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“Mit Josefine muss es abwärts gehen”: Making Audible the Conflicted Narrator of Kafka’s “Josefine”

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“Mit Josefine muss es abwärts gehen”: Making Audible the Conflicted Narrator of Kafka’s
“Josefine”

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College
by
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Preface

Long before beginning this project, I had already been intrigued by the writing of Franz Kafka. The works of his that I read generally left a similar effect on me; I was left wondering about what his words really meant. His enigmatic stories seem to contain the whole world in them--no other reason would explain the variety of meanings for each person that reads them--even when their plots are extremely limited. It has become clear to me that in Kafka's writing, what is said is only as important as what is *not* said. His works create the impression of being alone in a dark, vast, empty space, and I believe that it is in this vast emptiness that readers begin to hear more keenly as the words of the author resonate. When I find myself in this empty space, Kafka's prose begins to take on qualities that resemble music.

Speaking as a classically-trained musician, I began to appreciate a likeness to music in Kafka's writing long before I knew anything about the author. His writing, unadorned and yet endlessly layered with a balance between concrete detail and open implication, reminds me of the compositions of Soviet composer Dmitri Shostakovich, whose unadorned, often lightly-orchestrated music somehow manages to convey a world of feelings ranging from sardonic humor to chilling dread. A great deal of my musical training has involved developing my awareness of details and nuances that heighten music and bring it to life. Reading Kafka's meticulous prose, the appreciable intention that the author placed into each detail began to appeal to my musical mind.

It was therefore no surprise to me to learn that Kafka's writing has inspired numerous musical minds to composition. When I soon thereafter started to read from the wide array of academic research about Kafka and music, I realized that my own personal impressions of

Kafka's works were not an idiosyncrasy. The more I read about the topic, the more I became convinced that these trends observed between Kafka and music were not unintentional.

The first time I read Kafka's final short story "Josefine, die Sangerin oder Das Volk der Mause", I was interested at first only because it was a story about the power of song. In this story, set within a society of so-called mousefolk, a nameless narrator describes how a mouse singer named Josefine transfixes the mousefolk at large with the great effect of her song. Throughout the story, the narrator discusses Josefine's song, which never loses its power despite conflicting circumstances such as the general unmusicality of the mousefolk or the weakness of Josefine herself. By the end of the story, Josefine disappears from the mousefolk, who have denied her the one thing she desires above all: their unanimous understanding and acknowledgement of her art. However, Josefine's song remains in the memory of the mousefolk even after her disappearance.

As I read the story again and again, I started to observe more and more details that had escaped my attention at first, and gradually an entirely different story began to emerge. Like the other Kafka stories I read before it, I began to hear the music in Josefine's story as well with each subsequent reading. Thus began the journey which took me to the outcome of this final project.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Discovering Music in the Prose of “Josefine”	9
Chapter 2: Tracing The Narrator’s Voice In The Sounds Of The Text	24
Chapter 3: Transcribing The Prose of “Josefine” Into Written Music	35
Conclusion	42
Appendix	44

Introduction

“Die Stille zwischen den Noten ist genauso wichtig wie die Noten selbst.” - W.A. Mozart

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart delivers an incredibly subversive suggestion in this deceptively simple quote. It is already unconventional to consider the role of silence within music--however, with these words, Mozart is ascribing a higher importance to silence. He is not only calling attention to its ubiquitous presence alongside the audible sounds of music; he is asserting it as being a vital component of music. Composers, like other artists, give form and variety to their creations by using the available means at their disposal, such as rhythms, pitch, and timbre--silence requires equal consideration in the process of composition. Indeed, much music is written with intentional silences called “rests” amid the notes.

However, these silences are not merely sharing space with sound in coexistence; the silences are surrounded by sound. Mozart indicates this in placing silence “between” the notes. When silence appears in music, it is a stark contrast--the music goes from being sound to being the absence of it. Silence in music has various effects: for one, it can be used to indicate suspense or build anticipation for the sound that will come next. It can also be used as a relief from the intensity of sound--if the notes are a relentless stream of intense sound without any place to breathe, then the listener feels constricted and overwhelmed. Additionally, the variety of rhythms is formed around different proportions of sound and silence. For instance, “staccato” or “detached” notes are those whose duration is shortened--the distance between two staccato notes remains the same, but the silent space between them grows. Even when boxed in between audible space, silence remains a ubiquitous part of music.

John Cage's composition "4'33" sets an extreme example for the role of silence in music. In this piece, the performer ceremoniously assumes a playing position, but does not play a sound. For four minutes and thirty-three seconds, the performer remains silently onstage, and the real music comes from the expectant audience, from which the occasional accidental noise such as a cough or chair creak emanates. This piece is not merely a commentary on the arbitrary nature of how music and sound are frequently divided. It also shows how silence literally "sets the stage" for music to emerge, for ultimately it is silence that forms the music. Without silence, music can not be music, because the absence of it allows itself to be defined. Concurrent with this is the famous quote by Leopold Stokowski, "A painter paints his pictures on canvas. But musicians paint their pictures on silence."

At its core, Mozart's quote poses a sort of tension: is silence the constant from which music emerges, or is music the constant from which silence emerges? How exactly do silence and music coexist, if this is at all a coexistence? The tense coexistence between sound and silence becomes a central theme in Franz Kafka's final story "Josefine, die Sangerin oder Das Volk der Mause". This story, unique from any other text by Kafka, places music in a central role, highlighting the tension between a lonesome singer's unmitigable power of music and a greater society that would collectively rather live in peaceful silence.

In real life, Kafka's relationship with music was complicated. His circle of friends included accomplished musicians and composers, most notably Max Brod. Kafka attended concerts, several of which he wrote about in diary entries. As a child, he took violin¹ lessons, though in adulthood he did not play any instrument. Direct and indirect references in his works, diaries, and letters show that Kafka read works about music, such as Heinrich von Kleist's "Die

¹ In a 1912 letter to his lover Felice Bauer, he writes of his early violin studies, in which "mein Violinlehrer hat mich aus Verzweiflung ihn der Musikstunde lieber ber Stocke springen lassen, die er selbst gehalten hat, und die musikalischen Fortschritte bestanden darin, da er von Stunde zu Stunde die Stocke hoher hielt." (B 452)

heilige Cäcilie oder die Gewalt der Musik”² or Franz Grillparzer’s “Der Arme Spielmann”³. Additionally, in research papers such as Nicola Gess’s “The Politics of Listening” and Ido Lewit’s “Kafka’s Anti-Wagnerian Philosophy of Music”, there is strong evidence that Kafka was not only well aware of the popular ideals of music in his time, but that he also was heavily opinionated about them.

Despite his familiarity with music, however, Kafka considered himself “unmusical”. In his letters and diaries, Kafka makes several references to this self-perceived unmusicality, most famously indicated in this line from a 1920 letter to Milena Jesenská:

...weißt Du eigentlich daß ich vollständig, in einer meiner Erfahrung nach überhaupt sonst nicht vorkommenden Vollständigkeit unmusikalisch bin? (B 975)⁴

In concurrence with this claim, Kafka’s friend Max Brod wrote in his biography about the author that Kafka “had no talent for pure music” and even “couldn’t tell the difference between *The Merry Widow* and *Tristan and Isolde*” (115). Kafka himself attributed his unmusicality to his preoccupation with his writing, claiming in one diary entry from 1912 that his writing drained his capacity for other joys in life, including “die Freuden des Geschlechtes, des Essens, des Trinkens, des philosophischen Nachdenkens, der Musik zuallererst” [sex, eating, drinking, philosophical thinking--that of music, above all]⁵ (T 341)

The theme of unmusicality becomes a major theme in “Josefine” right from the start. In only the second paragraph of the story, the narrator describes the mousefolk (or in this case the mousefolk excluding Josefine) with the exact word “unmusikalisch”. This unmusicality is mainly attributed to the way of life of the mousefolk. A lifestyle of constant worry is well-known to the

² Bernhard draws parallels from this text to “Josefine” in his essay ““This Nothing of a Voice”: Kafka’s *Josefine* Narrative as a Modern Reflection on Revelation and Language”.

³ See Kafka’s letters to Milena on July 5th and 13th, 1920.

⁴ Translation by Philip Boehm from “Letters to Milena”, Schocken Books, 1990: “Do you realize that I am completely unmusical, with a completeness that in my experience does not exist anywhere else at all?” (49)

⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, all English translations provided will be my own.

mousefolk, and they generally can not “zu solchen, unserem sonstigen Leben so fernen Dingen erheben, wie es die Musik ist.” [elevate to such things as remote to the other parts of our life as music is] (K 1)⁶ For the mousefolk, their existence is constantly in jeopardy as they suffer attacks by unspecified enemies, neglect for the preservation of its history and of its education, and the toil of daily labor. Such a thing as music would be considered extraneous to the mousefolk, who, in the narrator’s words, possess a “praktische Schlaueit” [practical slyness]. Here the narrator emphasizes that it is due to this “practical slyness”, rather than music, that the mousefolk tend “uns über alles hinwegzutrusten” [to console ourselves about everything] (K 1). Yet, despite their unmusicality, the mousefolk are still affected by music all the same.

The self-perceived inherent unmusicality of the mousefolk is the point from which the narrator examines Josefine’s music and musicality throughout the story. At the base of the narrator’s examination of Josefine is one question above all else: if Josefine’s audience is unmusical, how can her song still have such a powerful effect over them? What is it about this music that allows it to thrive even in a setting that is fundamentally its opposite? In the narrator’s words, what is the “Rätsel ihrer großen Wirkung” [enigma of her great effect] (K 2)?

