

Die Sorge Des Hausvaters



By Franz Kafka

Die Sorge Des Hausvaters

By Franz Kafka

Translated by:

Anya Maksin
Google Translate
Malcolm Pasley
Nicholas Brown
Stanley Applebaum

Contents:

Ragged Bits of Meaning, Wound on a Star Shaped Spool for Thread (The Cares of a Family Man).....	3
The Father's Worry.....	6
The Concern of the Husband.....	9
The Problem for the Father of the Family.....	11
Worries of a Family Man.....	14

Ragged Bits of Meaning, Wound on a Star-Shaped Spool for Thread

(The Cares of a Family Man)

Some say the word Odradek is of Slavonic origin, and try to account for it on that basis. Others again believe it to be of German origin, only influenced by Slavonic. The uncertainty of both interpretations allows one to assume with justice that neither is accurate, especially as neither of them provides an intelligent meaning of the word.

No one, of course, would occupy himself with such studies if there were not a creature called Odradek. At first glance it looks like a flat star-shaped spool for thread, and indeed it does seem to have thread wound upon it; to be sure, they are only old, broken-off bits of thread, knotted and tangled together, of the most varied sorts and colors. But it is not only a spool, for a small wooden crossbar sticks out of the middle of the star, and another small rod is joined to that at a right angle. By means of this latter rod on one side and one of the points of the star on the other, the whole thing can stand upright as if on two legs.

One is tempted to believe that the creature once had some sort of intelligible shape and is now only a broken-down remnant. Yet this does not seem to be the case; at least there is no sign of it; nowhere is there an unfinished or unbroken surface to suggest anything of the kind; the whole thing

looks senseless enough, but in its own way perfectly finished. In any case, closer scrutiny is impossible, since Odradek is extraordinarily nimble and can never be laid hold of.

He lurks by turns in the garret, the stairway, the lobbies, the entrance hall. Often for months on end he is not to be seen; then he has presumably moved into other houses; but he always comes faithfully back to our house again. Many a time when you go out of the door and he happens just to be leaning directly beneath you against the banisters you feel inclined to speak to him. Of course, you put no difficult questions to him, you treat him--he is so diminutive that you cannot help it--rather like a child. "Well, what's your name?" you ask him. "Odradek," he says. "And where do you live?" "No fixed abode," he says and laughs; but it is only the kind of laughter that has no lungs behind it. It sounds rather like the rustling of fallen leaves. And that is usually the end of the conversation. Even these answers are not always forthcoming; often he stays mute for a long time, as wooden as his appearance.

I ask myself, to no purpose, what is likely to happen to him? Can he possibly die? Anything that dies has had some kind of aim in life, some kind of activity, which has worn out; but that does not apply to Odradek. Am I to suppose, then, that he will always be rolling down the stairs, with ends of thread trailing after him, right before the feet of my children, and my children's children?

He does no harm to anyone that one can see; but
the idea that he is likely to survive me I find
almost painful.

-translated by Anya Meksin

The Father's Worry

Some say the word Odradek comes from the Slavonic, and try to prove the formation of the word on that basis. Whereas others believe it comes from the German and was merely influenced by the Slavonic. But the unsureness of both interpretations probably points to the correct conclusion that neither one hit's the mark, especially since neither of them allows one to find a meaning for the word.

Of course, no one would occupy himself with such studies if there weren't really a being called Odradek. At first glance it looks like a flat, star-shaped bobbin for twisting yarn; and moreover it actually seems to be covered with yarn; but it would have to be merely torn off, old, knotted together, but also snarled bits of yarn of the most varied types and colours. But it isn't merely a bobbin: a transverse rod protrudes from the centre of the star, and another rod is attached to that one at a right angle. With the aid of that second rod on one side, the whole creature can stand erect on two legs.

You'd be tempted to believe that this configuration once had some useful form, and is now merely out of shape. But this doesn't seem to be the case, at least there's no hint of it; incomplete members or places showing breakage, which would point to such a history, are nowhere to be seen; to be sure, the creature as a whole

appears to make no sense, but it's complete in it's own way. Anyway, no further details can be supplied, because Odradek is extraordinarily quick-moving and can't be caught.

