

# At the Grave of Kafka

by [Justin Wong](#) (August 2025)



Kafka's Vulture (Yosl Bergner, 1990)

**This is the** nearest that I have come to you  
Though I have known you through the years,  
Long years as I arrive at the midpoint of life,  
Or as you knew it as an end, after death  
Kidnapped you capriciously when aspiring to your heights,

You amused me when I knew you first in youth,  
And returned to you in hours of solemn desperation,  
When the world grew too absurd for an imbecile  
Deficient in his wits to bare  
To speak little of the pitiable sane.  
I have looked at your pages to see not my face reflected,

But as a mirror (or window) to the insane world.

Literature is like a father to his doubtful offspring,  
It finds its value in a series of likenesses:  
The prison, the island, the bed, the castle  
Are here, all here, in the wasteland of this decadence:  
The uninspired edifices, grey offices, the decomposing roads,  
Or in the graffiti scarred city you perished too soon to see.

Those who never read a leaf off your work invoke you,  
Whilst scholars suffer bouts of amnesia  
After consuming the last word of your last page,  
And what do these works signify?  
It is the comprehension of incomprehensibility,  
To see multitudes in a singular,  
What has been, or what's to come,  
This signifying that? One thing for another?

You weren't a witness to the Shoah  
That purged many of your generation,  
But a witness merely to its spirit –  
One that's dumb and defanged  
And yet to manifest itself into an actuality  
In the short lived–relative–peace of your time,

Jealous death swept down prematurely and  
Buried you neath the sod I stand beside.

A work of art is justified by its moment in conception,  
To possess knowledge without experience,  
To warn the deaf-eared world of horrors  
They're too naïve in their sanguinity to see:  
Bourgeoise Cassandra, Patriarch of modernity,  
Ghetto dwelling seer, robeless visionary,  
Prophet of an implosion.

Day yet to come becomes distilled in allegory,

Nowhere it becomes everywhere,  
The nameless assume the identity of the reader  
A million faces become reduced to a type,  
The page disappears to reflect the hell  
To which we've been condemned.

Internal conflict becomes the stuff of substance  
A spiritual turmoil transfigured to flesh,  
The mythopoetic in modernity,  
An inner dynamic anthropomorphised in your century  
Between man and the god state.

To be is to be pursued as by unrelenting guards,  
Small talk has been judged calumny  
And blessings deemed an incitement to a riot,  
The silent are confined as conspirators  
And the passive reap a murderer's recompense.  
In liberty you knew this or foresaw a terror yet to envelope.

To be is to be riddled with guilt of a crime  
The knowledge of which has been obliterated at birth,  
And to live is to search for a justification  
For this anguish that excoriates.

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**Justin Wong** is originally from Wembley, though is presently based in the West Midlands. He has been passionate about the English language and literature since a young age. Previously, he lived in China working as an English teacher. His novel, *Millie's Dream*, is available [here](#).

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