Before this “great effect” can be deciphered, it must first be identified. In order to get to the bottom of this enigma, the story’s narrator exerts great effort in studying this music and analyzing it as thoroughly as possible, or as well as one can describe music while being unmusical. The narrator’s descriptions are less about the details of the music itself and more about displaying how powerfully the music affects the mousefolk. They receive her music with what the narrator calls a “feierliche Stille” [ceremonial silence] (K 3). They form a “Menge, die warm, Leib an Leib, schein atmend horcht” [warm mass, shoulder to shoulder, which listens,

⁶ The page numbers of the text, for the rest of this paper, will reflect the page numbers of the Google Document to which I transferred the Project Gutenberg online version:
<https://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/kafka/misc/chap031.html>.

scarcely breathing] (K 4). In the most vivid musical moment in the story, the narrator describes how the audience practically “träumt” [dreams] at her concerts, “als lösten sich dem Einzelnen die Glieder, als dürfte sich der Ruhelose einmal nach seiner Lust im großen warmen Bett des Volkes dehnen und strecken” [as if the individual released his limbs, as if the restless one were finally allowed to lay back and stretch out as he wished in the vast, warm bed of the folk] (K 9).

The imagery of these descriptions gives off feelings of warmth, unity, and dissolution of one’s self and worries. Essentially, Josefine’s song seems to give the mousefolk what they lack the most in their busy and fearful lives: comfort, peace, and community--the narrator does admit that the mousefolk listen to Josefine “noch besser als sonst” [more earnestly than normal] (Kafka 6) in times of distress. These depictions of the powerful effect of Josefine’s song correspond with a supernatural, romanticized ideal of music. Nicola Gess’s essay “The Politics of Listening” explores the power of music both in and outside of “Josefine” in great depth.

In her essay, Gess describes the prevalent music traditions of Kafka’s time, of which she maintains Kafka was certainly aware. She describes Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophy on the power of music in his “The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music”:

As listeners [the audience members] are transported, possessed; they lose their individuality and become part of a larger entity, the mass. This mass is then deemed to be itself creative... it has brought forth the very music it is hearing; it is at once the result and the creative origin of this music. (276)

Looking back at the narrator’s description of Josefine’s effect, there is a striking similarity between the individual losing his “limbs” and laying back in the “bed of the folk” and the audience member losing his “individuality” to join the “mass”. Gess continues by describing the newer view on music’s effect perpetuated by the composer Richard Wagner and his followers:

...the shapeless mass is given form by a musical leader (Führer) who... functions as its creator, exemplar, and mouthpiece...aiding in the formation of a Volk (unified people).
(277)

Josephine embodies the role of this leader quite clearly. She is indeed the “creator” of the Volk, as her song is able to draw the mousefolk away from their daily toils and incorporate the “individual” into the greater “mass” at these concerts. In fact, it is only at her concerts that the mousefolk are able to experience this kind of feeling of being “one”, for when her concerts are over, they return to their scattered daily life. The narrator even mentions, in fact, that even those who consider themselves opposed to Josefine “tauchen... in das Gefühl der Menge” [...quickly... sink... into the feeling of the warm mass] (K 4). Josefine’s song is therefore powerful enough to override dissent from among the mousefolk and uniting them at their core.

In the writing of “Josefine”, Kafka embeds the power of her song into the text in a way that it is able to overcome all challenges against its great effect, including the greatest one of all: the narrator of the story. In the text are revealed indications of the narrator’s bias against Josefine, a bias which is exemplified most clearly by in a statement of personal allegiance to Josefine’s opposition early in the story: “...diese Opposition, zu der auch ich halb gehöre” [...this opposition, to which I also half belong] (K 2). In fact, the narrator’s personal opposition toward Josefine becomes embedded in the telling of the story, most of which involves an ongoing argumentation that pushes *against* the potential merits of Josefine’s song. However, the power of Josefine’s song pierces through every argument that threatens to reduce it, and so the story progresses with the narrator’s increased--and increasingly futile--efforts in silencing Josefine’s song. The narrator being the sole voice relating the story while Josefine herself remains without dialogue means that Josefine and her song are literally being reduced to silence by the narrator, which in the end makes Josefine’s song ever more powerful through its imperviousness. The

narrator's repeated failure culminates in the desperate statement, "Mit Josefine aber muß es abwärts gehn" [For Josefine, however, it has to go downhill] (K 15).

The closer that this story is read, the more that this tension between silence and song becomes obvious, and in fact, lends an *audible* quality to the prose of "Josefine"--indeed, despite any appraisal of Kafka's own unmusicality, Max Brod describes Kafka's prose as bearing "all the characteristics of good music in its rhythm and dynamic" (115). Ample research has been conducted, especially in more recent years, studying the wide variety of acoustic qualities that appear across Kafka's fictional works. For instance, in "Kafka und Mahler", Albrecht von Massow compares Kafka's "Der Prozess" and Mahler's Seventh Symphony in their use of "Repetitionsfiguren" [repeated motifs]⁷, as their cyclical structures form a "Getriebe" [gear mechanism]. In his book "Kafkas akustische Welten", Rüdiger Görner explores the numerous "Hörspuren" [traces of sound] that form a "Klangwelt" [world of sound] in Kafka's fiction and their often-overlooked significance in sensately intensifying Kafka's writing; for instance the intricate network of "erzählte Geräusche" [narrated sounds], or the "Sprachmusik" [music of language] which Kafka himself keenly heard in human "Stimmführung" [the way one controls one's voice]. Equally as important in the music of Kafka's writing, of course, is the role of silence, and Achim Küpper's "Klang und Klangentzug als Schriftverfahren" studies the role of "Klang" [sound] just as much as "Klangentzug" [sound removal] in Kafka's works.

The multitude of such detailed "sonic readings", as I call them, by Kafka scholars, is one indication of why Kafka's works might frequently inspire so many musical compositions.⁸ Many of these works are inspired by main themes or a general ambience in Kafka's prose. My own

⁷ Unless otherwise indicated, all English translations provided of secondary literature will be my own.

⁸ Kafka's writings have inspired numerous compositions by renowned composers including Ernst Krenek, György Kurtág, and Philip Glass, to name a few. For further reading, "Franz Kafka und die Musik", released by Steffen Höhne and Alice Stašková, is a great source of information, featuring several essays analyzing the more well-known musical works inspired by Kafka stories.

intention for this project, however, is to go deeper than that. My source of inspiration will be the language of “Josefine”. I will uncover the sound, in the form of *Hörspuren*, that lies in the very words of the prose. Then, I will show how these *Hörspuren* form an intricate network of sound in the story, an overarching *akustische Landschaft* [acoustic landscape]. This *akustische Landschaft* will be the blueprint from which I will transcribe the language of “Josefine” into an audible music. I will then show, with the help of some samples of my transcription, how reading prose with an active sense of sound and listening for the music of the language can bring out facets of the story, such as the narrator’s tone of voice, that otherwise would have remained buried in the pages of the text.

Chapter 1: Discovering Music in the Prose of “Josefine”

Kurt Tucholsky wrote of Kafka’s writing as having a “Melodie” [melody] and being of a “singenden” [singing] nature (Born 19-20). As if to prove Tucholsky’s remarks, a multitude of musical compositions have been written around Kafka’s works by composers as notable as György Kurtág and Philip Glass. How exactly does one hear the music in Kafka’s writing? Drawing from the numerous scholarly writings⁹ available about Kafka and music, it is possible to uncover traces of this “melody” by delving into the text’s *Hörspuren* such as *erzählte Geräusche*, *Klangentzug* and *Sprachmusik*. By examining where and how these *Hörspuren* appear and reappear in “Josefine”, a process which I will call “sonic reading”, it will soon become clear that a larger acoustic landscape, or *akustische Landschaft*, resembling music is formed as the intricate network of *Hörspuren* become dynamic across the story.

To begin with the most obvious indication of sound in prose, let us first examine the *erzählte Geräusche*. In reading a work of prose, *erzählte Geräusche* are those words which are associated with sounds in the reader’s head. For example, if a reader encounters the phrase, “The doorbell chimed,” he will mentally hear the sound of a chime. Going even further with this, a sound can be given a different intensity or timbre depending on the vocabulary used by the author. For instance, a “shriek” will sound differently than a “shout”, which will sound differently than a “scream”.

In his essay “Klang und Klangentzug als Schriftverfahren”, Achim Küpper describes this class of words as belonging to an “optisch vermittelte Akustik” [optically mediated acoustics] (92), since these sounds are heard only upon the reading of their indicative words. He describes this even more vividly in saying that when a person reads to himself, a word mentally “nach-

⁹ For further reading on Kafka and music, see Rüdiger Görner’s book “Kafkas akustische Welten” (2019), the collection “Franz Kafka und die Musik” (2018) compiled by Steffen Höhne and Alice Stašková, and Jürgen Daiber’s book “Franz Kafka und der Lärm: Klanglandschaften der frühen Moderne” (2015).

oder mithallt” [reverberates with or after] when read (91). Küpper further asserts that these *erzählte Geräusche* allow for a “literarische Klangwelt” [literary world of sound] to form in the reader’s head, even when reading silently (91). This particular quote is reminiscent of Mozart’s quote regarding the silence between the notes. In this soundless reading, one is still able to mentally hear sound--it is not an externally audible sound, and yet the sounds of the text are still heard in silence.