At various times he stays in the attic, in the stairwell, in the corridors, in the vestibule. Sometimes he can't be seen for months on end; at such times he has probably moved to other houses; but then he inevitably returns to our house. Sometimes, when you're walking out the door and he happens to be leaning against the banisters at the foot of the stairs, you get the urge to talk to him. Of course, you don't ask him any difficult questions, but you treat him as a child - his very tininess induces you to do so. "What's your name?" you ask him. "Odradek," he says. "And where do you live?" "No settled address," he says with a laugh, but it's only a laugh that can be produced if you have no lungs. It sounds more or less like the rustling of fallen leaves. Most of the time the conversation ends there. Besides, even these replies can't always be obtained; often he's mute for a long time, like the wood that he seems to be.

In vain I wonder what will become of him. Can he die? Everything that dies has had some goal, some sort of activity previously, in the course of which it has consumed itself; but that's not the case with Odradek. Will he then perhaps at some time still roll down the steps, with a length of yarn dragging behind, landing at the feet of my children and my

children's children? Indeed, he obviously does no harm to anyone, but the notion that he is to outlive me as well is most painful to me.

-translated by Stanley Applebaum

The Concern of the Husband

Some say the word Odradek is of Slavonic origin, and they seek to prove the basis of which the formation of the word. Others believe it came from the Germans was only influenced by Slavonic. The uncertainty of both interpretations probably can rightly conclude that neither is accurate, especially since one can also be found with any of them make sense of the word.

Of course, no one would be concerned with such studies, if it does not really exist a being called Odradek. It looks at first like a flat star-shaped spool of thread, and indeed it does seem to have thread wound, although it should only be broken, old, aneinandergeknotete, but also ineinanderverfitzte twisted pieces of various kinds and colors. It is not only a coil, but from the center of the star comes out a little crossbar that sticks and then falls at right angles to one thing. Using this latter rod on one side, and one of the points of the star on the other side, how can the whole thing on two legs to stand upright.

One would be tempted to believe this creature once had some sort of shape and now it is just broken. This does not seem to be the case, at least there is no evidence, no approaches or breaks can be seen that would indicate anything like that, the whole thing looks senseless enough, but in its own way. Details can not be said about the way because Odradek extremely mobile and can not

catch them.

He lurks by turns in the garret, the stairway, the lobbies, the corridors. Sometimes he has not been seen for months, but since he has presumably moved into other houses, but he always comes faithfully back to our house. Sometimes when you go out the door and he just leans down the banister, you feel inclined to speak to him. Of course, one does not ask him any difficult questions, but deals with him - even his diminutive about this - like a child.

"What's your name?" You ask him. "Odradek," he says. And where do you live? "No fixed abode," he says and laughs, but it is just a laugh, how to produce it without lungs. It sounds like the rustling of fallen leaves. So that the conversation is usually too late. Incidentally, even these answers are not always forthcoming, and often it is a long silence, as the wood, which he seems to be.

I ask myself what will happen to him. Can he die? Anything that dies has had some kind of goal, and it had some kind of activity which has worn out, this applies to Odradek not. Should he therefore once hunker around before the feet of my children and grandchildren with trailing twine the stairs? It does no harm to anyone, but the idea that he should survive me, I'm almost painful.

-translated by Google Translate

The Problem For the Father of the Family

There are some who say that the word Odradek is of Slavonic origin, and they try to account for its information on that basis. Others again believe that it derives from the German and is merely influenced by the Slavonic. The uncertainty of both interpretation, however, probably justifies a conclusion that neither is correct, especially since neither permits one to attach a meaning to the word.

No-one, of course, would occupy himself with such studies if a creature called Odradek did not in fact exist. At first glance it looks like a flat, star-shaped spool for thread, and indeed does actually seem to be wound with thread; or rather, with what appear to be just odds and ends of old thread, of the most various kinds and colours, all knotted together and even tangled up with one another. But it is not simply a spool, for protruding from the middle of the star is a small wooden crossbar, and to this another little bar is attached at a right angle. By means of this latter bar on one side and one of the points of the star on the other, the whole thing is able to stand upright as if on two legs.

