages to paint such a realistic picture of life in the most absurd, often most absurd way. The human condition, for Kafka, is well beyond tragic or depressed. It is “absurd.” He believed that the whole human race was the product of one of “God's bad days.” There is no “meaning” to make sense of our lives.

In this story, the central character, who has no name, assumes represents a group of humans who can't find meaning in life. His only vision is to amuse people by torturing himself in a cage, which is fasting for 40 days. His wish was a success beyond 40 days. He was never concerned about his health. Finally, like in Metamorphosis, Gre or Samsa's death

is remembered when the hunger artist died. "Gregor, understanding that he is no longer wanted, laboriously makes his way back to his room and dies of starvation before sunrise. His body is discovered by the charwoman, who alerts his family and then disposes of the corpse." And the family wishes for a good future. "The greatest immediate improvement in their condition would, of course, arise from moving to another house; they wanted to take a smaller and cheaper but also better situated and more easily run apartment than the one they had, which Gregor had selected. While they were thus conversing, it struck both Mr. and Mrs. Samsa, almost at the same moment, as they became aware of their daughter's increasing vivacity, that in spite of all the sorrow of recent times, which had made her cheeks pale, she had bloomed into a buxom girl. . ." as the same "All right, tidy this up now," said the supervisor. And they buried the hunger artist along with the straw. But in his cage, they put a young panther.

What can be seen everywhere is the lack of passion for human death. Human life has no meaning or superiority over any worm, insect, or inanimate object, even in his death. Man is just a creature to return to the earth. He is not sure why he was born, why he is living, or what he is going to die. Hunger artist is presented as a man who does not think about death even for a moment. He has today's desire to achieve his goal. He dies just after achieving it. The others just pile the rotting straw inside the mushroom and burn it. Whose life is so pale. Either worm-eaten or fire-eaten human flesh. It seems as though his death was longed for, for in the cage, he mocked his death, and they led the more profitable Panther by providing enough food. In his diametrically opposite situation, an animal hoards money and gives it to the boss, a cheap performer, just a dead end.

“ART”

Art or workmanship, likewise called (to recognize it from other fine arts) visual art, is a visual article or experience deliberately made through an outflow of expertise or a creative mind. The term art includes different media like painting, sculpture, printmaking, drawing, decorative arts, photography, and installation. Art can communicate information, shape our everyday lives, make a social statement, and be enjoyed for aesthetic beauty. Art is a method for communicating numerous things. It is a strategy for dealing with emotions that cannot be expressed verbally or through conversation. One can express oneself through art. Until the seventeenth hundred years, workmanship alluded to any ability or authority and was not separated from artworks or sciences, yet in present-day use, the expressive arts, where tasteful contemplations are foremost, are recognized from procured abilities as a general rule, and the beautiful or applied expressions. Compared to the past, the dimensions of the arts have changed significantly in the 21st century. Nowadays, art is more than just a way to express your thoughts; it has also been used to convey information or a message to the general public. Art can be utilized for legislative issues and social plans, for example, the

publication of kid's shows and works of art coordinated with political or strict figures. Art can make people feel inspired and help them see things from new angles.

There was a group of artists called Hunger artists, or starvation artists who were performers, common in Europe and America in the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries, who starved themselves for extended periods of time for the amusement of paying audiences. The phenomenon first appeared in the 17th century and saw its heyday in the 1880s. Hunger artists were almost always male, traveled from city to city, and performed widely advertised fasts of up to 40 days. Several hunger artists were found to have cheated during their performances. Hunger artists should be distinguished from two other phenomena of the time: "Fasting Women" such as Martha Taylor and Ann Moore, who refused to eat while staying home, usually explained as some kind of miracle and later exposed as a fraud, and "Living Skeletons," people of exceptionally low body weight performing in freak shows.

When a person makes his body part of an art, there is no distinction between the artist and the art. When the body is tortured and turned into an empty body by starving, then the artist is the art. Art should be something that a person can hear, hear, or know and enjoy. Otherwise, it becomes just a farce. It is said that the condition of the hunger artists in the early days was very tempting. People start hating and fearing the artist. Only in the children does it arouse fear. It became an annoyance for adults. When new strategies came into being to enjoy the new age, everyone lost the old one. No one pays attention to a man who tortures himself to make society happy. That's how much art had existence and enjoyment. When everyone's eyes went to the animal cages, nobody knew the artist who broke his own record and fasted for more than 40 days.