The *Klangwelt* in Kafka’s writing corresponds to the author’s own ear for sound in daily life. In “Kafkas akustische Welten”, Rüdiger Görner equates Kafka’s relation to music to a sort of “resonante” existentialism, citing a fragmented diary entry by Kafka in which he writes of “die bisher immer wenigstens zu ahnende Musik der Welt” [the music of the world, up until now perpetually detectable] (57). The numerous diary entries and letters in which Kafka complains of noisy neighbors and mice in the walls may indicate a fundamental sensitivity toward sound on the author’s part, but here with this acknowledgement of the “Musik der Welt”, he elevates mundane sounds to a “music of the world”. Kafka’s perception of a “Musik der Welt” bears some similarity to the famous quote by Gustav Mahler, with whose name Kafka demonstrated some familiarity¹⁰: “A symphony must be like the world. It must contain everything.” Indeed, in Mahler’s compositions, instrumental sounds emulating sounds of nature such as bird calls often can be heard. Through the emulation of its sounds, Mahler writes the world into his music, and with his *erzählte Geräusche*, Kafka does the same.

Let us now look at some of the *erzählte Geräusche* in “Josefine.” In one paragraph, the narrator makes an analogy between Josefine's performances and someone cracking nuts for an audience:

¹⁰ Page 37 of Görner’s book discusses two letters from Kafka to Max Brod in which Mahler is referenced, once directly by name and once indirectly.

Eine Nuß aufknacken ist wahrhaftig keine Kunst, deshalb wird es auch niemand wagen, ein Publikum zusammenzurufen und vor ihm, um es zu unterhalten, Nüsse knacken. Tut er es dennoch und gelingt seine Absicht, dann kann es sich eben doch nicht nur um bloßes Nüsseknacken handeln. Oder es handelt sich um Nüsseknacken, aber es stellt sich heraus, daß wir über diese Kunst hinweggesehen haben, weil wir sie glatt beherrschten und daß uns dieser neue Nußknacker erst ihr eigentliches Wesen zeigt, wobei es dann für die Wirkung sogar nützlich sein könnte, wenn er etwas weniger tüchtig im Nüsseknacken ist als die Mehrzahl von uns. (K 2)

This paragraph is particularly noisy, and it appears at a point in the story right after the narrator has first reduced Josefine's song to noise by suggesting that her song consists of nothing more than "Pfeifen" [piping], which the average mouseperson naturally does throughout the day. Furthermore, the narrator suggests that her "große Wirkung" may lie more in her theatricality or the way she "sich feierlich hinstellt, um nichts anderes als das Übliche zu tun" [ceremoniously situates herself to in fact do nothing more than the mundane] (K 2). And so here begins the narrator's tangent about "Nüsseknacken" [nut-cracking].

Cracking a nut is a mundane action, and in comparing it to Josefine's song, the narrator is reducing it even further than in comparing it to "Pfeifen," which still has some musical qualities such as pitch. There is a distinct sound associated with the "aufknacken" of a nut--sharp and resonant, and yet not resembling anything like song. By comparing Josefine's song, first to piping and then to a nut cracking open, the reader's mental depiction of Josefine's song changes in its sound, from pure song to a thin and piercing whistle to an unpitched, percussive, and disruptive noise.

The use of these sounds in Kafka's writing is certainly purposeful and even vital for Kafka. Many of the *erzählte Geräusche* that appear in this story are strewn across Kafka's

writings. The word "Pfeifen", which is used interchangeably with "Gesang" throughout "Josefine", is used in fascinating ways across Kafka's oeuvre. In diary entries and letters, this word is used by Kafka to refer either to pipe-smoking or, more typically, whistling, such as in a 1921 letter to Max Brod describing the "Hämmern, Gesang und Pfeifen" [hammering, song, and whistling] of a loud neighbor (B 276). Curiously, in the numerous letters Kafka wrote about his experiences with mice during his stay on a farm in Zürau in 1917, the word "Pfeifen" is only ever once mentioned to describe their sound,¹¹ while Kafka's story about mousefolk is inundated with the word.

In another passage of "Josefine," the mouse children are portrayed as "zischend" [hissing] and "piepsend" [squeaking] (K 8). In his essay "Klang und Klangentzug als Schriftverfahren", Achim Küpper outlines the frequent use of "zischen" among Kafka's written works, a trend which only further strengthens the hypothesis that *erzählte Geräusche* were of great importance to Kafka and conscientiously chosen in their usage. Citing as evidence stories rich in *erzählte Geräusche* such as "Der Bau" and "Großer Lärm", both of which feature narrators surrounded by various types of sound, Küpper makes the statement that sound is "omnipräsent" in Kafka's writing (92). Given its abundance of *erzählte Geräusche*, "Josefine" is a clear example.

However, what of all of the words in the story that do not belong to the *erzählte Geräusche*? The vast majority of words in the story have no sound attached to them; they are silent words. Indeed, the *erzählte Geräusche*, as they appear throughout the text, stand out amid the rest of the text like occasional bursts of sound among an overall silence. On this topic of silence, Küpper's essay explores not only Kafka's use of "Klang", but of "Klangentzug" as well.

¹¹ "Was für ein schreckliches stummes lärmendes Volk das ist. Um zwei Uhr wurde ich durch ein Rascheln bei meinem Bett geweckt und von da an hörte es nicht auf bis zum Morgen. Auf die Kohlenkiste hinauf, von der Kohlenkiste hinunter, die Diagonale des Zimmers abgelaufen, Kreise gezogen, am Holz genagt, im Ruhen leise gepiffen und dabei immer das Gefühl der Stille, der heimlichen Arbeit eines gedrückten proletarischen Volkes, dem die Nacht gehört." (B 172)

In fact, Küpper asserts that *Klangentzug* is no less than “ebenso” [just as] (95) important as Klang for Kafka.

The word *Klangentzug* suggests not the mere absence of sound but the “removal” of it as well, and just as there are audible *erzählte Geräusche* in Kafka’s writing, there are also soundless *erzählte Geräusche*. Küpper gives some examples of this in Kafka’s writing, for instance in the story “Das Schweigen der Sirenen”, in which the Greek hero Odysseus stuffs wax into his ears to avoid the deadly song of the sirens, but the sirens actually remain silent and lead the oblivious Odysseus to assume that they are singing based on the fact that their mouths are open, their throats move, they take deep inhaled breaths, and their eyes shed tears. With this silent display, Küpper reveals a “Spannungsraum” [space of tension] (95) between the visual and audible elements in Kafka’s writing.

Such silent displays can be found in “Josefine” as well, for instance in one passage describing how she, when she desires to summon an audience for a performance, simply assumes a position--with open mouth, tilted-back head, and raised eyes-- “daß sie zu singen beabsichtigt” [that she intends to sing] (K 4). but does not actually sing. Here, she silently goes through the pantomimic motions of singing without producing sound to go with it. Another example is when the narrator says that Josefine “spricht überhaupt wenig” [says little overall] when not performing and describes her as “schweigsam unter den Plappermäulern” [quiet among the blabbermouths] (K 6).¹² The audience also factors into this silent display, as they listen to her performances in “feierliche Stille” [ceremonial silence] (K 3). The most crucial instance of *Klangentzug* in “Josefine”, however, is that the narrator seems never to directly describe her song--the closest that it ever gets is when the narrator tries to draw an uncertain parallel between

¹² "Schweigen" is a German verb without any direct English equivalent. Interestingly, the German language gives an active quality to an action which English describes in a passive way, namely "to stay quiet".

her song and the “Pfeifen” of the mousefolk. What is known about Josefine’s song is described in its physiological and emotional effects over the silent audience. All in all, the story of Josefine’s song finds itself surrounded by silence.

The *Klangwelt* that arises from the use of *erzählte Geräusche* and *Klangentzug* in the story is a rich one, and yet Kafka’s biographical background reveals still one more layer to the sound that exists in “Josefine”, and that consists of what I call *Sprachmusik*, a term which encompasses all of the sonic qualities of *spoken* language--this is especially important for “Josefine” as a text written in the perspective of a narrator speaking directly to the reader. In spoken language, one hears the sounds of consonants and vowels, the modulation of the voice to achieve a variety of inflections, and natural pauses. A sonic reading of Kafka’s texts therefore must take into consideration the sound of the language spoken aloud, because Kafka proves to have already been keenly attuned to these sounds himself.

It is shown in several diary entries and letters that reading aloud was a familiar and important experience for Kafka. In a 1914 letter to Grete Bloch, for example, he describes reading Franz Grillparzer’s novel “Der Arme Spielmann” aloud to his sister. He describes how he was so full of the text that he felt he had no possible capacity for “Irrtum der Betonung, des Atems, des Klanges” [errors in emphasis, breath, or tone quality] (B 793), among other things. What is particularly revealing in this passage is his attention to detail regarding the delivery of his reading. His mention of “emphasis”, “breath”, and “tone quality”--all fitting terms to describe qualities of music as well--show an appreciation for the sonic components that make up speech.

With his extensive study on the matter, Görner provides other evidence to point out Kafka’s appreciation for this so-called “Stimmführung” (53), or the way one modulates and directs one’s own voice. He cites a 1912 diary entry by Kafka, in which the author describes how

he attended a poetry recitation by the actor Alexander Moissi. Kafka's diary entry is extensive in its detail of Moissi's *Stimmführung*. Kafka brings up such techniques as chopping up syllables with the "Zungenspitze" [tip of the tongue] (T 393-395) or letting words "hinunterstoßen" [expel downward]. Even the word "pfeifen"--yet another instance of this ubiquitous *erzähltes Geräusch*--appears here to describe the recitation of poetry. Indeed, within this same passage, Kafka writes that the recitation has a "Melodie".

