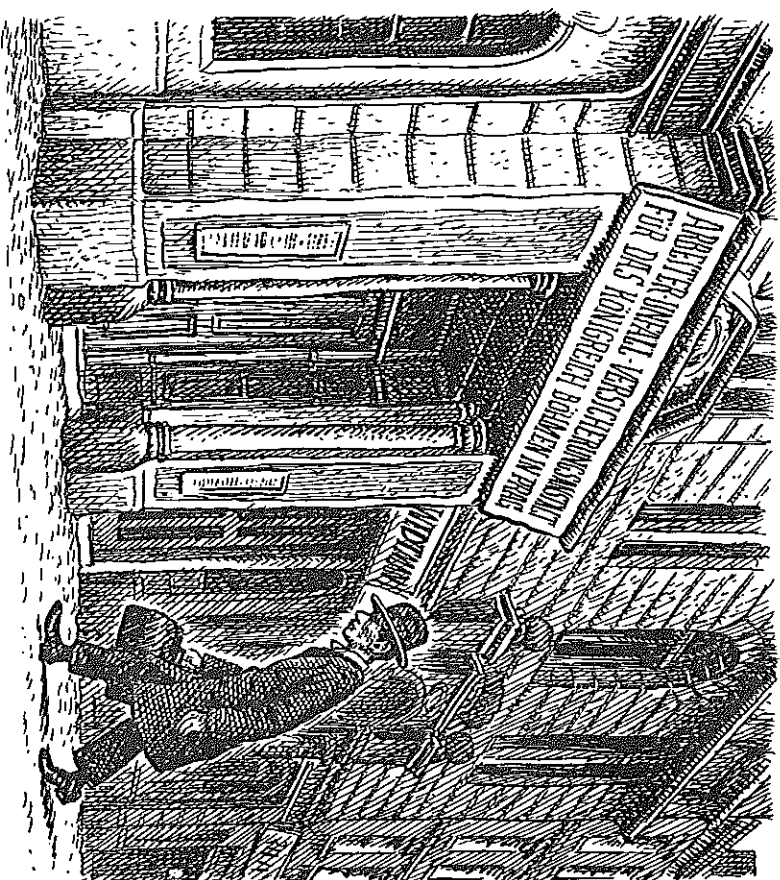


When it became clear to Kafka that he was CONDEMNED TO WRITE, "everything hurried in that direction," while everything that smacked of "sex, eating, drinking, philosophy, above all, music . . . atrophied . . ." in him. Writing, for him, was both an escape from, and revenge against, his father. But, of course, it was more — and less — than that:



For a businessman like Hermann Kafka, there was no greater waste of time than his son's scribbling. But for Kafka too, there was never the slightest question of this becoming his PROFESSION. He did not want to earn money by writing. He studied law at Prague's Charles University, which prepared him essentially for a bureaucratic post, becoming "Herr Doktor Kafka". And soon after, he was given a position in which he would remain until nearly the end of his life.



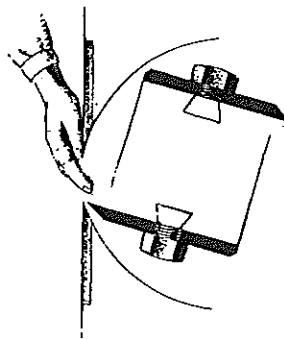
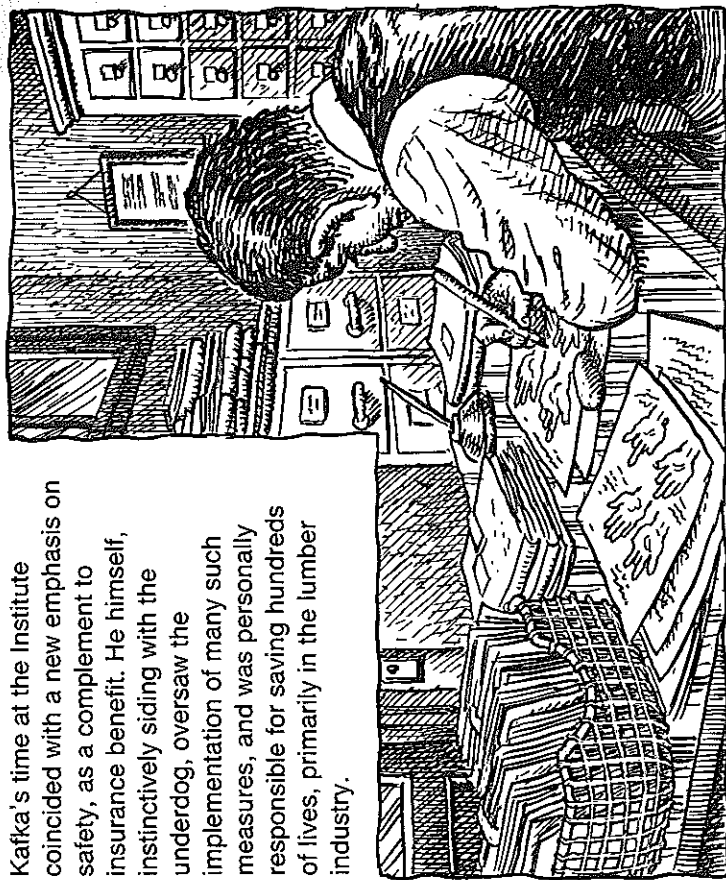
His job for the Workman's Accident Insurance Institute for the Kingdom of Bohemia in Prague, where he was one of two token Jews in a company with closed hiring practices, was both a nightmare and a blessing. On the one hand, it took valuable time away from his writing. But it also gave him a steady income and a measure of self-respect and, in his decision-making capacity, he was able to contribute to reducing the rate of industrial accidents in Bohemia.

Industrial workers had traditionally been subject to ghastly workplace accidents. In the area of Kafka's jurisdiction ...

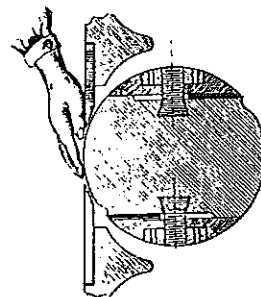
"...PEOPLE FALL DRUNKENLY FROM SCAFFOLDING INTO MACHINES, BEAMS COLLAPSE... LADDERS COME CRASHING TO THE GROUND, WHATEVER IS LIFTED UP FALLS DOWN, WHATEVER IS SPREAD ON THE GROUND PEOPLE TRIP OVER, AND IT GIVES ONE A HEADACHE TO THINK OF ALL THOSE YOUNG GIRLS IN CHINAWARE FACTORIES WHO KEEP FALLING DOWN STAIRS WITH HUGE PILES OF DISHES IN THEIR ARMS."



Kafka's time at the Institute coincided with a new emphasis on safety, as a complement to insurance benefit. He himself, instinctively siding with the underdog, oversaw the implementation of many such measures, and was personally responsible for saving hundreds of lives, primarily in the lumber industry.