“CAGE”

A cage is a structure of bars or wires in which birds or other animals are confined. The bird represents freedom or desire to be free, while the cage symbolizes confinement or oppression. Even the act of singing shines a spotlight on the author's ability to grow and flourish despite her challenges. The caged bird's song is a symbol of the freedom he longs for but has never known. Confined to a cage, the bird uses the power of his voice to move through the airspace his body cannot access. Although the bird cannot fly, he can still express his despair and his longing, which amounts to freedom in a symbolic form. The situation is almost the same with the hunger artist. He is still caged as part of his art. He never comes out. Like a parrot that has lost its freedom and doesn't sing, it gets stuck in that dirty cage. But perhaps there is a difference between the hunger artist and the cage. Both of them want freedom but are not ready to come out, even if the artist gives them a chance. It is because of his sincerity towards his art. He had to fully unleash his potential and assert himself.

In sociology, the iron cage is a concept introduced by Max Weber to describe the increased rationalization inherent in social life, particularly in Western capitalist societies.

As can be seen, Franz Kafka critiques capitalism throughout his novel. Kafka believes capitalism prevents people from living their own lives (deprived of freedom). Josef's character and the ways in which 'The Trial' is written in a Marxist perspective in depth, analyzing how Josef struggles against the oppressive court system, adamant not to compromise his beliefs to conform to and suit society's norms. The symbol of the cage was also used to indicate the capitalist environment that existed in the society. Europe was squeezed into an iron cage under the grip of capitalism, where they lost their freedom, and as they lived in that situation for centuries, they lost their sense of freedom. To some extent, they were addicted to the capitalist way of thinking, but even if they said that they would be freed, they were so enslaved that they were not ready to escape. Almost any artist has the same attitude. Even after being told that the new circus can be considered without a cage, it can be seen that the artist asked for a cage of his own and was satisfied with it. He was not ready to go anywhere. Yes, the artist was in the iron cage of capitalism and owned by Impisareo.

“ISOLATION”

According to Yalom, "existential isolation" is a more fundamental form of isolation—a separation from every living thing and aspect of our imagined world. There is an ultimate gap that cannot be bridged, regardless of how close a person becomes to another (a parent, a lover, or a child). Regardless of what our experience of the world is, it isn't a similar encounter as any other individual's — no other person's. Existential isolation really refers to the concept that each of us is responsible for creating our own lives and living those lives authentically. So, in fact, we are completely unique in every aspect of our existence and our death. Yalom (1980) writes, “To the extent that one is responsible for one’s life, one is alone.

One of the vital elements of Kafka's existentialism is his accentuation of the singular's insight into distance and segregation. Kafka's works frequently highlight characters that are cut off from others and unfit to interface with their general surroundings. This sense of isolation reflects the individual's existential condition, as they are ultimately alone in their experience of existence. Kafka's works show that this isolation can be a source of profound suffering as individuals struggle to find meaning in a world that seems indifferent to their existence.

The artist is completely alone in this story. He doesn't talk about anything other than his work. He is still behind a wall and is forgotten by the society. He is alone in that cage for months, and finally, he is going to die alone. A lifeless clock, a straw, and a glass of water are the only things in the cage. That's all he has in his cage to keep the active from going anywhere. He also becomes isolated in the realm of thought. His only concern is the realization of his family. He is gradually coming to know that society is changing outside the cage; their level of enjoyment and interest is changing. Yet, the man enjoys mental and

physical isolation. Finally, he does not think that he is alone; he comes, stands, and goes alone in the world, even as a simple man.

