

An Analysis Of Franz Kafka's "A Little Woman" In The Light Of Standpoint Theory

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Abstract: *The short story "A Little Woman" is written by Franz Kafka, a major figure in literature of the 20th century. It had been originally published in 1924. The story has been narrated from the perspective of a male narrator, who is faced with perplexing confusion about the behavior and gestures of the little woman, conveyed to him throughout the narrative in silence. The analysis of the story has been made through the application of the theoretical framework of the standpoint theory. Standpoint Theory is about the viewpoints and perspectives of different social groups, who look at people and situations from their own social position, without a serious understanding for the viewpoint of others. According to the theorists of the theory, the perspectives of the marginalized are more neutral and authentic and are more significant for understanding of outlooks and situations. The outlook in the "Little Woman" is also the perspective of the narrator, who draws a picture of the little woman, without taking into consideration the 'real' perspective of the female through her own mouth, and the picture, as has been drawn by him, goes on from the beginning till the end. The little woman remains silent and the narrator assumes everything from her gestures and facial expressions. The narrator does not think even once that his perspective about the woman is a wrong one. He never once thinks of going deeper into her inner self and to understand her mind and psyche. His views about her gestures have been shaped by patriarchy, of which he is the stereotypical product. He never once thinks that the hidden emotions behind the apparent anger of the woman can be her love for him, which the narrator is unable to understand in his masculine ego and pride over feelings of superiority.*

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Power dynamics

Introduction

A very close reading of Franz Kafka's short story "A Little Woman" reveals two different perspectives and the revelation goes on consistently throughout the narration, as it happens in an allegory. The two perspectives are the masculine and feminine. Franz Kafka was a German language writer and novelist from Prague and is regarded as a major figure in the literature of the 20th century. He was born in 1883 at Prague and died younger at the age of 40 in Austria. The dominant themes in Kafka's works are alienation, anxiety which is grounded in the very existence of man, feelings of guilt and the absurdities in human nature and the absurd situations created by humans. Kafka was a prolific writer but the largest part of his works has not been published and was burnt by him, as his whole life remained a persistent struggle with self-doubt. His short story "A Little Woman" was written between the December of 1923 and the January of 1924 and was originally published in April of the same year. The story is presented from the perspective of the male narrator, which shows his confusion about a woman, who is minutely observed by him throughout the story. The closest observation of the female fills the man with perplexing confusion about her behavior and gestures. He tries his best to develop

some understanding from her silent anger, which he thinks that she throws at him but does not reach the ultimate message, conveyed to him from silent rancor. The story leaves so much to the reader's imagination and understanding, as is the attribute of modern literature.

ANALYSIS OF THE STORY IN THE LIGHT OF STANDPOINT THEORY

Through the short story of Franz Kafka, "A Little Woman," the reader through the mouth of a male narrator, comes to know about two perspectives---masculine and feminine. The feminine perspective is a silent one throughout, from the beginning till the end. We have to depend on the narrative of the male narrator about the mute female protagonist. The picture drawn by the narrator cannot escape the eyes of an observant and intelligent reader. It will give rise to doubts and questions in the mind of a reader about the silence of the little woman and as to how and why has she been described from the perspective of a male. This one-sided narrative goes till the end and the reader just wonders about the gulf that exists between the masculine and feminine perspective and is not resolved till the end. Kafka's short story "A Little Woman" has an abrupt beginning, with the apparent physical description of the little woman through the mouth of a male narrator. The narrator says about the little woman of the story:

"She is a little woman; naturally quite slim, she is rightly laced as well; she is always in the same dress as I see her, it is made of greyish-yellow stuff something the color of wood and is trimmed discreetly with tassels of button-like hangings of the same color; she never wears a hat, her dull, fair hair is smooth and not untidy, but worn very loose" (Kafka, 1983; p. 317).