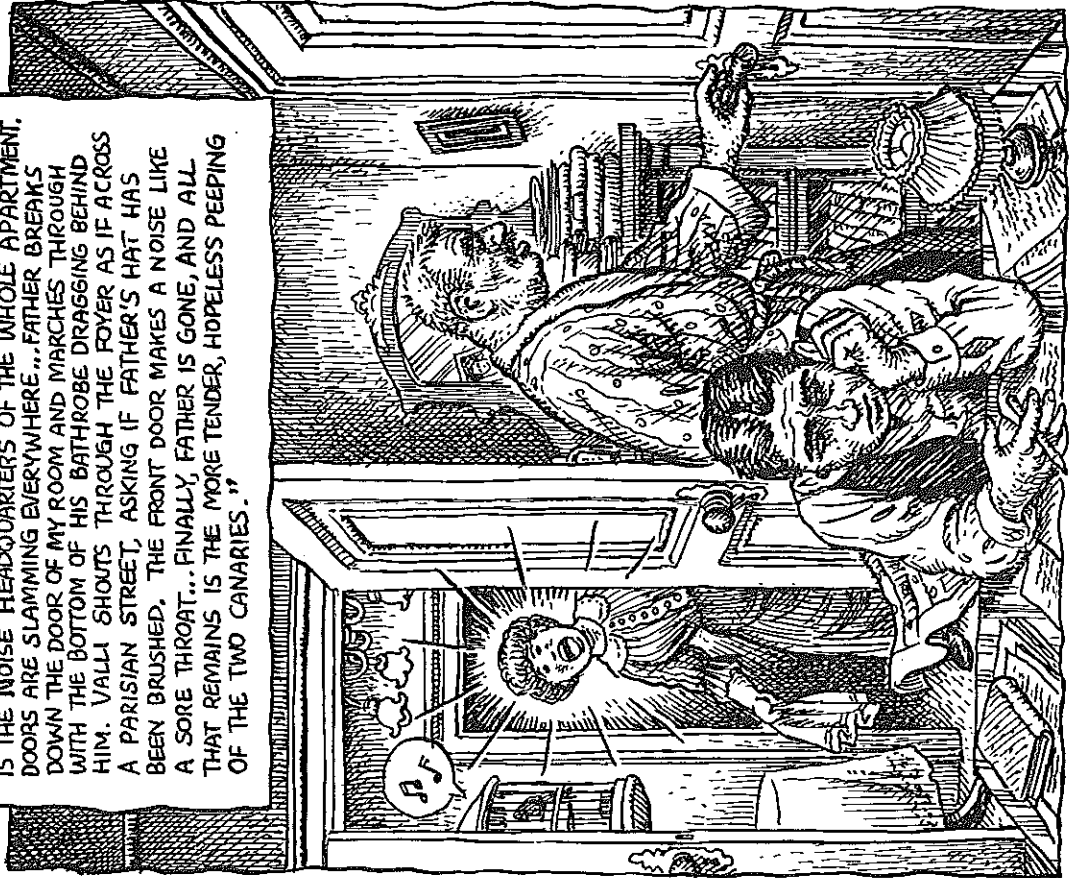
DRAWINGS FROM KAFKA'S REPORT ON INDUSTRIAL CONDITIONS SHOWING THOSE DEFECTIVE PARTS OF MACHINERY RESPONSIBLE FOR ACCIDENTS AND THE RESULTING VARIETIES OF TRUNCATED FINGERS



His job was also a way of placating his father, who would now have to find other reasons for treating his son as a good-for-nothing.

Working by day would mean writing at night in the cramped apartment, where he still lived with his parents and three sisters. This was hardly conducive to concentration . . .

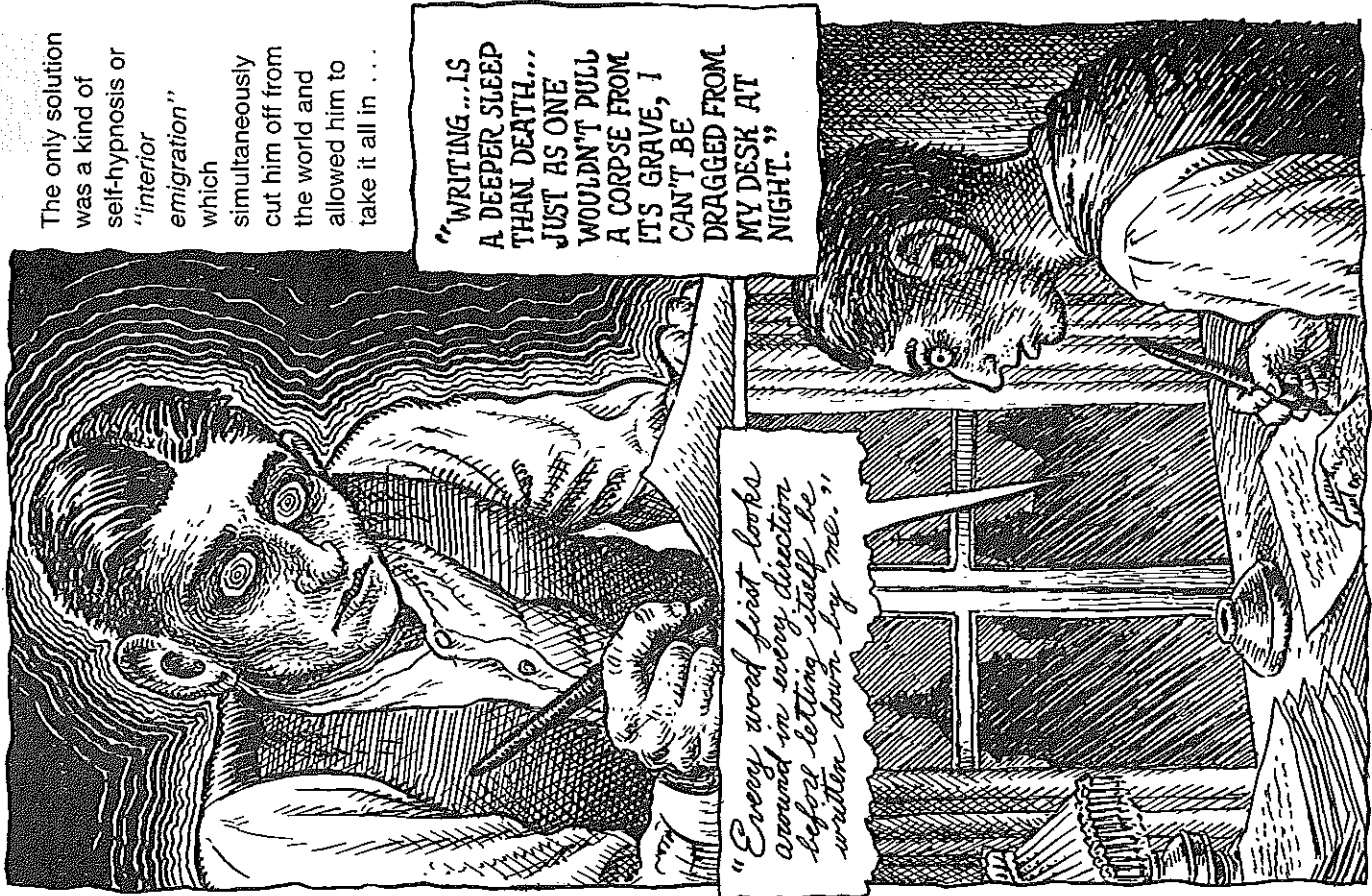
"I WANT TO WRITE AND THERE'S A CONSTANT TREMBLING IN MY FOREHEAD. I'M SITTING IN MY ROOM WHICH IS THE NOISE HEADQUARTERS OF THE WHOLE APARTMENT. DOORS ARE SLAMMING EVERYWHERE... FATHER BREAKS DOWN THE DOOR OF MY ROOM AND MARCHES THROUGH WITH THE BOTTOM OF HIS BATHROBE DRAGGING BEHIND HIM. VALLI SHOUTS THROUGH THE FOYER AS IF ACROSS A PARISIAN STREET, ASKING IF FATHER'S HAT HAS BEEN BRUSHED. THE FRONT DOOR MAKES A NOISE LIKE A SORE THROAT... FINALLY, FATHER IS GONE, AND ALL THAT REMAINS IS THE MORE TENDER, HOPELESS PEEPING OF THE TWO CANARIES."



