

Emily Vahs

Mrs. Rutan

AP Literature

09 November 2015

### A Happy Hunger Artist

Franz Kafka created an interesting character in his story A Hunger Artist. Back in the early 1900s it was considered a form of entertainment to watch someone starve themselves. The artistic character project I created was the cover of a Time magazine of the dead hunger artist. The hunger artist in Kafka's story did not have a name which helps show how insignificant he was to society. All the hunger artist ever wanted was attention, the crowds to swarm his cage and make him feel important. By putting his dead slim skeleton on the cover of a popular magazine I felt that it would finally give him the recognition he wanted. The hunger artist was doomed to be unhappy while he was still alive only because his art depends on the validation from others, which is very ironic. Only the hunger artist could truly appreciate his work because onlooker could suspect cheating or never truly grasp the whole experience. The narrator even tells us “only he could also be the perfectly assured spectator of his fast.” (Kafka, 2) The hunger artist died without the understanding from others of the art, and by putting him as a spectacle in a magazine I felt it would bring more appreciation to his fading art.

Drawing the hunger artist as a skeleton, and placing the phrase “dead men are skinnier” on the cover helped show the face value of his art. As a modern reader it is truly difficult to understand why he chose this as his career. We get hints as to what his thought process was while being locked up in his cage. We learn that the hunger artist “was so emaciated only from dissatisfaction

with himself.” (Kafka, 3) Although the actual starvation helps make him look so frail, part of his inability to master his art causes him to be that way. It's this type of love hate relationship that he has with his art that gives him so much mental anguish. His art was not directly focused on what size he became when he starved himself, it was the actual starving that was considered true art, and this misconception is what caused the hunger artist some pain in the first place.

The hunger artist not only was very unhappy with his art, but also was very lonely. I integrated this into my magazine cover by only having his skeleton. I could have added the cage he was in, a circus in the background, or even the impresario, but those things were not important to him. The hunger artist lived only for his art and by doing this he locked himself away from the people around him. Once he got to the circus things did not get any better. He wondered “ where they would tuck him away if he tried to make them aware of his existence, and therefore also of the fact that, strictly speaking, he has nothing more than an obstacle on the way to the animal sheds. “ (Kafka, 5) He became an roadblock to the people who wanted to see the other more lively caged animals, his art became nothing. Putting the hunger artist's skeleton all by itself on the cover helps push the point that he was alone before he died, and still will be afterwards. The career he chose was one that was not meant for a socialite, and if he wanted to be appreciated he inevitably would have to separate himself from society.

The hunger artist lived for recognition and for the crowds that seemed to dwindle to truly understand his art. One of his biggest mistakes he made was to go to the circus. He wanted the crowds to truly get that what he was doing was powerful, but “given the peculiar nature of this artistry, which does not develop with increasing age ...he would really and for the first time give the world a true reason to be astonished...” (Kafka, 4) He did not think his decision through,

because would the people flocking to the circus truly appreciate his fine art, when all that they wanted was a bearded lady. People come to the circus to see oddities, and even though that's what he didn't want to be seen as, you can't escape the inevitable. So by giving him recognition in a magazine, but only for his frail body I am defying him like his crowds one last time of the understanding he so desperately craved.