We can see Kafka dehumanizes in his *Metamorphosis*; the main character, through the actions of his family, shows the theme of seclusion, isolation, and rejection. Gregor, the main character, feels isolated from the world and society because his family disregards his life, both in human and insect form. They reject his humanity and often isolate him from reality and the outside by locking him away in a secluded room. Corresponding to Kafka's vision of an all-encompassing but indifferent society in *The Trial*- his other famous work, is the individual's intense feelings of isolation, alienation, and anxiety. The court stands in for a society that insists on conformity at all costs, and the individual is guilty simply for being an individual. The whole idea of a defense in this context is paradoxical. The purpose of a defense is to give the individual an opportunity to defend his innocence but to defend his innocence is to assert himself. The artist in *Hunger* also does not get a chance to prove himself. We can see that he often becomes a victim of society. In the end, he is completely alone, and his dedication is the only thing that keeps the man going. Like the judge in *The Trial*, we see a capitalist boss still shadowing him.

“ASCETICISM”

Asceticism is a lifestyle characterized by abstinence from sensual pleasures, often for the purpose of pursuing spiritual goals. Ascetics may withdraw from the world for their practices or continue to be part of their society, but typically adopt a frugal lifestyle, characterized by the renunciation of material possessions and physical pleasures, and also spend time fasting while concentrating on the practice of religion or reflection upon spiritual matters.^[4] Various individuals have also attempted an ascetic lifestyle to free themselves from addictions, some of them particular to modern life, such as money, alcohol, tobacco, drugs, entertainment, sex, food, meat, etc. Sometimes, we wonder whether he changed into Unnatural asceticism like the historical Siddhartha Gautama, who adopted an extreme ascetic life in search of enlightenment. Asceticism has been historically observed in many religious and philosophic traditions, including Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Pythagoreanism, and contemporary practices continue amongst some religious followers. Salvation or spirituality. Many ascetics believe that purifying the body helps purify the soul and thus obtain a greater connection with the Divine or find inner peace. This may take the form of rituals, the renunciation of pleasure, or self-mortification.

For Kafka, asceticism was a magical word that he used to describe an intricate web of images, cultural paradigms, idiosyncrasies, fears, and psychological strategies that he gradually integrated into his thoughts and feelings and made the center of his identity. He was completely legitimate in stating that he had 'a spectacular natural limit with respect to parsimony'. It is remarkable how tenaciously he maintained his adherence to the rule of self-

abjuration after his lag time ended. He clearly disproves his alleged willpower by persistently refusing himself food, drugs, and warmth. He decreased his great admission, hardened his body, and worked on his propensities. Asceticism is not austerity for its own sake; it is a process of self-regulation and self-formation based on the utopian notion of attaining complete control over one's body, self, and life. All of Kafka's interests, habits, and penchants were modified accordingly.

Asceticism is an important part of this story, a path chosen voluntarily by the artist. He does not preach any kind of spiritual attainment. But he takes fasting more than the 40 days he took in his mind as if it were important. That one thought only made him make this tough decision. Even though Pakum tries to stop him, he is not ready for it and goes ahead. Remember that even Sri Buddha, after his enlightenment, rejected extreme asceticism in favor of a more moderate version of the "middle way." However, the artist was not ready to get rid of his extreme asceticism even after 41 days. Various individuals have also attempted an ascetic lifestyle to free themselves from addictions, some of them particular to modern life, such as money, alcohol, tobacco, drugs, entertainment, sex, food, meat, etc. Here, the artist is spending months in a cage without food. He finds joy in it. He does not expect a salvation. Instead, he is completely satisfied with the approval of the society. He does not get any form of entertainment. Just a little water for sprinkling. Military band music is a celebration on the day of the end of starvation, and the audience is full of applause. See everything. He is not at all obsessed with it, and he is escorted on stage by two young, beautiful women. The story says that they grab his hands and head, but he shows no interest or attraction to them at all. An act of starving himself to earn money in order not to starve to survive may seem counterintuitive. He refused all kinds of allurements. The artist was never tempted when the guards sat in front of him at night. No one could tempt him with food or anything else. He even hates the food that the impresario puts in his mouth at the last minute. Just like Buddha's enlightenment, the artist's goal in life was to break his own record.