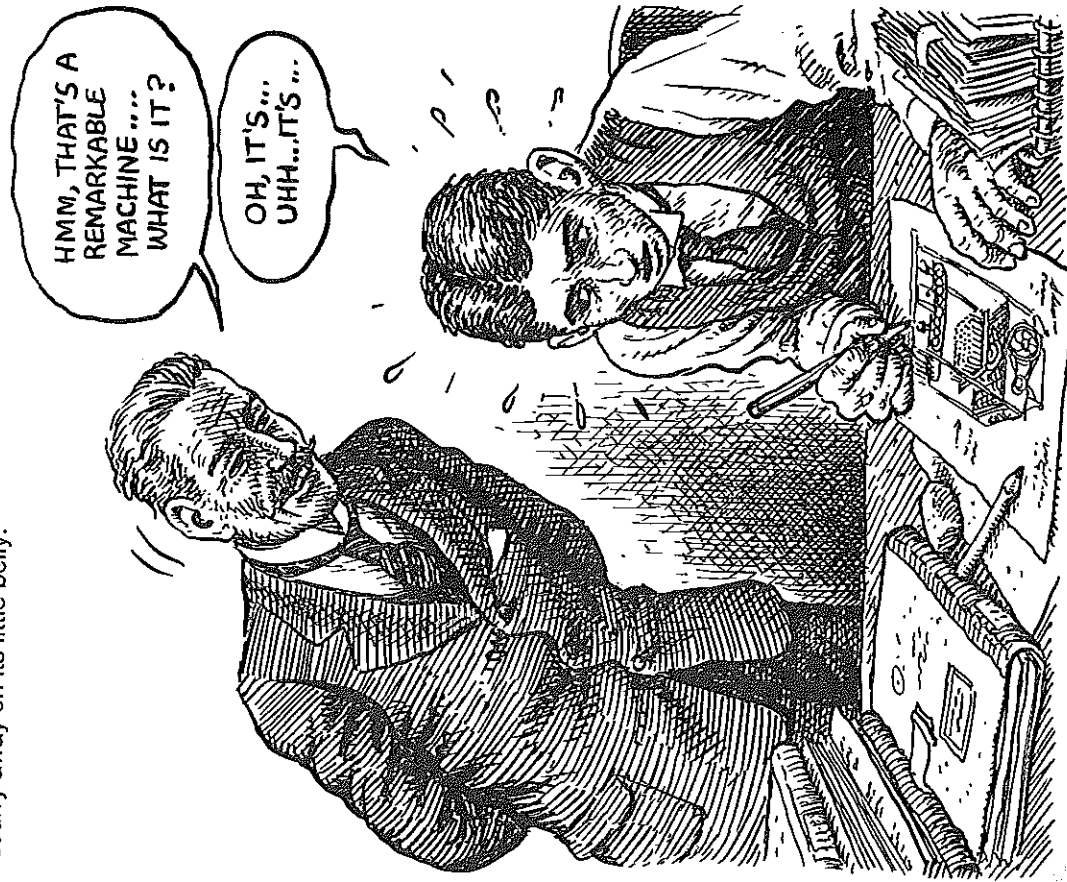
The only solution was a kind of self-hypnosis or "interior emigration" which simultaneously cut him off from the world and allowed him to take it all in . . .

"WRITING... IS A DEEPER SLEEP THAN DEATH... JUST AS ONE WOULDN'T PULL A CORPSE FROM ITS GRAVE, I CAN'T BE DRAGGED FROM MY DESK AT NIGHT."

"Every word first looks around in every direction before letting itself be written down by me."



It's 1914. If Hermann Kafka is still a background cause of his son's feverish nocturnal writing, it has gone far beyond the banality of their ongoing Oedipal war, and there are other important influences at work. Kafka is writing about POWER. And Submission. And Humiliation. The superior POWER that makes its object want to, as we have seen, reduce itself to something smaller that can scurry away on its little belly.

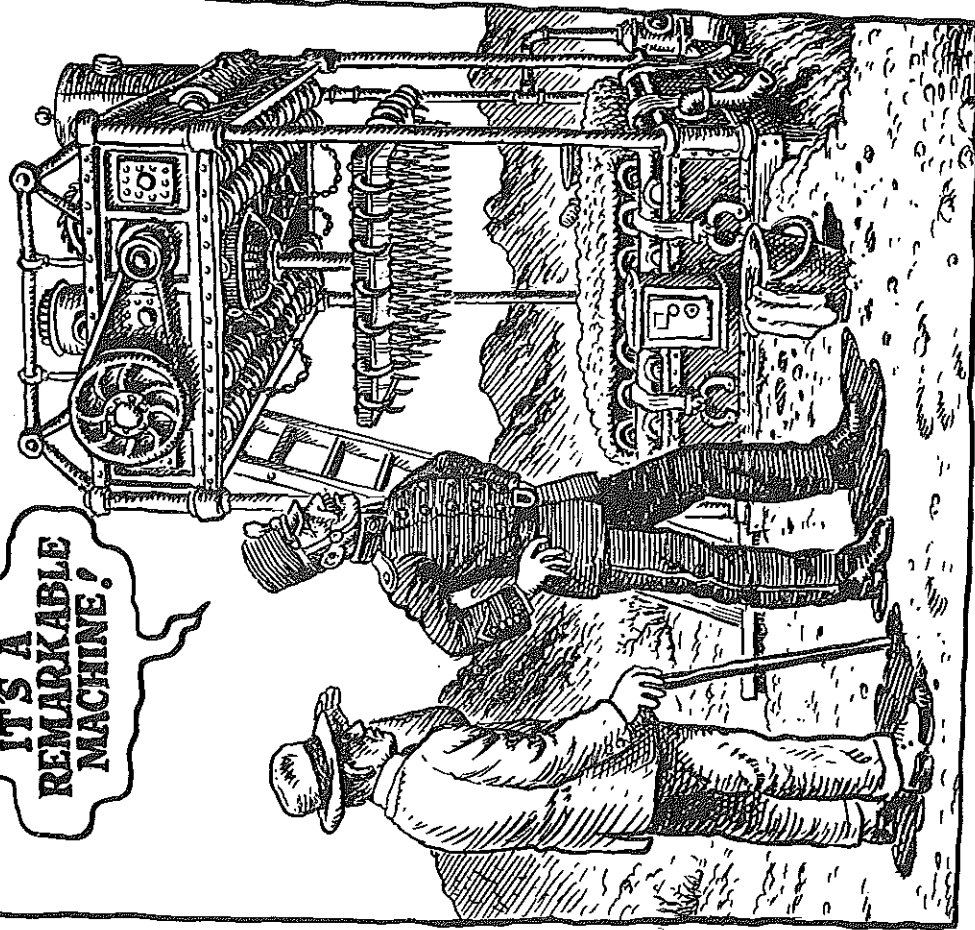


At the same time, events are shaping themselves around him which will set the 20th Century on its Horror Course. As with everything else, Kafka can tell the time before the clock strikes.

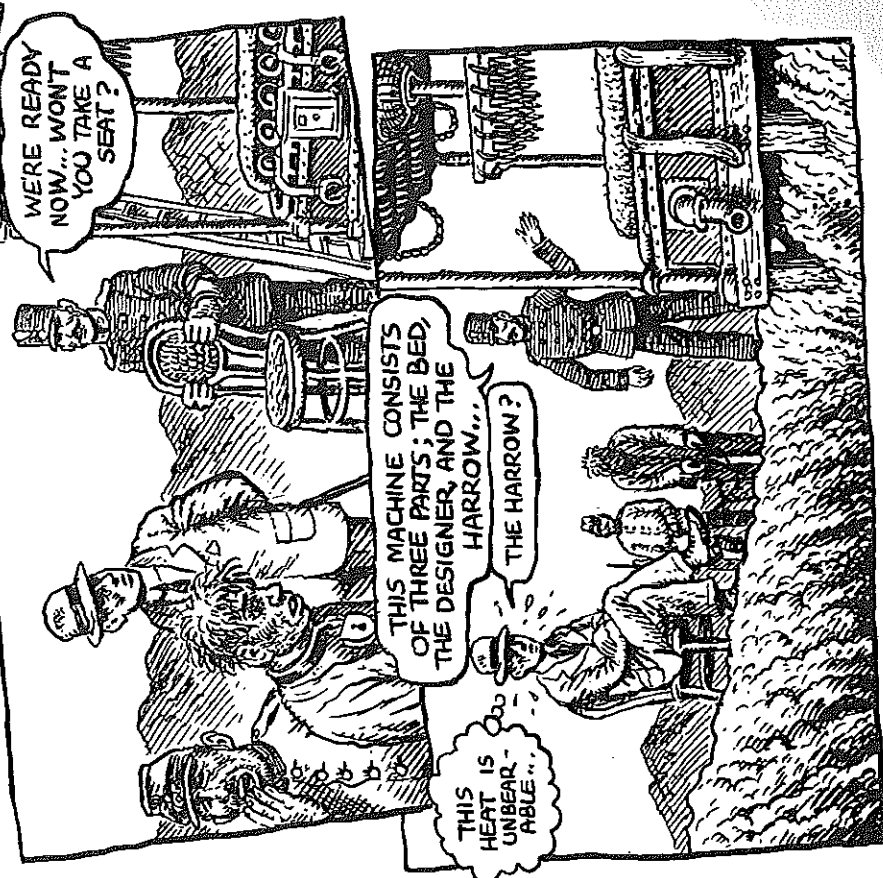
IN THE PENAL COLONY

(IN DER STRAFKOLONIE)