Görner discusses numerous instances of Kafka and his ear for such a *Sprachmusik*. He exemplifies this most aptly with one especially lucid passage from a letter from Kafka to Milena Jesenská, in which Kafka describes the Czech word "nechápu", or "I do not understand":

...es ist so streng, teilnahmslos, kaltäugig, sparsam und vor allem nußknackerhaft, dreimal krachen im Wort die Kiefer aufeinander oder richtiger: die erste Silbe macht einen Versuch die Nuß zu fassen, es geht nicht, dann reißt die zweite Silbe den Mund ganz groß auf, nun paßt schon die Nuß hinein und die dritte Silbe endlich knackt, hören Sie die Zähne? (29-30)

Kafka speaks here in great detail of the sound made when the Czech word is spoken aloud. He compares the three syllables to the cracking open of a nut--the word "nußknackerhaft" [nutcracker-like] is another curious parallel with the *erzählte Geräusche* in "Josefine." The first syllable of the word is "ne-", which Kafka compares sonically to a feeble "attempt" to "grab" the nut. The second syllable, "-chá-", he compares to the mouth being "torn open" and the nut being placed inside. In fact, in pronouncing this word, one will find that the mouth must open wider for the accented "a" to sound. In this accented "a" is the emphasis of the word, aided by the throaty "ch" with which it begins, all of which makes the forceful word "reißt" a fitting description for this syllable. The third syllable, '-pu', is when the nut finally "knackt"--Kafka adds to this sonic experience by imagining the "Zähne" [teeth] in the final question. As the "p" is enunciated, the

sound of it resonates in the mouth, similar to the sharp and resonant sound of a nutshell cracking open. In this passage, Kafka reveals the keen ear he has for the music of speech.

A similar *Sprachmusik* can indeed be read in “Josefine” as well. One example is in a passage where the narrator describes the sounds that disrupt Josefine’s performance, including sounds such as “Zähneknirschen” [teeth-gnashing] and “Knacken im Parkett” [cracking in the parquet] (K 3). “Knirschen” is a particularly abrasive-sounding word. The first syllable, “Knir-”, has a percussive opening, similar to the distinct sound made by teeth clacking together. The second syllable, “-schen”, has the piercing sound of the friction made as the teeth rub against each other. The translation of this story by Kevin Blahut offers a close equivalent with the word “gnashing” (145), though since the “g” is silent in the English word, the sound of teeth clashing together has been softened and the first syllable’s originally audible clash has been somewhat lost in translation. The words “Knirschen” and “Knacken” both begin with “Kn-”, which lends itself in both cases to harsh and discordant noise. The harsh sounds of these two words stand out in this passage, quite fittingly given their roles as disruptions, and in this sense the *Sprachmusik* allows one to literally hear the disruptive noises of Josefine’s audience.

In addition to the sounds made by individual words, Kafka was also attuned to inflections of speech. The human voice is an instrument, and even in speech, it sounds at a certain pitch. In everyday speech, a speaker will, unless he speaks in a monotone, naturally alter the pitch of his voice to signal an emphasis or question. In the earlier-mentioned passages from letters and diaries, this aspect of speech is already hinted at, for instance with the word “Betonung” [emphasis] in Kafka’s letter to Grete Bloch or how he describes the “Melodie” of Moissi’s poetry recitation. The most explicit acknowledgement of this, however, is in a letter he wrote to Milena Jesenská:

»Du warst also wirklich nicht in Wien? Bekamst diesen Brief und warst nicht in Wien?
 Warst nicht in Wien? Warst nicht in Wien?« Ich verstehe nicht Musik aber diese Musik
 verstehe ich leider besser als alle Musikalischen. (B 1017-1018)

Kafka refers to a “Musik” that is formed by the repeated question, “Du warst nicht in Wien?” [You were not in Vienna?] Görner, in his view of this letter, describes the music as coming from the repetition of the question until it takes on qualities of something “Musikalisches” and becomes “singbar” [singable] or “spielbar” [playable] (31). Indeed, the repetition of the sentence gives it a certain rhythmic constancy. However, in addition to that is the unmentioned element of inflection. The question mark here indicates an upward inflection in the speech, rather similarly to how certain symbols on staff paper indicate certain musical sounds to be played or sung. It is not clear to no one except for Kafka as to on which word this question is placed, but there will be one placed somewhere regardless of who speaks the question aloud, and in this way punctuation serves to make human speech “singable”.

Punctuation does not solely indicate inflections in speech, however; it also marks a silence--the silence between the notes of the spoken word, one might say, in reference to Mozart’s quote. There are a variety of pauses in speech. There are long pauses, short pauses, abrupt pauses, pauses for breath or relief, pauses for suspense, and so on. Such a variety of silences can also be found in the text of “Josefine”. An excellent example is in the following sentence:

Wir sind doch ganz unmusikalisch; wie kommt es, daß wir Josefinens Gesang verstehn
 oder, da Josefine unser Verständnis leugnet, wenigstens zu verstehen glauben. (2)

Rüdiger Görner, in his reading of “Josefine”, remarks on the final period of the sentence, saying that the crucial question of the text, namely that of the “Verstehen” of the mousefolk toward

Josefine's song, is not given a question mark--this he believes is an indication that this pivotal question in the text is in fact "rhetorisch" [rhetorical] (84).

In reading the music of the story's language, observing Kafka's choice of punctuation helps to discern the tone of the narrator. In written music, there is a variety of pauses, be it a contemplative fermata, an abrupt caesura, or a sustained rest. The duration of these pauses are often left to the discretion of the performer and his intentions. Similarly, a reader of prose decides for himself how to read the pauses created by the punctuation of the text--the text of this story consisting of the voice of the narrator. A dash will be a different kind of pause--different in its duration and in how abruptly it sends speech into silence--from that of a semicolon, a colon, a period, or a comma.

Take the semicolon of the above sentence, for instance, which follows one of the most concrete and direct statements of the story, "Wir sind doch ganz unmusikalisch." Where a conclusive period and sentence break should have sufficed, however, Kafka made the decision of adding on a hypothetical question to complete the full idea, or in musical terms, the full phrase. This semicolon indicates an indecisive pause; where the phrase could have stopped with a period, a new theme instead appears--the rambling question as to the "understanding" the mousefolk have for Josefine's song despite their unmusicality--and carries the music of the sentence further.

Kafka's acknowledgement of music in language went beyond the miniature details that he heard in daily speech, however--he recognized how the sounds of language formed the collective *Sprachmusik*. For instance, in one 1917 letter to Max Brod, who had sent Kafka a copy of the former's German translation of the Czech libretto of Janáček's opera "Jenůfa," Kafka writes that reading his friend's translation was "Musik" (B 156). In this sense, Kafka recognizes a

musicality to the poetry of Brod's translation. A few sentences later, he writes admiringly, "Wie hast Du nur die Wiederholungen Leben-atmend gemacht" [How did you make the reprises live and breathe]. Here, Kafka's word "Wiederholungen", which refers to musical reprises, is also the German word for "repetitions". Indeed, Kafka's appreciation for *Wiederholungen* in the writing of other authors is a strong indication of his attention to them in his own works.

Every *Hörspur* in Kafka's writing may not amount to much on its own, but they are more than incidental flashes of sound; the fact that these flashes of sound appear repeatedly--as *Wiederholungen*--throughout the writing of an extraordinarily meticulous author indicates an overarching structure of sound--an *akustische Landschaft*--alongside the plot of the story. In its essence, "Josefine" intertwines music and prose as one piece.

The choice of each note in music, or of each *Hörspur* in the case of "Josefine", is one made conscientiously with the intention of a particular sound quality so as to contribute most meaningfully to the atmosphere of a piece and the direction in which it goes. One can think of a *Hörspur* as a sort of literary motif and, due to its audible qualities, a sort of musical motif.

In her essay "Of Mice And Women", Ruth Gross provides an excellent first glance into this motivic parallel between music and prose in her view of the first paragraph of "Josefine":

It contains the entire plot, such as it is, within it. It is like an overture with all the tunes already included or alluded to... Even Josefine's final disappearance is prepared for and alluded to in the last sentence of this paragraph... (61)

Gross compares the story's opening to an operatic overture, which is played before the musical plot begins as a way of introducing major themes that will figure into the story. The opening paragraph of "Josefine" functions similarly. With the first sentence, Josefine is introduced as "unsere Sängerin" [our singer] (K 1)--she is the story's subject, which the reader will be following throughout the story. In the second sentence, the "Macht des Gesanges" [power of

song] is introduced--a power that is known by all except by those who “sie nicht gehört hat” [have not heard her], which is the first hint at the theme of silence in the story. In the third sentence appears the mousefolk, which “Musik nicht liebt” [does not love music]--the story’s main conflict is established here as a theme of opposition is immediately tied together with the introduction of the mousefolk. In the next sentences, other main themes of the story appear, including the “schwer” [difficult] lifestyle of the mousefolk, their “praktische Schlaueit” [practical slyness], the “Verlangen nach dem Glück” [longing for happiness] which allegedly comes from Josefine’s song, and finally her “Hingang” [departure]. With this “overture,” the reader is prepared for the motifs which will feature throughout the story.

Music and prose are also similar in the way they make use of the *Wiederholung* of motifs. While a piece of prose may use a certain word or phrase as a motif, music can form a motif out of a musical phrase, harmony, rhythm, or even a note. In opera music especially, certain motifs are played repeatedly throughout the duration of the opera as a way to announce the appearance and reappearances of a character or idea in the story. Such motifs were most famously utilized in Richard Wagner’s operas, though *Wiederholung* is an essential tool for countless composers.

In his paper “Kafka und Mahler”, Albrecht von Massow describes the *Wiederholung* present in Kafka’s “Der Prozess” and the second movement of Gustav Mahler’s seventh symphony. In Mahler’s Seventh, Massow observes Mahler’s repetition of a musical theme to signal an “unentrinnbaren Getriebe” [inescapable gear mechanism] (84), which he compares to the maddening repetitiveness of the bureaucratic “Behördenleerlauf” [administrative idleness] across Kafka’s “Der Prozess”. Massow demonstrates here how *Wiederholung* can trap a reader or listener in a cycle which gives the impression that nothing is changing throughout the piece. “Josefine” features some of this “Getriebe” as well, most clearly in the back-and-forth across the

story in which the narrator is unable to settle on how to describe Josefine's song, first calling it "Gesang", then "Pfeifen", then "Gesang" again.

