Shivam Gupta

1/17/18

ENL 3

Explication: An Imperial Message

The short story “An Imperial Message” by Franz Kafka is about a message and how that message can never be directly conveyed. The use of word “you” suggests that the speaker is directly referring to the reader of the story and trying to communicate how they will never receive the message from the Emperor.

This short story is full of ambiguity. In the first line of the story the speaker suggests that this story is in a form of a parable using the phrase “so a parable runs”. This phase leads the reader to assume that the speaker is trying to impart a hidden meaning. When referring to the reader the speaker suggests that the reader is in distant part of an infinitely large kingdom. While using the term “imperial sun” to suggest the center of the kingdom. Here we see a comparison of location to the Sun, as its location being the center of our solar system and further comparing the size of the kingdom to our solar system.

Furthermore, the speaker create an image of an emperor on his deathbed trying to convey an extremely important message through a messenger. The speaker suggests that this particular message has a great importance to the emperor while the idea the story presents is that “you” will never receive it. After receiving the message from the emperor the messenger is tasked to spread the message. He tells this message to everyone present near him and when he is done he keeps on moving. This marks the start of an endless journey. The messenger tries his hardest but the numbers are against him. The speaker here gives a clear imagery of how many boundaries the messenger has to cross. First the inner palace, then the courts, the second outer palace, more stairs and even more courts and even if this goes on for a thousand years and he is able to make out of the outermost gate which the speaker says “will never, never happen” he has only reached the imperial capital. Finally he will never be able to leave this place even if he has a message from the emperor. And while all this is happening the speaker suggest that the reader is waiting for this message to reach them.

Kafka writes this story in a liner progression, where a dying emperor has sent a message to “you” using his messenger and you await for this message. This simple idea from Kafka shows how a message gains its importance from where it originates. While the messenger is just a medium and a symbolic representation of a way in which an idea can be conveyed. While the reader is eagerly in wait of something that will never happen further showing a layer of idea that the message can be a representation of our hunger of knowledge and how a reader will wait to understand something even when the idea is unachievable. Kafka also clearly show that the origination of the message on a deathbed is a symbolic representation of ideas being passed down during death and how the important ideas are conveyed. Kafka also leaves a lot ambiguity though out his story like the exact size of the kingdom and what exactly was the message, which leads the reader to create their own assumptions on how vast this empire could be and why would a king use a messenger to deliver this message and no other mediums. The general theme that Kafka creates in this story is of communication and relentlessness. He shows how a person when tasked with something can keep on perform the same task even though the result of that task will not matter in the end. We see this depiction with the messenger and how he is tasked with an impossible task and never stops. This idea of being given a task and never questioning the ideas behind the task shows how Kafka represents a single functioning mind.

Finally the idea he presents is that sometimes we as a reader will never be understand the message. He creates this desire to know the message behind something or the reason behind an incident, and then suggests that as the reader of this story the emperor’s message is never going to reach you. Which leads to questions of how a person can justifiably wait for a message from someone while they do not know what the message is going to be.