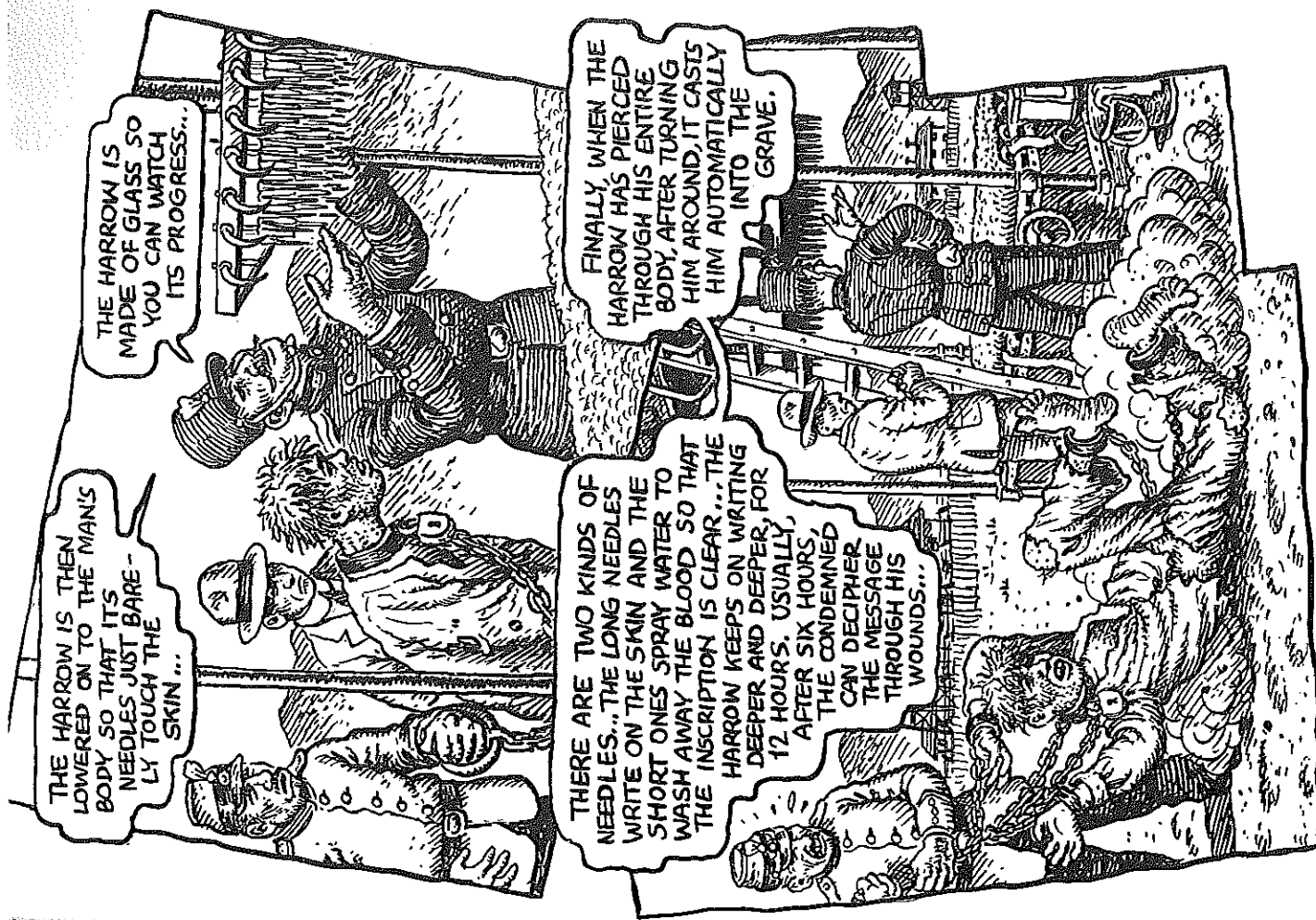
IT'S A
REMARKABLE
MACHINE!



A Traveller to a penal settlement on a colonial island in the tropics is invited to witness the execution of a soldier condemned to death “for disobeying and *insulting a superior*”. This soldier, who has been caught sleeping on duty, does not know his sentence, indeed, doesn't even know he **has been** sentenced and, naturally, has not had the chance to defend himself before a court.



The Officer, who is also the prison's appointed Judge, goes by the very simple rule that GUILT IS NEVER IN DOUBT. (In his novel, **AMERIKA**, Kafka spells out quite clearly this principle of basic "law": in both Europe and America "the verdict was determined by the first words that happened to come from the judge's mouth in an impulse of rage".)