However, when a motif is repeated, it is often developed. Some composers may choose to develop a motif in its various iterations by changing the key for each appearance, perhaps changing a motif from A major to B major or by changing it from major to minor and thereby changing the mood associated with it. They may change its rhythm from a measured and regal one to a frantic and abrupt one. Some may even change the voice which performs the motif, for instance changing from a gentle flute to a blaring trumpet.

Görner's book describes how sound not only repeats itself in Kafka's works, but also intensifies and lessens across the scope of the story in what Görner describes as a "*crescendo-decrescendo*" effect. He illustrates this with a diary entry from Kafka, in which Kafka describes a "Traumphantasie" [dream fantasie] of a "singender Reiter" [singing man on horseback] on a stage, accompanied by a piano simulating "Hufeklappern" [hoofbeats], the sounds of which grow louder with an "Anschwellen" [swelling] as the Reiter travels across the length of the stage, and the Reiter's music becomes a "schreiendem Gesang" [screaming song]. Finally, "lassen beide ab" [both let up] and the Reiter approaches with "ruhigem Gesang" [soft song] (49). In this passage, Kafka allows the reader to experience a dynamic range similar to that in heard music, as the *erzähltes Geräusch* of "Gesang" "swells" and becomes "screaming", then "lets up" and shrinks to a "soft" song. In the next chapter, we will examine in more detail how this occurs in "Josefine".

There is most certainly a dynamic range to be seen in "Josefine", as the motifs of the story appear, reappear, swell, and die away across the *akustische Landschaft* within the story's pages. For instance, silence and "Frieden" [peace] are brought in nearly at the very start of the

story, and from then on the story begins to gain in volume as Josefine's song interacts with this silence from the mousefolk. As the story goes on, a certain word begins to appear more and more frequently, namely "Kampf", which is a German word that can, in the mildest sense, translate to "struggle" or "conflict", and in the most extreme sense mean "battle". While not immediately associated with a sound in the way "Knacken" or "Pfeifen" is, the word "Kampf" is nonetheless a noisy word, in that its typical use in a military context conjures up the sounds of clashing swords or gunfire; this therefore makes it an *erzähltes Geräusch* as well. Its motivic *Wiederholung* is made all the more conspicuous considering that such a combative word appears in a story that revolves around a singer. As will be made clear through the sonic reading in the next chapter, this "Kampf" is in fact a main theme, a motif of the story, and a sonic one at that. This growing repetition, this "Anschwellen", parallels an intensification of the story's conflict, a conflict which is manufactured, along with every other facet of the story, by the narrator's voice.

In fact, every *Hörspur*, including the use of *Wiederholung*, the *erzählte Geräusche*, the *Sprachmusik*, and the story's essential "Kampf" leads back to the narrator, whose role as the intrinsic composer of the story is all-powerful. As the sole mediator of Josefine's story to the reader, the narrator speaks the story, and Josefine, into existence. This narrating voice is the only one that the reader knows, as Josefine and the mousefolk have no dialogue and therefore no voice--a restriction under the control of the narrator. Everything that can be known about Josefine, her song, or the mousefolk is revealed at the narrator's whim. A sonic reading of "Josefine" in any capacity will therefore always actually be a sonic reading of the narrator's voice, and every word, space and punctuation mark will always be permeated with the presence of the narrator. The further sonic reading of "Josefine" will therefore be most productive by

examining the part the narrator's voice plays in building the essential conflict of the story and the *akustische Landschaft* that reverberates with it.

Chapter 2: Tracing The Narrator's Voice In The Sounds Of The Text

As the sole mediator and, so to speak, the composer of Josefine's story, the narrator has an all-powerful role and a presence that lingers behind every word spoken--in essence, the narrator's voice creates and comprises the *akustische Landschaft* of the story. However, despite being the source of all the information that the reader knows about Josefine and her song, the reader is left knowing nothing about the identity of the narrator. There is no information provided within the story that indicates with any certainty the age or gender of the narrator, both of which are features which could give the narrator a particular background and bias.

In the context of a sonic reading, by which I mean the tracking of *Hörspuren* in prose, age and gender are features that would give the speaking voice of the narrator a particular sonic quality. For instance, the sound of a younger man's voice would be entirely different from that of an older woman's. It is commonly assumed that the narrator is a man, an assumption made all the more strongly by those who consider the story's narrator to be a stand-in for Kafka himself--Clayton Koelb¹³ and Chris Danta¹⁴ for instance both argue that "Josefine", the last story of Kafka's lifetime, is a meditation on his death and legacy and that the narrator represents Kafka's reflection on his life's work, made all the more personal by the first-person point of view used in the story, a feature Koelb notes as being "atypical" (347) among Kafka's works. In a different angle, Ruth Gross's essay "Of Mice And Women" explores the role and character of the narrator as she examines gender roles in "Josefine". She asserts that the narrator is a man, and that his gender leads him to be opposed to the feminine singer Josefine by nature. However, in general, there is no information provided in the story that can concretely determine the identity of the narrator; in this way, the narrator's voice remains veiled in soundlessness.

¹³ "Kafka Imagines His Readers: The Rhetoric of "Josefine die Sangerin" and "Der Bau"." *A Companion to the Works of Franz Kafka*, edited by James Rolleston, NED-New edition, Boydell & Brewer, 2002, pp. 347–60.

¹⁴ "Kafka's Mousetrap: The Fable of the Dying Voice." *SubStance*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2008, pp. 152–68.

While we can not make any certain conclusion as to the narrator's identity, however, there is much we can learn about this mysterious voice by tracing it across the *akustische Landschaft* of the story--where and how sound appears, reappears, intensifies, and wanes.

The opening of this story functions an overture for a musical piece; as Ruth Gross said, it "sets the tone" for the story, and all of the main themes of the story are "included or alluded to" (61) in this paragraph, even Josefine's final disappearance. Right away, the narrative becomes filled with sound. The opening sentence, "Unsere Sangerin heit Josefine" [Our singer's name is Josefine] (K 1), sets the stage with a declamatory tone. The next sentence literally silences Josefine, focusing not on who *has* heard her, but who has *not*. Still, while Josefine herself is silenced, the "might" of her song is much too strong for silence and can only grow more powerful; accordingly, the sentences of this overture begin to swell and grow, each longer than the last. The power of Josefine's song changes to sound more violent as it "fortreißt" [tears away] all without exception and only grows "hoher" [higher] in the narrator's estimation.

Immediately placed in stark contrast with this violent song is the "stiller Frieden" [silent peace] preferred by the mousefolk. This juxtaposition forebodes the central conflict of the story: Josefine and her song versus the mousefolk and their silence. The longest, most meandering sentence of this overture is almost exclusively about the unmusical mousefolk, explaining their inability to "erheben" [elevate] from their silence to music and their tendency for "praktische Schlaueit" [practical slyness], with which they tend to replace music and any "Verlangen nach dem Gluck" [longing for the happiness] that it "vielleicht" [maybe] produces. Even at the remotest, most hypothetical mention of music, however, there is still an additional insistence injected into this sentence to deny and to silence this music, an insistence which is punctuated urgently with dashes: "--was aber nicht geschieht--" [--something that however never happens--].

After this explanation of the mousefolk and their basic opposition to music in what is the lengthiest sentence of the overture by far, the figure of Josefine reappears into the overture, singled out, no longer “our Josefine” but an “einzige” [only one] with a pointed “nur” [only], and alienated as the “Ausnahme” [exception]; it becomes a marked certainty that upon Josefine’s disappearance the music “wird” [will] also finally disappear. On this final determination, the overture wanes and fades out, while Josefine’s song still echoes on for “wer weiss wie lange” [who knows how long].

With the conclusion of the overture, the main piece now begins. The very first word is “Ich” [I]. The narrator’s personal entrance into the story jars the reader. Not only has the narrator not been introduced alongside the other main themes in the overture, but this mysterious, anonymous new voice booms out first and foremost to start the story. This immediately makes clear that the narrator is not just a passive, impartial mediator of Josefine’s story, but is willing and able to impose a monopoly of voice over the story on a whim. Each personal insert by the narrator marks what I call an “auditive Enthüllung” [auditory unveiling]: a brief moment where the narrator steps out from behind the anonymity of the mousefolk at large¹⁵ and becomes heard.

The first sentence of the main piece goes straight to the heart of the matter: “Ich habe oft darüber nachgedacht, wie es sich mit dieser Musik eigentlich verhält” [I have often wondered about what it is with this music]. On the most basic level, the story is about what Josefine’s music is and does. However, even before this vital question, the narrator speaks out first: “I have often wondered.” Not only is it clear right away that the narrator will be an active as opposed to a

¹⁵ The narrator speaks not as an “I”, but as a “we” most of the time. The narrator uses first-person plural (wir, uns, unser) one hundred forty-four different times in the story, not including the pronouns attached to reflexive verbs. On the other hand, the first-person singular (ich, mein, mir) is used only twelve times, and so the narrator’s personal inserts into the story are quite rare whenever they do appear; this scarcity makes each instance ever more worthwhile to examine.

passive voice in the telling of the story, but also that the narrator has a personal connection to the matter, and an intense one at that, given the use of “oft”.

