

Kafka's central joke

What Kafka's stories have, rather, is a grotesque, gorgeous, and thoroughly modern complexity, an ambivalence that becomes the multivalent Both/And logic of the, quote, "unconscious," which I personally think is just a fancy word for soul. Kafka's humor — not only not neurotic but *anti*-neurotic, heroically sane — is, finally, a religious humor, but religious in the manner of Kierkegaard and Rilke and the Psalms, a harrowing spirituality against which even Ms. O'Connor's bloody grace seems a little bit easy, the souls at stake pre-made.

And it is this, I think, that makes Kafka's wit inaccessible to children whom our culture has trained to see jokes as entertainment and entertainment as reassurance.³ It's not that students don't "get" Kafka's humor but that we've taught them to see humor as something you *get* — the same way we've taught them that a self is something you just *have*. No wonder they cannot appreciate the really central Kafka joke: that the horrific struggle to establish a human self results in a self whose humanity is inseparable from that horrific struggle. That our endless and impossible journey toward

[Newer](#)[Older](#)

5th February 2025

Polemics ... are counterproduct...

17th January 2025

large acquaintance with particu...

sonia turcotte © 2022-2025

[RSS feed](#)

Made with [Montaigne](#) and by [anton](#) 