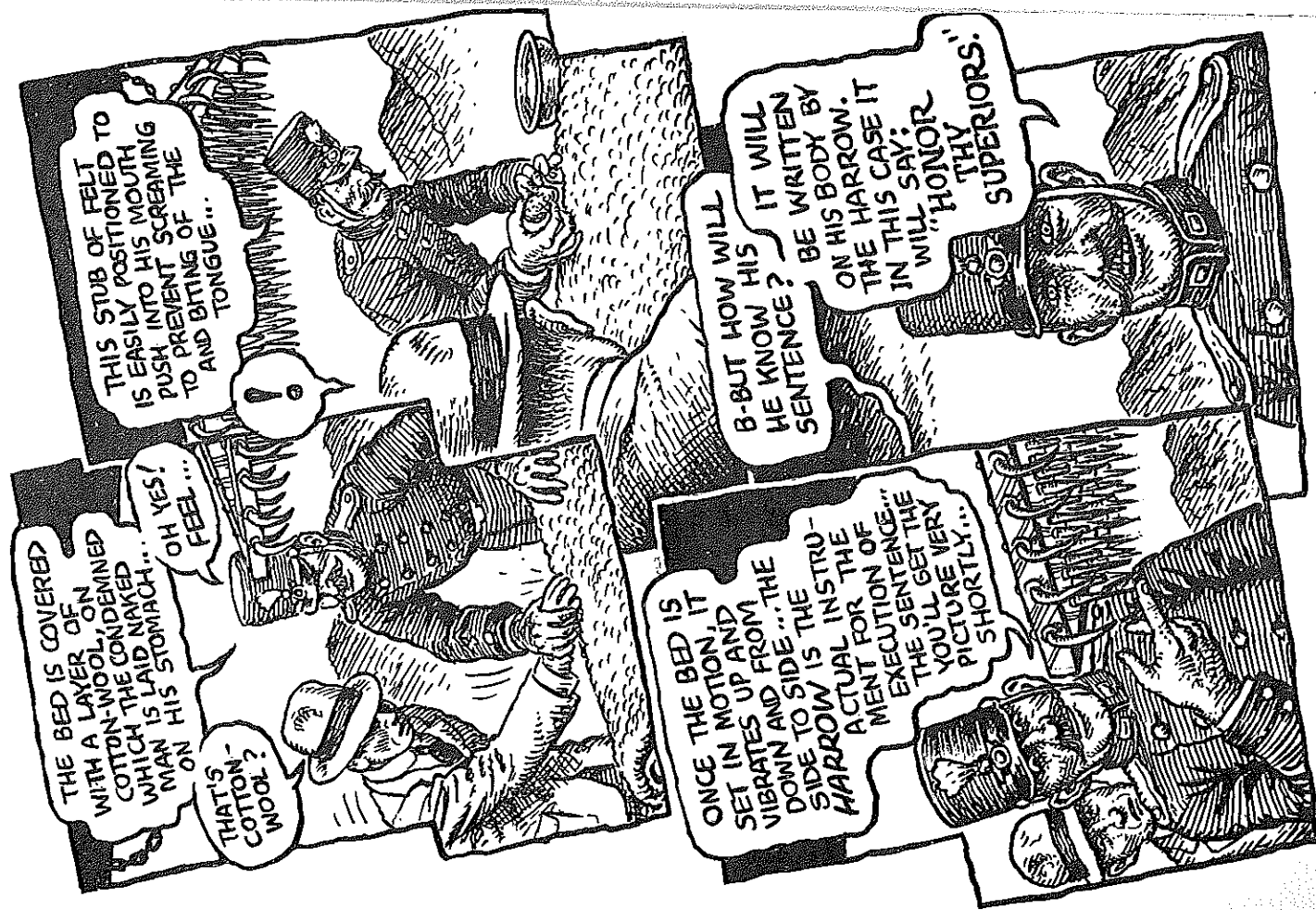


THE HARROW IS THEN LOWERED ON TO THE MAN'S BODY SO THAT ITS NEEDLES JUST BARELY TOUCH THE SKIN...

THE HARROW IS MADE OF GLASS SO YOU CAN WATCH ITS PROGRESS...

THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF NEEDLES...THE LONG NEEDLES WRITE ON THE SKIN AND THE SHORT ONES SPRAY WATER TO WASH AWAY THE BLOOD SO THAT THE INSCRIPTION IS CLEAR...THE HARROW KEEPS ON WRITING DEEPER AND DEEPER, FOR 12 HOURS. USUALLY, AFTER SIX HOURS, THE CONDEMNED CAN DECIPHER THE MESSAGE THROUGH HIS WOUNDS...

FINALLY, WHEN THE HARROW HAS PIERCED THROUGH HIS ENTIRE BODY, AFTER TURNING HIM AROUND, IT CASTS HIM AUTOMATICALLY INTO THE GRAVE.



THE BED IS COVERED WITH A LAYER OF COTTON-WOOL, DENIED WHICH THE CONDEMNED MAN IS LAID NAKED ON

OH YES! FEEL...

THAT'S COTTON-WOOL?

THIS STUB OF FELT IS EASILY POSITIONED TO PUSH INTO HIS MOUTH TO PREVENT SCREAMING AND BITING OF THE TONGUE...

ONCE THE BED IS SET IN MOTION, IT VIBRATES UP AND DOWN AND FROM SIDE TO SIDE...THE HARROW IS THE STRU- ACTUAL FOR THE EXECUTION OF THE SENTENCE... YOU'LL GET THE PICTURE VERY SHORTLY...

B-BUT HOW WILL HE KNOW HIS SENTENCE?

IT WILL BE WRITTEN ON HIS BODY BY THE HARROW. IN THIS CASE IT WILL SAY: "HONOR THY SUPERIORS."



NO... I DON'T APPROVE OF THIS PROCEDURE... I'M MOVED BY THE SINCERITY OF YOUR CONVICTION, BUT IT CAN'T INFLUENCE MY JUDGMENT.

The Officer, knowing that this form of capital punishment was no longer in favour, sought the approval and aid of the Traveller. He urged him to speak up on behalf of the machine.



SO... THE PROCEDURE DIDN'T COME THE TIME YOU... COME... HAS THEN...

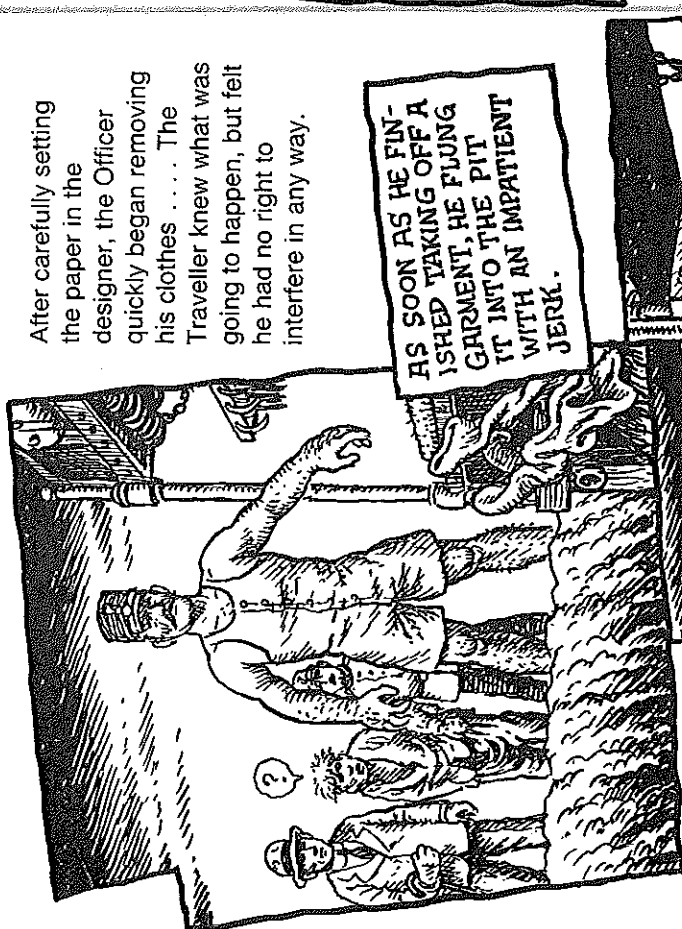
THE TIME FOR WHAT?



Taking a paper from a small leather wallet, the Officer held it up for the Traveller to look at.

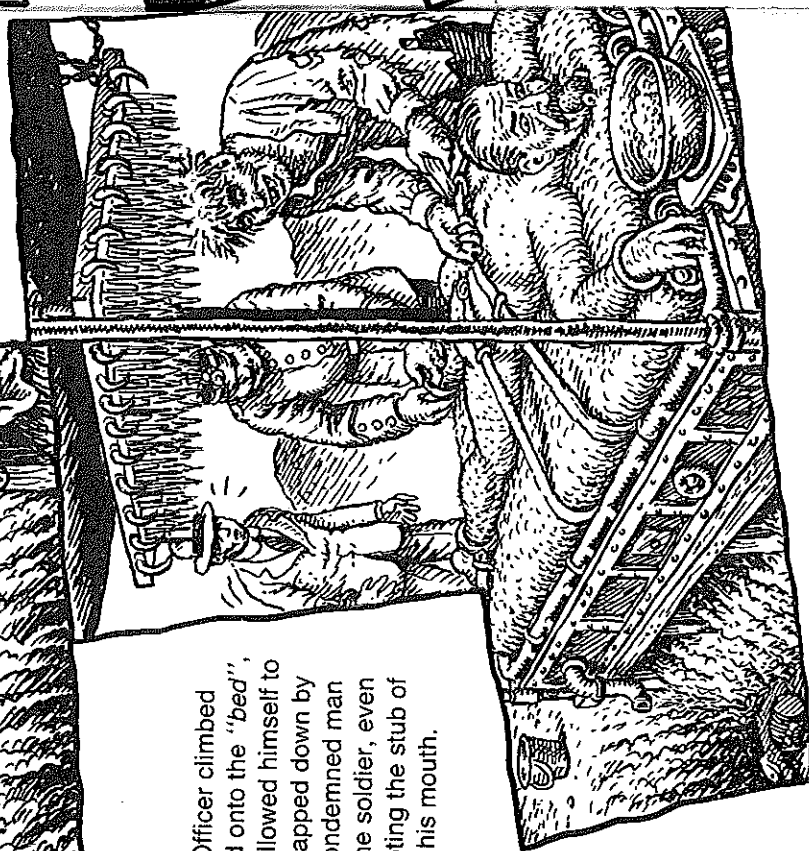


After carefully setting the paper in the designer, the Officer quickly began removing his clothes The Traveller knew what was going to happen, but felt he had no right to interfere in any way.