One might be tempted to suppose that this object had once been designed for some purpose or other and was now merely broken. But this does not seem to be the case; at least there are no indications of it; nowhere are there stumps of fractures visible that might suggest anything of

the kind; the whole thing appears senseless, and yet in its own way complete. It is not possible to state anything more definite on the matter since Odradek is exceptionally mobile, and refuses to be caught.

He resides by turns in the attic, on the stairs, in the corridors, in the entrance hall. Sometimes he is not to be seen for months; so presumably he has moved into other houses; but then he invariably comes back to our house again. Sometimes, when one comes out of one's room and he happens to be propping himself up against one of the banisters down below, one feels inclined to speak to him. Naturally, one doesn't ask him any difficult questions. One treats him - his diminutive size is itself sufficient encouragement to do so - like a child. 'What is your name?' One asks him. 'Odradek,' he says. 'And where do you live?' 'No fixed abode,' he says, and laughs, but it is only the sort of laughter that can be produced without lungs. It sounds something like the rustling of fallen leaves. This is usually the end of the conversation. Even these answers, by the way, are not always forthcoming; often he remains dumb for a long time, like the wood he seems to consist of.

It is in vain that I ask myself what is likely to become of him. Is he capable of dying? Everything that dies has previously had some kind of goal, some kind of activity, and at this activity it has worn itself away; in the case of Odradek that

does not apply. Can it be, then, that he might one day still be rolling down the stairs, with ends of thread trailing after him, before the feet of my children and my children's children? He obviously does no harm to anyone; but the idea that he might also outlive me I find most painful.

-translated by Malcolm Pasley

Worries of a Family Man

Some say the word odradek comes from the Slavonic and look for the word's derivation on that basis. Others think it comes from the German, only being influenced by the Slavonic. The uncertainty of both interpretations permits one to conclude that neither applies, particularly since neither leads to a meaning for the word.

Naturally nobody would occupy himself with such study if there were not actually a being called odradek. It looks at first like a flat starshaped spool, and in fact it does appear to be wound with thread; which, to be sure, is really only ragged, old, knotted together or simply tangled pieces of string of mixed color and description. But it is not only a spool, since a small crossbar emerges from the middle of the star and another bar joins the first at a right angle. With the aid of this second bar on one side, and one of the points of the star on the other side, the whole thing can stand upright as though on two legs.

One is tempted to believe that this entity once had some purposive form and is now simply broken. Despite appearances, this is not the case. At least, no evidence can be seen for it; one cannot find a mark of incompleteness or rupture that would suggest anything like that. The whole thing looks senseless enough, but in its own way complete. At any rate, nothing more precise can be said, since Odradek is exceedingly agile and not to be caught.

He hangs around in the attic, on the stairway, in the hallways, in the entryway by turns. Sometimes he is not to be seen for a month at a time, having probably moved on to other houses; but he never fails to return to our house. Sometimes, if one steps out the door and he is leaning against the stair-rail just below, one feels inclined to speak to him. Naturally one doesn't ask him difficult questions, handling him rather — his smallness makes it hard not to — like a child. "What's your name then?" one asks. "Odradek," he says. "And where do you live?" "No fixed abode" he says, and laughs; but it is a laughter such as only one without lungs can produce. It sounds something like the rustling of fallen leaves. Generally that's the end of the conversation. Incidentally, even these answers are not always forthcoming; often he is silent for long periods, as wooden as he looks.

To no avail, I ask myself what will become of him. Can he even die? Everything that dies must previously have had some kind of purpose, some kind of activity which has exhausted itself; this doesn't apply to Odradek. Is he to be then always at the feet of my children and my children's children, tumbling down the stairs with threadfibers dragging after? He evidently harms nobody; but the idea that he is furthermore to outlive me I find almost painful.

--translated by Nicholas Brown