This apparent description of the little woman by the male narrator brings a question to the mind of an inquisitive reader, as according to Harding (2004, p. 447), "Inquiring minds want to know." The narrator calls her little woman throughout the narrative and the question about it also leaves the reader wondering. The reader starts thinking whether the adjective "little" about the woman is literal or metaphorical in meaning. Is she little of height or is it the narrator derogatory manner of calling her? Moreover, it is the narrative about a woman with complete exclusion of her perspective, which again is a source of concern for the reader as to how will one know about the real self of the protagonist in the story, if she is not even provided the chance to speak her real self out. According to the Standpoint theorists, like Sandra Harding and Julia Wood (2004, p. 447), "the best thing about starting any inquiry into the social world around us is to look at it from the standpoint of women and the marginalized groups." According to these theorists the advantaged groups cannot keep themselves partial, when it comes to any description about the disadvantaged groups. Standpoint is our position from which we look to the world, formulate our viewpoint and then present it if necessary and required of us. The story, in the context of the Standpoint theory, is about a woman, of one from the marginalized section and she has been kept silent. This may be a strategy of Kafka, to highlight the issues of women and their life but with their utter exclusion from them even in the real world. The deeper connotation of it can be that women are not considered worthy of been taken into account even about the very serious issues related to their life. So, the important thing about the story is the narrative about the physical appearance of a woman by man. The description of only physical appearance of a woman by man will bring into the mind of an inquisitive reader a question. Appearances are most often deceptive, contrary to the fact, that most of the people go by appearances and establish firm opinions about people on the same basis. The first paragraph of the narrative goes to the apparent physical description of the little woman. In the second paragraph the narrator mentions with specific reference the offensive behavior of the woman, the target of which is the narrator (as he perceives it):

"This little woman, then, is very ill-pleased with me, she always finds something objectionable in me, I am always doing the wrong thing to her, I annoy her at every step; if a life could be cut into the smallest of small pieces and every scrap of it could be separately assessed, every scrap of my life

would certainly be an offense to her. I have often wondered why am I such an offense to her; it may be that everything about me outrages her sense of beauty, her feeling for justice, her habits, her traditions, her hopes, there are such completely incompatible natures, but why does that upset her so much?" (Kafka, 1983; p. 317).

An utter confusion is found in the narrative of the man about his understanding of the offensive behavior of the little woman towards about him. He uses different words for the behavior of the little woman, which she shows towards him without expressing it through her mouth. The male narrator assumes this from the expression on her face and her prominent gestures. The words, as come into the mind of the narrator about the expressions of the woman are "ill-pleased," "objectionable," "annoy," "offense," "outrages" and "upset." The male narrator believes that the little woman is always ill-pleased with him, finds something objectionable in him and that his presence is annoying and offending to her and besides that, it is also outraging and upsetting. The assumption of the narrator is based on the outward gestures and expressions on the face of the little woman, as he calls her throughout. His presence, he believes, never bring pleasant expression on the face of the only mute protagonist in the story. According to the feminist scholar Julia Wood (2004, Pp. 212-220), "all perspectives are partial but some are more partial, depending upon the social locations, from which different individuals or groups look at things." Perspectives and standpoints are certainly affected by the hierarchies in the social setup, from which they look at other individuals or groups. All social relations, according to the Standpoint theorist, Sandra Harding, emanate from different locations of the social hierarchy, from which the relationship of power and knowledge cannot be extricated. The perspective of the powerful, according to Sandra Harding will be more partial, compared to the perspective of woman and other marginalized groups. If looked at in this context, man's standpoint about woman will be biased and partial, as he looks at her from his position of the privileged and powerful. The perspective of man is also influenced from his own interests, as he has to defend his powerful position and thrust weakness on woman to prove her weak, contrary to his dominant position. It is on this basis that the theorists of Standpoint theory say that the viewpoint of the powerful is not neutral but is influenced by their bias, in the social setup, where all relations emanate from power. On the contrary, woman's account of man, his expressions, actions and gestures will be more accurate and authentic, as according to Harding, the perspectives of the ones, who look at and speak from the opposite side of powerful relations can be more objective and reliable. The irony about this well-established fact is that the perspective of the marginalized is not given significance and the perspective of the privileged enjoys more weight and value and the norms of the social world are shaped by the powerful.