AS SOON AS HE FINISHED TAKING OFF A GARMENT, HE FLUNG IT INTO THE PIT WITH AN IMPATIENT JERK.

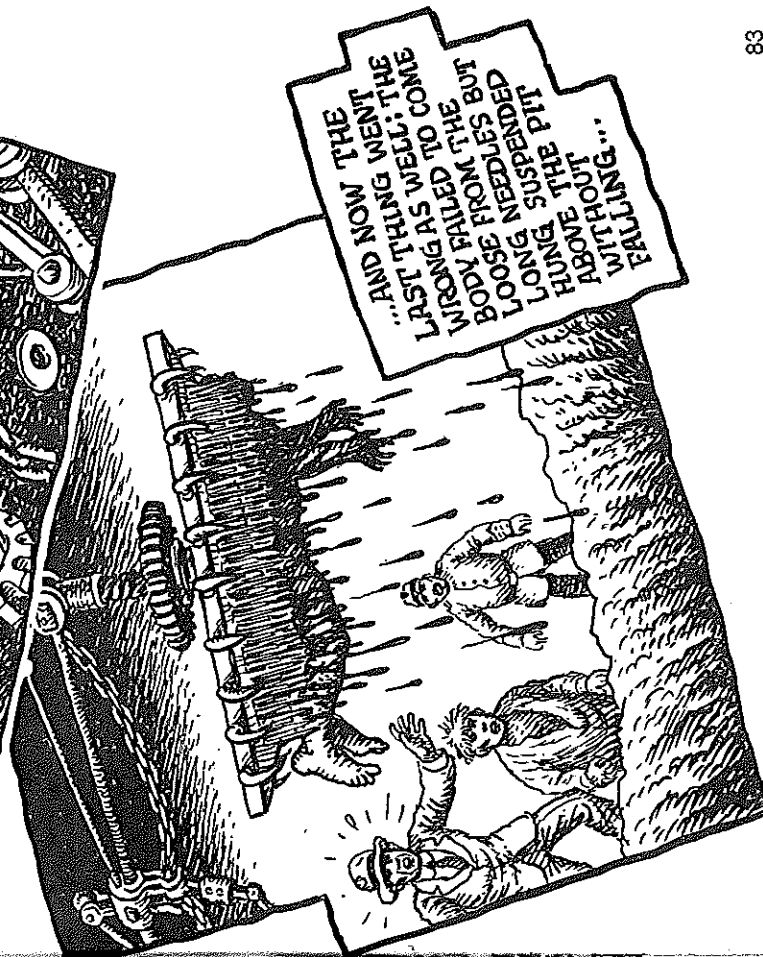
The Officer climbed naked onto the "bed", and allowed himself to be strapped down by the condemned man and the soldier, even accepting the stub of felt in his mouth.



But something went wrong.

THE MACHINE WAS OBVIOUSLY DISINTEGRATING...ITS EASY ILLUSION WAS AN OF WRITING...INSTEAD HARROW WAS ONLY JABBING, AND THE BED, NOT TURNING THE BODY OVER, SIMPLY RAISING IT UP QUIVERING, AGAINST THE NEEDLES...

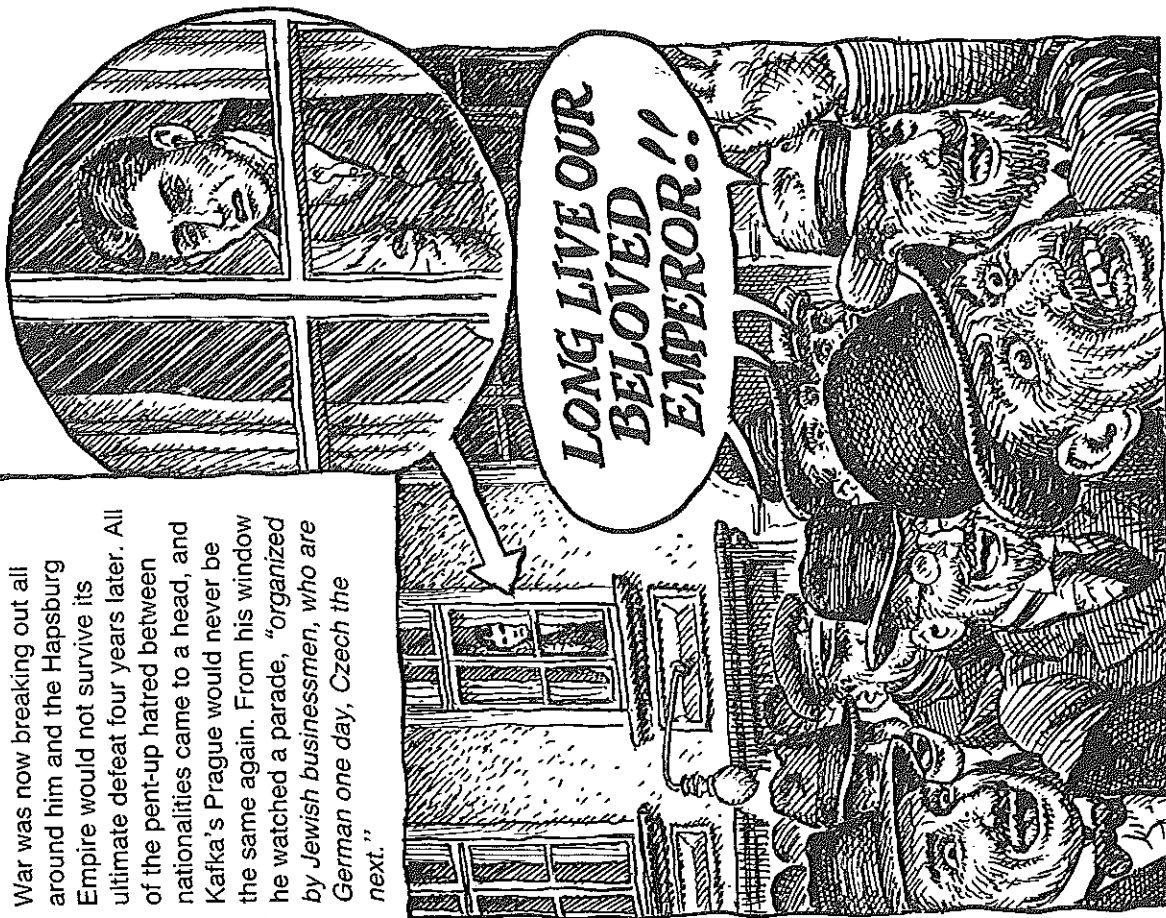
...AND NOW THE LAST THING WENT WRONG AS WELL: THE BOOSE FRODLES BUT LONG NEEDED LUNG THE PIT ABOVE THE FALLING...



HIS FACE REMAINED AS IN LIFE... WHAT THE OTHERS HAD FOUND IN THE MACHINE THE OFFICER HAD FOUND TOGETHER... HIS LIPS WERE PRESSED AND FULL OF CONVICTION, CALM OF THE FOREHEAD CAME THE POINT OF THE BIG IRON SPIKE.



War was now breaking out all around him and the Hapsburg Empire would not survive its ultimate defeat four years later. All of the pent-up hatred between nationalities came to a head, and Kafka's Prague would never be the same again. From his window he watched a parade, "organized by Jewish businessmen, who are German one day, Czech the next."



At the same time, Czech nationalism was on the rise, its leaders seeing in the War a chance to escape the repressive claws of the Empire. As usual, the Jews were caught in the middle. The Czech nationalists were traditionally anti-Semitic, and they associated the Jews — primarily German-speaking — with the Hapsburgs.

