

fort . . . d'obtenir la suppression de la méchante comédie de *Tartuffe*." (p. 7)

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### Kafka's *Der Prozess*

To the Editor:

I should like to comment on Henry Sussman's article "The Court as Text: Inversion, Supplanting, and Derangement in Kafka's *Der Prozess*" (*PMLA*, 92, 1977, 41–55). While the conclusions reached are certainly provocative and highly interesting, I question the justification of his method of quasi-Freudian text interpretation using etymology in cases where a native German would never think of it. For example, on page 43: " 'Was treibt ihr hier?' . . . The etymological root linking the verb describing the motivation of the warders and Whipper to the Freudian *Trieb* should not pass unnoticed. . . ." I am not so sure that it should not pass unnoticed: "Was treibt ihr hier?" is a common German phrase, and no native German would think of *Trieb* in this context. The same applies to "the wordplay linking *Kanzel*, 'pulpit,' and *Kanzlei*, 'Court offices'" (p. 47) or *tauschen* and *täuschen* (p. 48); the last "wordplay" figures rather prominently in the argument of the article.

I should also like to take exception to the expression "anaerobic atmosphere" (p. 48) as rather strange; according to the dictionaries I consulted, "anaerobic" means "able to survive without air"—not the same as "stifling," which the author must have had in mind (although certainly a much more erudite word).

Finally, I should like to point out that one of the quotations in the article is incomplete in a way that changes its meaning. On page 44 reference is made to "the way K. kisses Fr. Bürstner just before retiring, 'wie ein durstiges Tier mit der Zunge.'" This sounds as if K. were using his tongue in the act of kissing; this is, however, by no means necessarily true, since the complete quotation is: "wie ein durstiges Tier mit der Zunge über das endlich gefundene Quellwasser hinjagt."

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*Mr. Sussman replies:*

Andrew Török has read my essay as closely as I have attempted to treat Kafka's novel, something for which any writer must be extremely grateful.

While not disagreeing with my overall argument or method, he points to certain excesses in my use of language, both Kafka's and my own. On some points, my essay resists his objections more resiliently than on others. In reading a novel that takes such pains, for example, to dramatize the breakdown of spatial integrity and in which even a painter's atelier turns out to be the property of the Court, my pointing to a word confusion (*Kanzlei/Kanzel*) that superimposes the Court offices on the church where K. receives his judgment is hardly out of place. Yet Török raises other objections that may not be dismissed quite so easily. The native speaker of German may not hear the Freudian *Trieb* in an expression involving *treiben*. (The scene in which we find the expression is, of course, vividly colored by sexual excitation, revulsion, and guilt, and so the Freudian resonance that I hear may not be entirely my projection.) A native ear is not an unambiguously beneficial critical implement, as truly close reading demands that the language under scrutiny, even if one's own, acquire the unfamiliarity and vividness of a foreign tongue. Török has a stronger case in objecting to my linkage of *tauschen* and *täuschen*. After all, the words that I bring into "play" are separated by episodes, not merely pages. I am certain that, on some objective level outside my text, such usages may be judged wrong (though an elaboration of the preconditions of that objectivity would be interesting). Yet, even in defense of my weaker points, the question may be raised whether there is not something in the general manner in which I approach the text that justifies the particular treatments. In other words, in dealing with Kafka, my essay evolves an autonomous fictive economy of its own. Alongside of accuracy or objectivity in characterizing Kafka's novel, "working" within this network becomes a legitimate criterion according to which my particular moves may be evaluated. Out of context, what I describe as a wordplay between *tauschen* and *täuschen* may seem farfetched, but this is a variation on a move that the reader may find more convincing elsewhere (on *Kanzlei/Kanzel*, for example).

Yet another instance of fictive language in my essay would be the use of "anaerobic" to describe the air in the Court offices. Since the word means "able to live without air" it should rightly apply to the clerks who work there rather than to the atmosphere itself. I have thus added a metonymic displacement to Kafka's metaphoric suggestion that the inhabitants of the offices are a kind of mold. With regard to K.'s kiss, my interest is not specifying how he does it but contrasting his passionate embrace of Fr. Bürstner, almost a sexual attack, with his more restrained approach to Fr. Montag.