

Title: Language as Othering and Redemption in "The Penal Colony"

Presenter: Nick Atmore, Victor Valley College

Mentor: Tim Adell

Language is used as a tool to achieve power over others in Kafka's "In the Penal Colony."

Language relegates the Prisoner to the status of Other, for he is referred to as subhuman. By using euphemism and linguistic moral disengagement, the Officer removes any stigma of committing torturous acts upon the Prisoner. Once he achieves power over the Prisoner, the Officer tortures him for homosexual pleasure. The Officer uses linguistic sadism against the Prisoner. Linguistic sadism is a form of sexual sadism in which the dominant party receives "a verbal ecstasy or linguistic excess" from their words (Lurie 25). Language not only empowers the Officer to subjugate the Prisoner, but it is also through language that he commits sexual violence against others. While language is used as a tool for sexual domination over the Prisoner, the Explorer also uses it to end the torture of the victim and achieve equality on his behalf, putting an end to his Otherness. This places language in a paradoxical role. It facilitates both the subjugation and sexual objectification of the Prisoner, while also enabling his salvation and inclusion. Positive language allows the prisoner to cross between the binary of Other/Belonging. He begins the story as a subjugated Other; however, once the Explorer saves him, the prisoner transitions into the concept of Belonging, in which he is held in equal regard to others. This suggests that people can use language to mistreat and exclude others or they can use it to include and empower others.

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