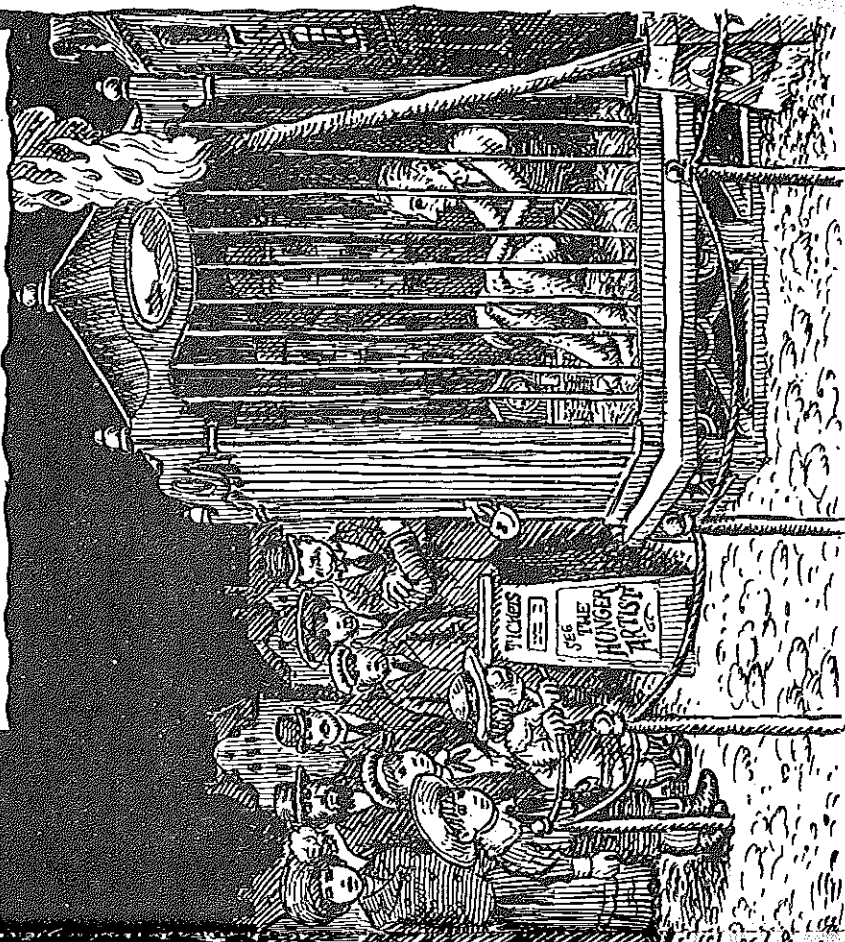
In June, 1924, his "phantoms" saw to it — with their usual irony — that while dying of STARVATION, he would be correcting the gallery-proofs of an astonishing masterwork called . . .

A HUNGER ARTIST (EIN HUNGERKÜNSTLER)



IN THE LAST FEW DECADES, THE INTEREST IN PROFESSIONAL HUNGER-ARTISTRY HAS GREATLY DIMINISHED. ONCE THE WHOLE TOWN CAME OUT TO SEE THE HUNGER-ARTIST. SOME EVEN BOUGHT SEASON TICKETS, AND AT NIGHT THE SCENE WAS BATHED IN THE LIGHT OF TORCHES.

GROUPS OF PROFESSIONAL WATCHERS, USUALLY BUTCHERS, WERE SENT TO WATCH HIM, IN CASE HE HAD SOME SECRET CACHE OF NOURISHMENT. BUT, DURING HIS FAST THE ARTISTE WOULD NEVER, EVEN UNDER COMPUSSION, SWALLOW THE SMALLEST BIT OF FOOD; HIS PROFESSIONAL HONOR FORBODE IT. HE ALONE KNEW WHAT THE OTHERS DIDN'T: FASTING WAS THE EASIEST THING IN THE WORLD.





THE PERIOD OF FASTING WAS SET BY HIS IMPRESARIO AT FORTY DAYS MAXIMUM, BECAUSE AFTER THAT TIME THE PUBLIC BEGAN TO LOSE INTEREST. SO, ON THE FORTIETH DAY, WITH AN EXCITED CROWD FILLING THE ARENA AND A MILITARY BAND PLAYING, TWO YOUNG LADIES CAME TO LEAD THE HUNGER-ARTIST OUT OF HIS CAGE. WHEN THIS HAPPENED HE ALWAYS PUT UP SOME RESISTANCE... WHY STOP AFTER ONLY FORTY DAYS?? WHY SHOULD THEY TAKE FROM HIM THE GLORY OF FASTING EVEN LONGER, OF SURPASSING EVEN HIMSELF TO REACH UNIMAGINABLE HEIGHTS, FOR HE SAW HIS ABILITY TO GO ON FASTING AS *UNLIMITED!*

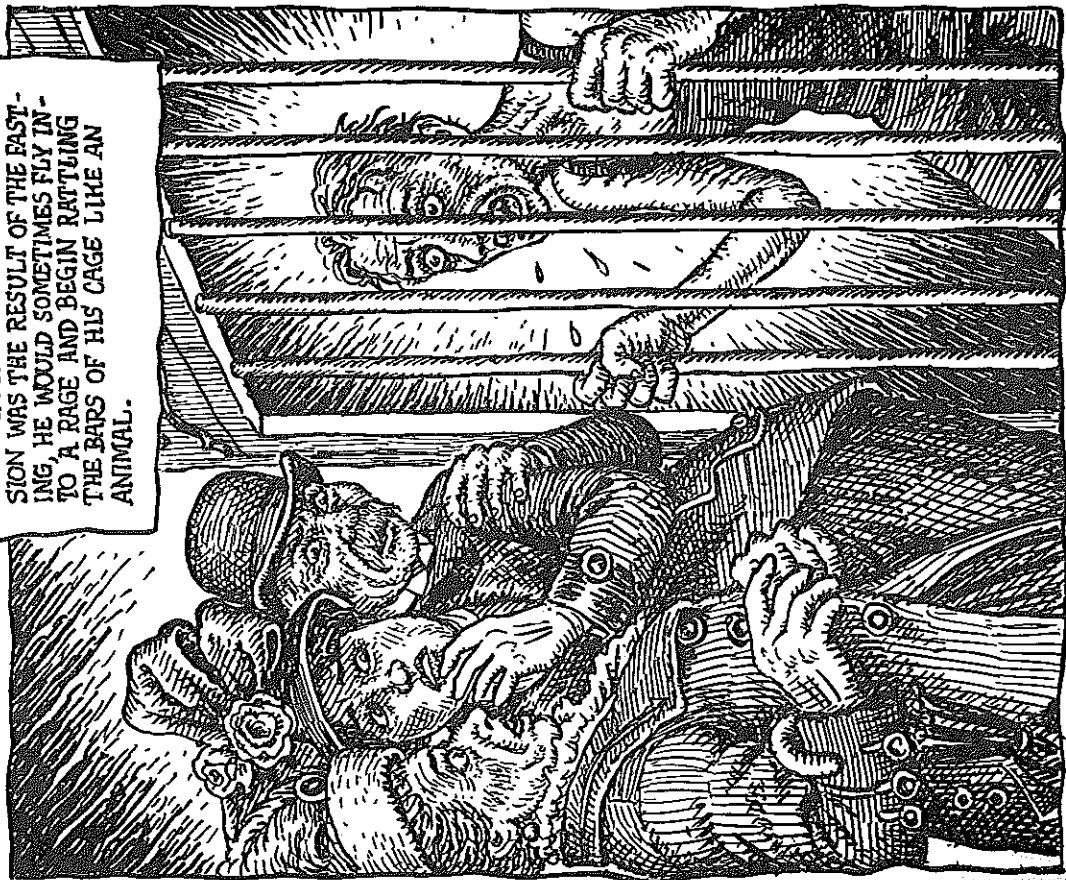


THEN CAME THE FEAST, WITH THE IMPRESARIO TRYING TO SPOONFEED THE NEARLY COMATOSE HUNGER-ARTIST, ALL THE WHILE CHATTING CHEERFULLY IN ORDER TO DISTRACT ATTENTION FROM HIS CONDITION.