According to Garfield (2020, 3), certain social norms in the social structure bring separation between the two genders. In that way, certain characteristics are expected of women, as the social and cultural expectation from them are mostly similar across the globe. All women are viewed in the socio-cultural context and man looks at them from his preconceived social notions about them, which may not be correct always. The strong supporter of feminist movements De Beauvoir (1972, p. 693) believes that "the idea of femininity is shaped through the social customs and traditions and then every woman is viewed from that perspective." If viewed in the light of the comments of De Beauvoir, the male narrator in Kafka's "A Little Woman" looks at the little woman and very minutely observes each and every gesture of her but is unable to make anything out of his close discernment, as he is stuck in the socio-cultural web of preconceived notions about women. To add to it more, social norms are set for women by social structures and men are either exempted from them or in other words, these are religiously imposed on women compared to men. It is the actions of women which are controlled by cultures and judgments are passed about them on the basis of the same controlling. The male narrator in the story emphasizes upon his masculine power and strength, endowed upon him by the social structure, in comparison to the female protagonist. He speaks from his powerful position by calling the female protagonist a "little woman" throughout in the course of his narrative. He further

says in his description of the little woman:

“There is no connection between us that could force her to suffer because of me. All she to do is to regard me as an utter stranger, which I am, and which I do not object to being, indeed I should welcome it, she only needs to forget my existence, which I have never thrust upon her attention, nor would, and obviously her torments would be at an end. I am not thinking of myself, I am quite leaving out of the account the fact that I find her attitude of course rather trying, leaving it out of account because I recognize that my discomfort is nothing to the suffering she endures” (Kafka, 1983; 317).

The male narrator is bewildered at the suffering of the little woman endures and power of her endurance because of him, or even just at the very sight of him. The whole situation also fills him with discomfort but he knows that his discomfort is nothing compared to the suffering of the little woman. He also believes that no such relationship exists between him and the little woman and that he is an utter stranger to her and that she should forget everything about his existence, which would be a relief to her. So far during his narration of the little woman, the man has not tried to think about what is going on in the inner soul of the little woman and understand her inner working. He believes her to be a little woman and looking at her from his perspective of inferiority, significance and belittlement. Woman cannot express herself openly in language due to the social restrictions and norms, so she is doing everything through gestures, which the narrator from his perspective of the powerful is unable to understand and it is here that the deep chasm exists. This sample of masculine view about woman through language can also be taken as woman's absence from language. According to Cheri Kramarae (2005), “language is literally a man-made construction.” Kramarae (2005) further says that “Women and other subordinate groups in cultures are not as free as men to express whatever they wish to express, due to the reason that words and norms for them have been formulated by men as a dominant group.” According to the words of Kramarae, it can be said that all groups in cultures have not a due share in the formulation of its language and that the formulation of language has remained more in man's control. Kramarae (1981, Pp. 1-63) and other feminist thinkers are of the view that “Women's words are discounted in our culture and her thoughts are devalued.” Whenever woman has tried to break these barriers and express herself through language, man's control has silenced her on the pretext of going against the norms.

The male narrator in the story and as he calls himself a stranger to the little woman, takes the narrative further from his masculine standpoint and says:

“All the same I am well aware that hers is no affectionate suffering; she is not concerned to make any real improvement in me, besides, whatever she finds objectionable in me is not of a nature to hinder my development” (Kafka, 1983; 318). He makes an assumption about her suffering, which his presence causes to the little woman. He thinks that her suffering is due to something objectionable, which the little woman finds in him. While carrying the narrative further, he calls her suffering “no affectionate suffering” and then further says that her suffering at the sight of him, the little woman “does not care about any development in him either.” The narrative about the little woman with total annihilation of her perspective and views is one side of the picture. This picture is the one shown to us by the narrator. It does not make the complete story but as is the case with modern literature that reader has to develop an understanding about narratives from the selection of words by writers. The reader has not to be solely dependent on what the writer says but has to develop an independent perspective about the character (the actions and gestures of the character) and description. In other words, a reader has to make his own story by assembling each and every bit of the words in the right place. Moreover, the narrator calls himself a stranger to the little woman from the beginning till the end of the story and he in reality may not be knowing about what is going on in her mind. So, throughout the narrative his focus is on her physical appearance, facial expressions and her gestures of “perpetual resentment,” from which he assumes that his very sight fills her with “fury.” The narrator once tried to put an end to the “perpetual resentment” of the little woman but he failed badly. He

admits the fact that this very attempt of him added to her suffering even more. The reader has in front of him two different perspectives, masculine and feminine, which lack in clarity due to complete silence of one viewpoint, which is the feminine perspective. The feminine perspective has been muted, as has happened to woman in different cultures. The feminine perspective comes to the reader through the masculine perspective, ironically with her utter exclusion. Things cannot be better understood from one position and especially from position of power.