To broach the matter of Josefine’s music and its power over even those who are “unmusikalisch” like the mousefolk, the narrator first proposes the possibility that the “Schönheit dieses Gesanges” [beauty of this song] must be so great that nobody can “widerstehen” [resist]. In this hypothetical scenario--“wenn es wirklich so wäre” [if this really were the case]--the narrator builds up Josefine’s song more and more; it has an element of the “Außerordentliche” [extraordinary] in it, it is something that has “nie vorher” [never before] been heard, and finally it “befähigt” [enables] the mousefolk to hear something that “niemand sonst” [nobody else] could recreate. With this hypothetical, the sound of Josefine’s song grows more “beautiful,” then more powerful, even more so than anything that has been heard before it.

However, the narrator then chimes in with not one but two moments of *auditive Enthüllung* within the next sentence: “Gerade das trifft aber *meiner* Meinung nach nicht zu, *ich* fühle es nicht” [Currently however this does not meet *my* opinion, *I* do not feel it].¹⁶ After hearing this buildup of Josefine’s “Gesang”, suddenly, any grandness or power that we the readers have begun to associate with this *erzähltes Geräusch* drops down to nothing as the narrator begins to literally *talk over* it. The narrator concludes this paragraph by stating that her song actually consists of “nichts Außerordentliches” [nothing extraordinary]--what had begun as a crescendo of Josefine’s song drops away once more, subdued. It now becomes clear in the story that the narrator does not merely ponder and probe Josefine’s song, but also disrupts and reduces it.

Throughout the main story, which essentially consists of the narrator’s examination of Josefine, Josefine’s “Gesang” moves dynamically as a motif. It is a sound constantly in motion;

¹⁶ Italics in the original and in the translation were added by me.

in one part it may be uplifted by the narrator and amplified, then at another it is reduced or interrupted, hushed in a sort of *Klangentzug* undertaken by the narrator.

After having reduced Josefine's song to "nothing extraordinary", the narrator proceeds to bring her song down even further, proposing that, given its ordinariness, her "Gesang" is in fact no different from the mundane "Pfeifen" of the mousefolk. However, the narrator exhibits a marked uncertainty, asking "Ist es nicht vielleicht doch nur ein Pfeifen?" [Then is it not perhaps only a sort of piping?] Unable to prove with soundproof logic that her song is the same as piping, the narrator can only propose it as a possibility. Josefine's song begins to waver as a different sound quality is imposed over it, namely that of a piping that rises in pitch along with the narrator's questioning tone.

However, the narrator then changes gears and elevates Josefine's song once more with the statement, "Es ist aber eben doch nicht nur Pfeifen" [But it just simply is not mere piping] (K 2). This statement is riddled with modal particles, which are a feature of German language that show emphasis, particularly in spoken German--here, the narrator's voice for a moment auditively unveils a hint of exasperation, as if pounding a fist on the wall with each subsequent modal particle. After this, the narrator compares her song with a different *erzähltes Geräusch*, "Nüsseknacken" [nut-cracking]. The choice of such a sharp and disruptive sound clashes, along with the sound of a high, thin piping, with the beauty of her song.¹⁷ Overall, the first part of this story features an ongoing sonic conflict, in which Josefine's song fluctuates between sounding of pure song and lesser noise as the unmusical, silencing voice of the narrator disrupts it.

Josefine's song withstands all attempts to silence it, however, and so the narrator begins to focus on Josefine's character instead, in the first instance describing her "hochmütig"

¹⁷ For an additional example, in a later passage, the narrator describes how, in concerts, Josefine's song faces all disruptions to it, including sounds such as "Zähneknirschen" [the gnashing of teeth] and a "Knacken im Parkett" [cracking in the parquet] and ultimately "besiegt" [vanquishes] them. (K 3)

[haughty] (K 3) and condescending interactions with the mousefolk who do not understand the finer points of her song. The language of the text suddenly crescendos in intensity as the narrator proposes that Josefine's arrogance is motivated not by "gewöhnliche Eitelkeit" [ordinary vanity] but by something stronger: "Haß" [hate]. With this word "hate," the text begins to seethe.

For whom is Josefine's supposed hate? At this point, the narrator makes another *auditive Enthüllung* and reveals that "ich auch halb gehöre" [I also partly belong] (K 3) to a so-called "Opposition", one which goes against her song by reducing it as piping. However, even this opposition can not resist the power of her song, admitting at first that "was sie hier pfeift, ist kein Pfeifen" [what she pipes here is not piping at all].

With the first mention of this opposition, with which the narrator personally aligns, the story begins to crescendo with sounds of conflict. The word "Kampf" [battle] appears for the first time after this opposition appears into the story. This word is not coincidental, nor is it a surprise: this battle was born in the inability of anyone to "widerstehen" [resist] Josefine's song in the overture despite the expressed desire for silent "Frieden" [peace], and has existed already as a sonic conflict between "Gesang", "Pfeifen", and silence up to this point.

As the story progresses, there is an increase in militaristic vocabulary--the musical Kampf grows louder at the same time as the conflict between Josefine and the mousefolk intensifies. This stage of the Kampf centers around one question: "Was treibt das Volk dazu, sich für Josefine so zu bemühen?" [What drives the people to go to such efforts for Josefine?] (K 5) In this part of the story, the narrator attributes a number of flaws to her character: haughty, ungrateful, condescending--yet, the mousefolk still humor her and provide her with an audience. In one passage, the narrator describes the great lengths--resembling a battle in itself with the use of words like "Boten" [envoys] and "Posten"[sentries]--the mousefolk go to in order to gather for

Josefine's performances, only for Josefine to ungratefully stamp her feet and bite those around her as she "flucht ganz unmädchenhaft" [curses quite unfemininely] (K 4).¹⁸

However, despite Josefine's antics, the mousefolk, including those part of Josefine's opposition, are still taken by the power of her song. Even when comparing Josefine's song to piping, Josefine's opposition quickly lose these thoughts and go silent when they hear her sing, quickly joining her audience as they, "scheu atmend" [scarcely breathing] (K 4) in their fixation, listen to her song. The sonic conflict between Gesang and Pfeifen eases up, settling into the background as the battle shifts to a literal struggle between the story's characters. However, the power of Josefine's Gesang is omnipresent even when it falls away from the narrator's focus, piercing through the silence of the mousefolk as it compels them to put up with Josefine.

After describing at length the back-and-forth between Josefine's antics and the silent tolerance of the mousefolk for the sake of her song, the narrator finally describes what it feels like to listen to her song: it is as if one "träumt" [is dreaming] "zwischen den Kämpfen" [between battles] (K 9). The narrator admits that even if her song sounds "stoßend" [jagged] (K 9), and even if it sounds "leicht, flüsternd, vertraulich, manchmal ein wenig heiser" [light, whisperlike, intimate, sometimes a little on the hoarse side] (K 10), her song still manages to convey to all mousefolk something of a "verlorenem, nie wieder aufzufindendem Glück" [lost, never-to-be-found-again happiness], a happiness like the one longed for in the overture. The narrator concedes wholeheartedly, "Gewiß, diese Vorführungen wollen wir nicht missen" [Certainly, we do not want to miss these performances].

However, after making this admission, the narrator's tone suddenly changes, waving off the idea that Josefine's song benefits the mousefolk with a dismissive "usw., usw." [etc., etc.].

¹⁸ Josefine has essentially no dialogue in the story, so all that we hear from her besides her song is this "cursing" and another incendiary statement later in the story, "Ich pfeife auf euren Schutz" [I pipe on your protectiveness] (Kafka 6).

The narrator's voice has another *auditive Enthüllung* here with this flippancy--no matter what Josefine's song may do for the mousefolk, the narrator does not want to acknowledge the power of her song--doing so would mean surrendering to the power of her song, and as the narrator concludes, the mousefolk is a folk that "kapituliert" [surrenders] to nobody. At this point in the story, the story's Kampf reaches its peak of intensity.

The battle becomes a final stand, and by now it is no longer one about Josefine's music--by this point, the narrator has given up comparing Josefine's song to "Pfeifen" and refers to it exclusively as "Gesang". Instead, the battle focuses around the "Anerkennung" [acknowledgement] (K 11) of Josefine, which she pursues by requesting to be released from daily labor in order to spare energy for her song; this request is repeatedly denied by the mousefolk. The word "Kampf", of its eighteen uses in the story, appears a dozen times alone in this third stage of the battle. Additionally, militaristic words flood the story with sounds of combat: from "Feinde" [enemies] to "Angriff" [attack] to "Genossen" [comrades]. The narrator even brings Josefine's song into the fray, describing her as fighting "mit der kostbaren Waffe des Gesanges" [with the precious weapon of song] (K 13). Josefine's campaign begins to resemble the endless repetition of the *Getriebe* discussed in the earlier chapter as she tries and fails and tries again.

The narrator's voice also becomes more present and louder within this final stand, becoming personally involved in the battle now. While Josefine struggles for her recognition, there are various *auditive Enthüllungen* from the narrator, in the form of snide remarks¹⁹ and

¹⁹ One example is how Josefine, whenever denied by the mousefolk, will shortly thereafter pick up the battle once more "mit neuen Kräften" [the battle with renewed strength]. The narrator cuts in here to say that, while she claims to lack energy for her song, she seems to have "unbeschränkt viele" [an undiminishing plentitude] for battle (K 11).

personal opinions,²⁰ through which the narrator personally cuts in to diminish Josefine and her song.

At the end of the story, Josefine, unable to achieve the recognition she desires, leaves the mousefolk for good--her “Hingang” [departure] as predicted in the overture finally happens. The battle has ended, Josefine is gone, and her opposition has prevailed. However, the story does not end there--what might have been a finale is suddenly reinvigorated in a final coda, one that consists of paragraphs that successively grow shorter and fade away into nothingness.