“SPIRITUAL ASPECT”

Spirituality is relating to or affecting the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things. The meaning of spirituality has developed and expanded over time, and various meanings can be found alongside each other. Traditionally, spirituality referred to a religious process of re-formation that "aims to recover the original shape of man," oriented at "the image of God," as exemplified by the founders and sacred texts of the religions of the world. The term was used within early Christianity to refer to a life oriented toward the Holy Spirit and broadened during the Late Middle Ages to include mental aspects of life.

The hunger artist takes fast to seek attention from society. Through help, that way to earn money for Impisareo and for self-satisfaction also. The story might be happening somewhere in Europe. Fasting was commonly mentioned in the Bible. As a European nation,

we

assume the majority will be following Christianity. Nehemiah fasted to help him confess his sins to God and turn away from them and to ask God for favor in the sight of the king of Persia to get permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:4). David fasted to ask God to intervene because of injustice (Psalm 35:13). In 2 Samuel 12:17, 23, he fasted to ask for a miraculous healing — a request God did not grant. Mordecai and the Jews fasted upon hearing news of Haman's wicked plot for their extermination (Esther 4:3). In the visual art, nobody was allowed to fast for more than 40 days. Even so, the artist wishes to fast for more than 40 days to show his capability. The days set for 40 may be related to biblical background. The disciples of John the Baptist, an important prophet who prepared the way for Jesus' ministry, often fasted. The Bible provides many examples of fasting, including when Moses fasted for 40 days (Exodus 34:28) and when Jesus fasted for 40 days before he began His public ministry (Luke 4:2). In common practice, fasting can be defined as giving up all food and sometimes drinks. Here, the artist completely avoids food and uses very little water to swipe his lips. Like Jesus faced temptation, Satis, the artist, also faced a lot of temptations, but he successfully overcame them as Jesus did.

“CLOCK”

The clock symbolizes time. Time symbolizes a lot of things, like living life. Designed to measure, record, and indicate time, the clock is one of the oldest instruments invented by humans. One of the most significant time-keeping symbols, clocks, can be found in nearly every culture on the planet. The clock is an image of the progression of time, and it addresses the significance of time in our lives. Clocks also symbolize death in many cultures, reminding us of how short our lives are. This concept is very important to the story. The hunger artist is conscious of time; that is, he needs to pass 40 days for his personal success. However, one in the story never mentions a situation in which the hunger artist is looking at the clock. AS mentioned, the clock also symbolizes death, i.e., how short our lives are. It can be seen that the clock was there for us to remember the upcoming death of the artist. The clocks are a clear sign that nothing remains permanent in life and that everything changes at some point or other. As it is, we can see the amusement of the audience in society change from decade to decade. During that time, almost nobody was interested in watching Hunger artists except children. May be the hunger artist is aware of each time he lived on earth and knows that nobody can hold time that he ignores by not looking at the clock

“PANTHER”

While the hunger artist was sleeping in a cage, he was living with a pile of straw in an unsanitary environment. He spent more than 40 days without food and with little water to wet his lips. No one listened to him except some children. Adults hated him. He failed to provide amusement to visitors in the circus. But with the artist's death, he was swept away like a pest and burned with straw. Instead, on the contrary, the cage was given to a panther

who eats meat in abundance, and the crowd crowded in front of the cage. The boss also got a good income.

Black Panther's dreams can have a wide variety of meanings and symbolism depending on the way in which she appears. Generally, dreams about Panthers represent personal power and shrewdness. For example, a wounded Panther represents a meeting with an adversary that you will overcome, and petting a Panther portends good luck. A panther has a lot of specialties, which may be why the owner and the author decided to place a panther after an artist.

CONCLUSION

Like the other works of Kafka, "A Hunger Artist" is also full of existentialist and absurdity concepts in symbolic form. A form of Kafkaesque ("having a disorienting, confusing, nightmarish quality; feeling surreal and threatening") can also be prominent in this short story. But some kafkaesque situations involve a feeling of oppression or danger, like a kafkaesque nightmare that leaves you feeling uneasy even after you wake up. This story leads us into a nightmare even after we wake up. Especially the death and burning of the body of the hunger artist. It is universal because he has no name. The main themes in this story are identified as death, art, cage, isolation, asceticism, spiritual aspect, clock, and Panther. It can be said that more than this number of themes can be identified.

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