The reader comes to know more from his discernment, as the narrative goes forward by the narrator. He says:

“I feel too a certain responsibility laid upon me, if you like to put it that way, for strangers as we are to each other, the little woman and myself, and however true it is that the sole connection between us is the vexation I cause her, or rather the vexation she lets me cause her, I ought not to feel indifferent to the visible physical suffering which this induces in her” (Kafka, 1983; p. 318).

The narrator’s stress on the physical sufferings and the appearance of the little woman bring questions to the mind of the reader. Moreover, this narration establishes another striking point as well. The male narrator is not interested in the inner enigma, which the little woman is going through this whole time. There can be two interpretations to it. One is that either he is not interested in the least about the mental sufferings of the little woman or that he simply cannot reach the depth of her inner soul due to the difference and also lack of understanding in the two perspectives. Feminine and masculine perspectives are like two parallel lines, which go side by side and never meet. So much can be understood from the facial expressions of women and the way they laugh or through their gestures but the male narrator is either not capable of doing that or looking at her from male bias and superiority. The male bias is reflected in his view about the little woman, when he says:

“But to keep utterly silent about something that so persistently rankles would be also too much for her. So with feminine guile she steers a middle course; she keeps silent but betrays all the outward signs of a secret sorrow in order to draw public attention to the matter” (Kafka, 1983; Pp. 318-319).

The little woman, as the narrator’s account conveys, through her silence, wants to bring attention of the public to the matter, faced by her at the hands of the narrator. According to Ardener (1975, Pp. 1-27), who introduced the idea about women as a muted group in the Muted Group Theory, “Mutedness in groups is due to their powerlessness that takes them to the very margins of society. People, who are given little space, fail to give voice to their perceptions.” Silent groups are not completely silent but the problem is that they are not able to say what they want to express when and where. In this context, the little woman of Kafka, cannot express herself freely to the male narrator openly and so goes through suffering and pain due to the muteness, imposed on her by the social norms. The narrator says, that in her pangs, full of sorrowful expressions, she wants to “draw public attention to the matter.” The very mention of public attention fills him with his masculine pride and ego, as he says:

“Perhaps she even hopes that once public attention is fixed on me a general public rancor against me will rise up and use all its great powers to condemn me definitively much more effectively and quickly than her relatively private rancor could do; she would then retire into the background, draw a breath of relief, and turn her back on me. Well, if that is what her hopes are really set on, she is deluding herself. Public opinion will not take over her role; public opinion would never find me so infinitely objectionable, even under its most powerful magnifying glass..... she won’t be able to convince anyone else” (Kafka, 1983; 319).

The male narrator firmly believes that the little woman of his narrative wants to bring public opinion towards him for being the cause of torments to her. Moreover, he thinks that the disgust of the public, which she plans to divert towards him, will be stronger than that of a weak individual. This viewpoint of the narrator may not be correct but he sticks to it throughout the narrative. He is adamant till the end of the narrative that the little woman is trying to bring public disapproval against him for being