In this coda, the narrator’s voice first takes on a tone of indignation: “Sonderbar, wie falsch sie rechnet, die Kluge, so falsch, daß man glauben sollte, sie rechne gar nicht” [Strange, how wrongly she calculates, that clever one, so wrongly that anyone would think she does not calculate at all] (K 14). With the string of commas, the narrator’s voice becomes a *Sprachmusik*, a cascade of incessant phrases, lamenting Josefine’s poor judgement. Then the narrator’s tone becomes accusatory: “Selbst entzieht sie sich dem Gesang, selbst zerstört sie die Macht, die sie über die Gemüter erworben hat” [She herself withdraws from the song, she herself destroys the power that she has gained over our spirits] (K 15). The word “selbst” starts each accusation, crashing down repeatedly like a magistrate’s gavel. The third sentence of this coda is the longest phrase so far, but Josefine only plays a small part: “Sie versteckt sich und singt nicht” [She hides away and refrains from singing], after which the rest of the sentence is about the mousefolk that goes “weiter seines Weges” [further along its way], just like the sentence describing them.

The penultimate paragraph then begins, “Mit Josefine aber muß es abwärts gehn” [For Josefine, however, it has to go downhill]. This “muß” sharpens the narrator’s voice with

²⁰ For instance, when Josefine cuts ornaments from her song, the narrator claims, “Mir allerdings ist kein Unterschied gegenüber ihren früheren Vorführungen aufgefallen” [To me certainly there appears no difference from her earlier performances] (Kafka 13).

determination--it *must* go downhill for Josefine. However, Josefine is already out of the picture--how can it go further downhill for her?

The explanation comes in the following sentence: “Bald wird die Zeit kommen, wo ihr letzter Pfiff ertönt und verstummt” [The time will soon come when her final pip will sound and fall silent]. As it turns out, Josefine may be gone, and yet her song remains. Not in person, as Josefine is already long gone, but as a memory--this memory not only remains, in fact, but resounds. The narrator is holding out on the assumption that one day soon, her song *will* finally fall silent, but for now, it continues to echo and plague the narrator for, hearkening back to the overture, “wer weiß wie lang” [who knows how long] (K 1). However, the narrator’s tone shifts shortly after this statement. The rest of this story’s penultimate paragraph consists of five consecutive questions. The narrator becomes racked with doubt; perhaps the battle has been lost after all.

The final paragraph of the story then is a single sentence, and while it starts out with a final ring of hope from the narrator, “Vielleicht werden wir also gar nicht sehr viel entbehren” [Perhaps then we will not be missing very much at all] (K 15), it quickly is overtaken by a drawn-out certainty--a certainty given the lack of a “maybe”--about Josefine’s fate: she “wird fröhlich sich verlieren” [will happily lose herself] among the ranks of the “Helden” [heroes] of the mousefolk and disappear in “gesteigerter Erlösung” [heightened relief] with all of her “Brüder” [brethren].

In contrast to the narrator, who is left with the consequences of Josefine’s departure and a distant hope for eventual silence from her song, Josefine the singer is, for the first time in the story, happy, united once more with the brethren from whom she was separated by conflict, and the

sprawling reverberation of her song fades away as the story ends with a peaceful union between her eternal song and the silence of the mousefolk.

Across the story, Josefine's song has grown and waned and developed as the narrator speaks it into and out of silence. From tracking the narrator's voice, a clearer trajectory, an *akustische Landschaft*, emerges, elevating into audibility the scope of Josefine's song and its unyielding struggle against the silence that surrounds it and threatens its existence. With the sonic revelations that have appeared, the world of sound existing within the words of the story can be traced and examined, and a blueprint can be formed, with which sound drawn from pages of prose can then be transcribed into composed music.

Chapter 3: Transcribing The Prose of “Josefine” Into Written Music

In the undertaking of a composition about “Josefine”, the purpose of uncovering the *akustische Landschaft* of the work has been to get as close to the sound of the original text as possible. Musical composition on its own is a process of invention, where each detail is written from nothingness and emerges into existence. However, “Josefine” has already been composed, the composer being the story’s narrator, and so this project becomes one of transcription instead. Arranging a preexisting piece as a new piece of music requires just as much attention to detail as the original compositional process has entailed, because an arrangement must stay as close to the original composer’s intent as possible.

The first step of transcribing Josefine’s prose to music was to trace out the *akustische Landschaft*, and so there is already an outline of the text, a blueprint of sounds with a preexisting rise and fall, a growth and decay, throughout. The next step is now to determine how best to convert the multitude of sounds in the prose to sounds of music. How does one make the story’s various sounds such as speech, song, piping, and battle through music audible? The oboe, a musical instrument in which I specialize, becomes quite fitting for such a task.

As a woodwind instrument, the oboe’s mechanism of sound production is already the same as that used in speech and song: the movement of air through the body. In this way, playing the oboe is already physically like singing, so this instrument is quite appropriate for a story about a singer. In addition to this, the oboe has a very distinctive sound, one which is often described as having a “vocal” quality and which easily stands out even from within a full orchestra.

The oboe’s sound is extremely versatile. With more air pressure, the oboe can become louder, more present, and even perhaps somewhat strident at its extreme. With less air pressure,

the oboe's sound can become softer, more diffuse, and even somewhat airy. When playing the oboe, the air is constantly in motion as it changes in pressure. Additionally, by experimenting with other factors, for instance dropping the jaw or raising the tongue, the oboe's sound can easily become, as Josefina might say, "perlend" [pearl-like], or just as easily become, as the narrator might say, "stossend" [jagged]. The oboe provides an incredible range of different sound qualities for only one instrument--and this piece must be played by just one instrument, because the story is told by only one voice: the narrator's. Having determined the instrumentation of this piece, the next step is to determine how to differentiate the sounds of the oboe for the different *Hörspuren* of the text.

It has already been determined that Josefina's "Gesang" will be represented by the sound of the "vocal" oboe. As her song grows and recedes in the story, so will the sound of the oboe accordingly in crescendos and decrescendos throughout the piece. However, other *Hörspuren* such as Pfeifen and Kampf require their own sounds for the piece as well. Now, the arranger must become creative.

The oboe is capable of a wide range of sounds outside of normal playing, as well; these are called extended techniques, which utilize the oboe to create sound in unconventional ways. One example is taking the mouthpiece, the reed, out of the oboe. The vibration of air through the reed is what allows the oboe to sound. Without the oboe, however, the reed alone sounds entirely different. It produces a higher, thinner sound than the oboe produces, like a sort of peeping. The sounds of the reed are therefore a suitable equivalent for the Pfeifen of the story. As the narrator alternates across the story between calling Josefina's song "Gesang" and "Pfeifen", the music will alternate between the sounds of the oboe and the sounds of the reed.

The next sound of the story to consider is the narrator's voice, whose *auditive Enthuellungen* cut in throughout the story. The most appropriate choice here will be to have the performer speak these lines from the story aloud in a whisper. The reason that the narrator's voice is a whisper and not a normal speaking voice is because, while the narrator cuts in over the story and overlays it with speech, the narrator's actual voice has no identifying characteristics attached to it--nobody knows if the narrator is old or young, man or woman, because the narrator never discloses information that would confirm these things. Therefore, a whisper will conceal such features of the narrator's voice. Additionally, the effect can be captured of how the narrator *talks over* the storyline while still not being able to overpower the sound of Josefine's song--the oboe will, even in its softest moments, still be louder than the narrator's loudest whisper.

The mousefolk, to whom the narrator belongs, need a sound for themselves; though they are a species for whom silence is the "liebste Musik" [dearest music] (K 1), they still have a presence within the story, though the narrator's *auditive Enthuellungen* have to remain louder than the mousefolk. Therefore, a noise which tends toward total silence and which is not as loud as the narrator's whisper is the sound of air, which will be produced by blowing air through the oboe but at a low enough pressure that the oboe does not sound.

One more sound to consider for the piece is the sound of Kampf, which in the story interferes with Josefine's song, threatening it and pushing it toward silence. Therefore, an unmusical, discordant sound--somewhere in the middle between Josefine's song and the silence of the mousefolk--is necessary for this sonic clash. The musical equivalent of this will be an oboe multiphonic. The multiphonic is an extended technique in which several notes of different frequencies sound together, resulting in a strident noise that sounds as if an oboe sound were no longer pure and had begun to split apart or dissolve. As the "Reinheit ihres Gesanges" [purity of

her song] (K 3) is put in struggle with various forces throughout the story, its sound begins to fray at the edges.

The next thing to consider is what is to be done with all of the remaining text of the story that does not consist of *Hörspuren*. The answer to this is to turn to the *Sprachmusik* of the narration. While not every word of the text may constitute a particular sound such as Gesang or Pfeifen, the story as a whole exists as one long speech from the narrator. The music swells and falls as sentences grow longer or shorter; each punctuation mark signals a brief silence like a musical rest. As the paragraphs in general grow longer or shorter, so do the musical phrases.

With all of these ideas discussed, it is best to now demonstrate them at work. The first sample (see a1 in appendix) consists of the first three sentences of the overture paragraph. The piece has no time signature because there is no consistent rhythm to the story--“Josefine” is a story that takes place entirely in the present tense, and as such is “timeless”. The key signature is C major, the most neutral key, and which historically has been associated with purity ²¹, a state toward which Josefine and the mousefolk both aspire in their own ways in the story.

In this sample, the motifs of Josefine and her song and the mousefolk and their “stiller Frieden” are audibly introduced. The first sentence of the story declares Josefine as “our” singer: the motif for Josefine and her Gesang is a four-note theme that follows the inflection of Josefine’s name: the first three syllables rise to the “-fi-”²² of her name and fall once more on the “-ne”. However, since Josefine here is “our” singer, each note of Josefine’s theme is preceded by octave grace notes, which, when played out loud, make it sound as if each note has two voices at once.

²¹ See Schubart’s treatise “On the Human Voice and the Characteristics of the Musical Keys” for colorful descriptions of the emotions historically attributed to each individual musical key signature.