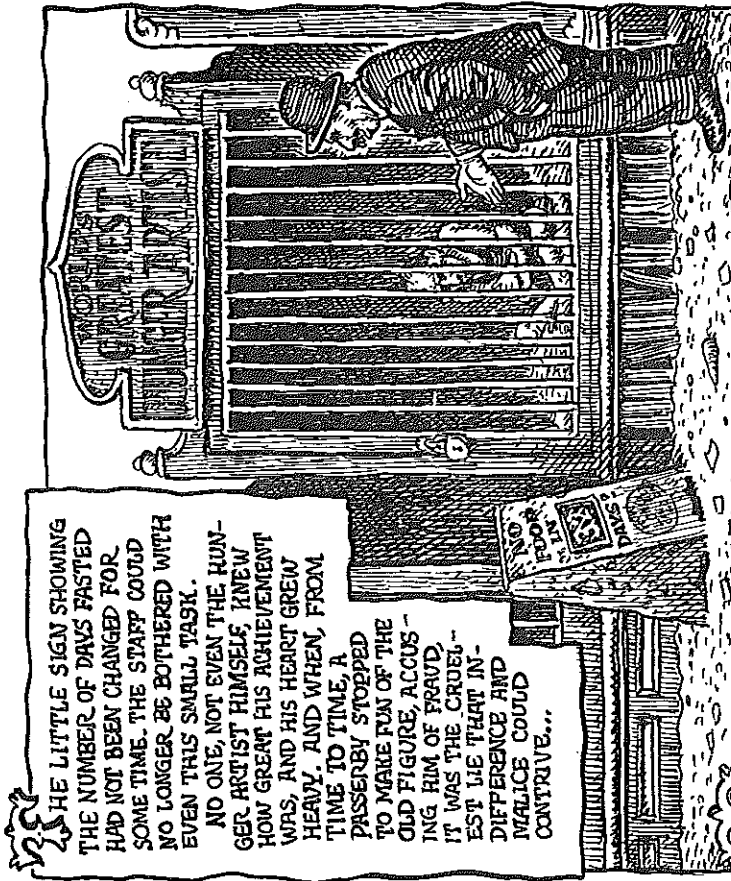
AFTER THAT THERE WAS EVEN A TOAST TO THE AUDIENCE, SUPPOSEDLY SUGGESTED BY THE HUNGER-ARTIST HIMSELF IN A WHISPER TO THE IMPRESARIO.

HE LIVED THIS WAY FOR MANY YEARS, HONORED BY ALL THE WORLD, YET TROUBLED IN HIS SOUL, DEEPLY FRUSTRATED THAT THEY WOULD NOT ALLOW HIS FASTING TO EXCEED FORTY DAYS. HE SPENT MOST OF HIS TIME IN A GLOOMY MOOD, AND WHEN SOME KIND-HEARTED PERSON WOULD TRY TO EXPLAIN THAT HIS DEPRESSION WAS THE RESULT OF THE FASTING, HE WOULD SOMETIMES FLY IN TO A RAGE AND BEGIN RATTLING THE BARS OF HIS CAGE LIKE AN ANIMAL.



AS TIME WENT BY PEOPLE BECAME INTERESTED IN OTHER AMUSEMENTS, AND WERE REVOLTED BY PROFESSIONAL FASTING. THE HUNGER-ARTIST COULD NOT CHANGE JOBS, FANATICALLY DEVOTED TO FASTING AS HE WAS. SO DISCHARGING THE IMPRESSIONARIO, HE HIRED HIMSELF OUT TO A LARGE CIRCUS, WHERE HIS CAGE WAS PUT OUTSIDE, NEAR THOSE OF THE ANIMALS.





BECAUSE... BECAUSE I
COULD NEVER FIND ANY
FOOD I LIKED... IF I HAD
FOUND ANY, BELIEVE ME,
I WOULDN'T HAVE MADE
ALL THIS FUSS! I'D HAVE
STUFFED MYSELF THE
SAME AS YOU OR
ANYBODY ELSE!

THESE WERE HIS LAST
WORDS, BUT IN HIS BROKEN
EYES ONE COULD SEE THE
FIRM, IF NO LONGER PROUD,
CONVICTION THAT HE WAS
FASTING STILL....



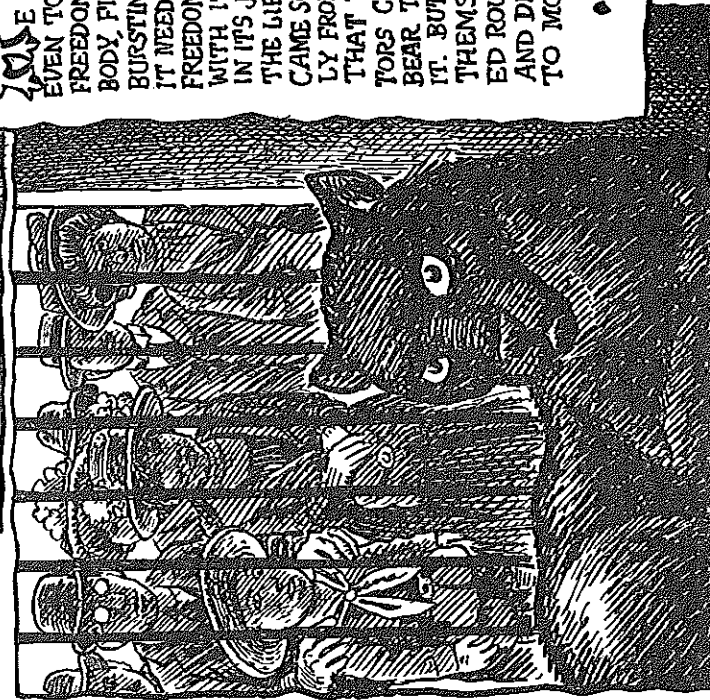
ALRIGHT,
CLEAN UP
THIS MESS...



HEY BURIED
THE HUNGER-ARTIST
TOGETHER WITH THE
STRAW. INTO HIS
CAGE THEY NOW
PUT A YOUNG
PANTHER...

EVEN THE
MOST THICK-
SKINNED PEOPLE
WERE RELIEVED
TO SEE THIS
WILD CREATURE
THROWING HIM-
SELF ABOUT IN
THE CAGE
THAT HAD SO
LONG BEEN
SO MISERABLE.
WITHOUT ANY
AFTERTHOUGHT
HIS KEEPERS
BROUGHT HIM
ALL THE
FOODS HE
LIKED BEST.

HE SEEMED NOT
EVEN TO MISS HIS
FREEDOM, HIS NOBLE
BODY, FIRED OUT TO
BURSTING WITH ALL
IT NEEDED, CARRIED
FREEDOM AROUND
WITH IT, AS IF HELD
IN ITS JAWS, AND
THE LIFE FORCE
CAME SO PASSIONATE-
LY FROM HIS THROAT
THAT THE SPECTA-
TORS COULD HARDLY
BEAR THE SIGHT OF
IT. BUT THEY BRACED
THEMSELVES, CROWD-
ED AROUND THE CAGE,
AND DID NOT WANT
TO MOVE AWAY.



AFTERWORD:

A Hunger Artist was one of the few stories Kafka exempted from his instructions to Max Brod that all his work, all his manuscripts and papers, be INCINERATED after his death. So, he was still trying to DISPOSE of himself; although, as the writer J-L Borges rightly points out: if he really wanted a bonfire, why didn't he just strike the match himself?

In any case, Brod, as we know, did not comply, and went on to edit what was, at that time, a confused jumble: chapters unnumbered or out of order, multiple versions, crossings-out, some works untitled (many of the titles we have were later provided by Brod).



A completely new edition is now being prepared by Kafka scholars in Germany, based on more accurate and up-to-date readings.

Manuscripts left in the hands of Dora Diamant were not so "lucky", being taken in a raid on her Berlin apartment in 1933. Ironically, Kafka's wish was most likely carried out by the book-burning Gestapo.



Milena Jesenska and Kafka's three sisters were deported to, and died in, concentration camps. Ottla cut off a possible escape route by divorcing her non-Jewish husband, so as not to separate herself from her family. Had Kafka lived, the Holocaust would surely have been his fate as well.

As for Kafka's Ghetto, Adolph Hitler had the idea of turning it into a kind of "memorial to an extinct race", after having extinguished that race himself, and the State Jewish Museum is, in a curious way, his legacy.