²² On a side note, I chose to write the “-fi-” in “Josefine” as an F-sharp because “Fi” is the Solfege syllable for F-sharp.

For every punctuation mark in the story, there are rests of varying lengths in the piece to signify the natural pauses in the narrator's speech. Whereas commas are rests of shorter duration, periods are full stops of indefinite duration, and so each sentence is marked by a rest with a fermata to indicate that the duration of the pause is at the performer's discretion.

In the second sentence of the overture, which I had, in the previous chapter, described as a "silencing" of Josefine, the oboe sound representing Josefine's song drops away at first, but her song still pierces through the imposed silence as a silhouette--the sound of the clicking of the oboe's keys--before the mention of the "Macht des Gesanges" [might of song] sends her song bursting back into the music.

Silenced again at the start of the third sentence, her song pierces through once more as it "fortreibt" [tears away]--shown here by a (subito forzando) scale that tears rapidly upward. It then travels even higher in register--"umso höher" [everso higher]. However, the (nearly) silent mousefolk are then introduced for the first time and the first hint of conflict, the fact that music is something that they "nicht liebt" [do not love], appears with a low, ominous, momentary multiphonic.

Already in these three opening sentences, multiple major themes of the story have made themselves audible. Already, Josefine has been silenced twice--to no avail, as her song persistently comes bursting back to life. However, the Kampf is only just starting to develop.

The next sample (see a2 in appendix) is the music of the sentence that occurs shortly after the narrator introduces the "Opposition" for the first time: "Und wenn man vor ihr sitzt, versteht man sie; Opposition treibt man nur in der Ferne; wenn man vor ihr sitzt, weiß man: was sie hier pfeift, ist kein Pfeifen" [When you sit before her, you understand her; she can only be opposed from afar; when you sit before her, you know: what she is piping here is not piping at all] (K 3).

There are two things in particular that I wish to musically highlight with this excerpt: the crescendo of the prose, and the faceoff between Gesang and Pfeifen.

In providing a physical point of reference for Josefine's song, namely directly "before her", her song is right up in the face of the listener, and so grows louder and more present. The sentence then goes on, showing a moment of truce between Josefine and the critic sitting before her. I represented this moment of truce by changing Josefine's theme into a pure C major triad: free of nonharmonic notes, her song becomes agreeable to even her critics for a moment. Thus the narrator says that her opposition is only present from a distance. I marked the distance of this opposition with a decrescendo of the Kampf figure, letting it fade away from Josefine.

The narrator repeats the exact same phrase as before, "Wenn man vor ihr sitzt," and this I kept exactly the same in its repetition--however, instead of the conclusive "verstehst man sie" [you understand her] of before, this repetition is followed by an expectant "weiß man" [you know], and so I took the same figure as before but left it unfinished this time, letting it hang in suspense until the final phrase completes the sentence. In this final phrase, Josefine's song begins as "Pfeifen" and becomes "kein Pfeifen" [not piping at all], so this excerpt ends with the Pfeifen of the oboe reed transforming into the Gesang of the oboe, an effect that is produced by first blowing into the reed alone and then inserting it into the oboe while the air is still passing through the reed.

A third excerpt which I would have liked to compose but for which there was not enough time, depicts the story's final sentence, where the narrator gets the first word in: "Vielleicht werden wir also gar nicht sehr viel entbehren" [Perhaps then we will not be missing very much at all] (K 15). This is a weak and fleeting hope wrapped in a "perhaps", and Josefine's song quickly and confidently overtakes it. As the sentence drags on, her song echoes on and on, rising in pitch

as it ascends in “gesteigerter Erlösung” [heightened relief] at the end until it finally resolves in a peaceful C Major triad, from which the final note dissipates into the airy silence of her “Brüder” [brethren] the mousefolk and ends the piece in silent peace.

The central commonality that these musical examples bring out is the ultimate prevalence of Josefine’s song against all hindrances, be it the voice of an overpowered narrator or other disruptive noises or even the disappearance of the singer herself. While the “Rätsel” of the great power of Josefine’s song may have never been solved, it proves itself to withstand every opposition to it, and it continues to live on long past the lifetime of the voice that created it.

Conclusion

In my earliest readings of the story, I was convinced that Kafka's intention as an author was to, in his characteristically meticulous fashion, get to the bottom of Josefine's song and its power. However, as I began to dive deeper into the story, past the surface level of the plot and themes, and got into the words themselves, the story began to morph, in fact growing even more enigmatic and multidimensional than it was before. Like the narrator, I found myself even more daunted by trying to examine the elusive power of Josefine's song.

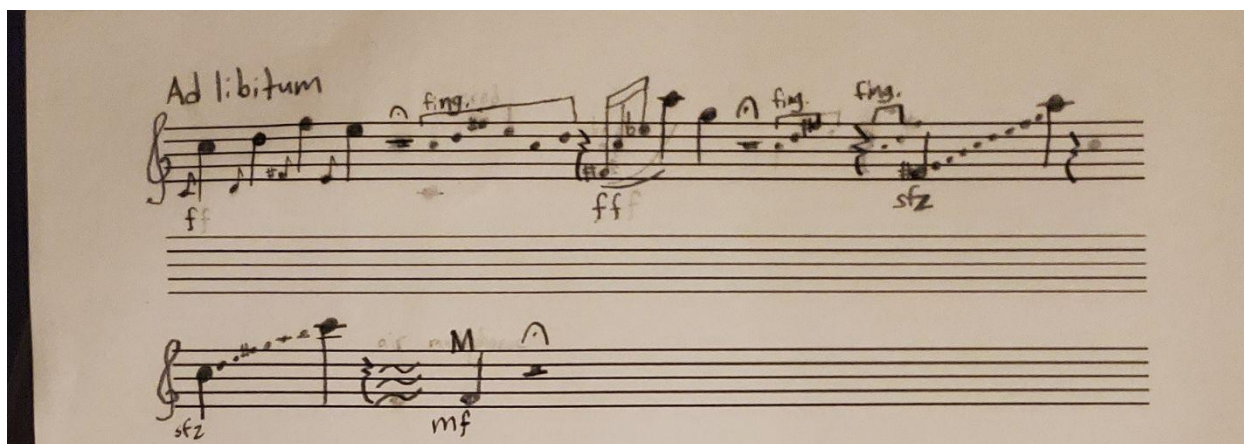
While Kafka's authorial intention can only be left to speculation, perhaps this story was never intended to solve or even explain the power of music in the first place. By the end of the story, the enigma of Josefine's great effect has not grown any closer to being solved than at the start. Throughout this project, my sonic readings have come to yield the same conclusion.

However, as it became audible across the course of this project, the power of Josefine's song has undoubtedly become easier to imagine. By transcribing the story into a heard music and getting the sense of sound involved in the reading process, the power of Josefine's song and its struggle for existence in an overwhelmingly silent world have been made more vivid, brought closer to the reader than before.

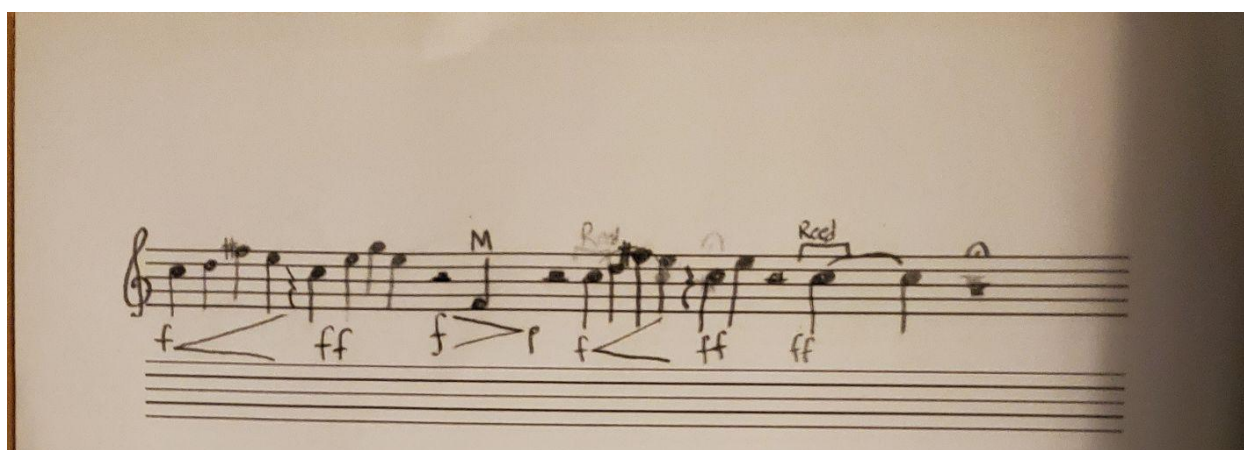
This project has been an experiment, an introduction into the depth of possibility for finding music in Kafka's work. However, the exploration of Kafka and music is a field in ongoing development, and, considering the variety and breadth of material in Kafka's oeuvre, a field with limitless creative possibilities. As more and more academic research appears and draws new layers of music out of Kafka's work, as more and more composers are inspired to

create by the Kafkaesque, the essence of the author will, like Josefine's song, continue to thrive in its complexity, scope, and musicality.

Appendix



a1. The opening three sentences of “Josefine” set to music.



a2. The sentence, “Und wenn man vor ihr sitzt, versteht man sie; Opposition treibt man nur in der Ferne; wenn man vor ihr sitzt, weiß man: was sie hier pfeift, ist kein Pfeifen,” set to music.

<https://youtu.be/2SUnQ90upNg>

a3. YouTube link to my recording of a1.

<https://youtu.be/zy0iPdLZFLs>

a4. YouTube link to my recording of a2.

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