the cause of “suffering” and “torment” to her, which he is sure will not happen. “Public opinion,” he says, “would never find me so infinitely objectionable, even under its powerful magnifying glass.” Cheris Kramarae (2005, Pp. 56-71), is sure about the social reality that because of the strong, controlling and dominant position in the social structure, women are not provided the manner of public expression, which is enjoyed by men. As, according to Ardener (1975), women are the muted group and it is men, who have the key of public communication in their hands. Cheris Kramarae (2005) elaborates upon the idea of man’s control of the public sphere of communication. She says that the strict demarcation of communication into private and public has remained a strategy in cultures of presenting gender differences in an exaggerated manner. Man has utilized this demarcation of communication and declared public communication as masculine sphere, in which woman has no voice and so part of the muted groups. Moreover, private mode of communication by experts has been restricted to the domestic. According to Deborah Tannen (1984), the two spheres of communication make the words of women insignificant and, so declare her appropriate for home, the “smaller domestic world, which is her only domain,” according to cultural and social norms. This private and smaller world of women is different and at the same time less important than the “larger world of communication,” which is a significant world of debate and discussion, controlled by men and where the words of women hold no significance. Even if a woman out of many tries to be a part of the larger world and to speak there, she is discouraged and silenced. The narrative of the male observer about the reactions and responses of the little woman bring forth the idea of her as a part of the restricted and narrow world. In this connection, the narrator says:

“if I am to follow a plan at all it must be that of keeping the affair within its present narrow limits which do not yet involve the outside world, that is to say, I must stay quietly where I am and not let affect my behavior as far as can be seen, and that includes mentioning it to no one, but not at all because it is a kind of dangerous mystery, merely because it is a trivial, purely personal matter and as such to be taken lightly, and to be kept on that level” (Kafka, 1983; p. 321).

The narrator of “A Little Woman” is proud of the fact that he is a member of the larger world of public communication, where men have control over “public opinion” and where the words of men matter and mean everything. Moreover, he believes that he is “not so altogether a useless creature as she thinks,” through which he conveys an implicit message that the wider world of communication, discussion and opinion-making belongs to him, where the words of the little woman will be of utter insignificance. The narrator says that if he is asked any questions about the torment, which he is causing to the little woman and to correct his behavior about the matter in hand, he makes an answer, filled with gender-bias and influenced by the patriarchal influence:

“Should I admit frankly that I do not much believe in these symptoms of illness, and thus produce the favorable impression of being a man who blames others to avoid being blamed himself, and in such an ungallant manner?” (Kafka, 1983; p. 319).

The male narrator both consciously and unconsciously as a representative and proponent of patriarchy, says that as a man he knows how to “blame others to avoid being blamed himself, and in such an ungallant manner.” Men, in patriarchies, have dominated and controlled women through power, control, fear, trickery and the narrator is right in saying that even if in an ungallant manner. This strategy, according to Connell (1995), has for that purpose, ensured man’s perpetual domination and woman unquestionable subordination. If woman has tried to break the silence and come out of the mute state, man, and as the narrator as representative of the dominant group, also thinks of using the strategy, has put the blame on woman in an ungallant manner. She has been charged with going against the norms. She has been deprived of the label of good woman and has been charged with the label of bad woman. Woman, throughout the centuries of age-old fear has preferred silence for herself, not always by choice but out of the fear of going against the social norms, which have been strategically imposed on her by patriarchy. The narrative of the little woman is through the mouth of

the male narrator and she does not get the chance to speak up her stance.

Standpoint theorists have focused mainly on the point that social location holds significance in the life of groups and individuals (Harding, 2004). They are convinced of the fact that people at the top of the social hierarchy have the privilege to define others in a given social structure. It is men, who have remained at the top of the hierarchy and, it is they, who have defined women, while women have remained as passive spectators. The narrator, in “A Little Woman,” since the beginning till the end, defines the little woman from his masculine perspective to the reader. The reader does not know whether his description of the little woman is impartial or partial. The reader is left with no other option but to accept his narrative as true as the little woman remains mute throughout the story. In this situation it is the male narrator, who has power in his hands to define the little woman from his perspective. His first biased definition begins with the title of the narrative, by calling a “little” woman, thus highlighting her insignificance in the social world. He makes comments on her dress from masculine perspective, which conveys an impression that like typical women, the little woman is not so much concerned about her appearance, thus making her different from other ordinary women, whose main concern remains with their appearance. According to the narrator, the little woman:

“Although she is tightly laced, she is quick and light in her movements, actually she rather overdoes the quickness, she loves to put her hands on her hips and abruptly turn the upper part of her body sideways with a suddenness that is surprising” (Kafka, 1983; 317).

The description of the little woman in the above cited lines tells that the little woman, as she is called by the narrator, is an extraordinary woman. The quickness of her movements tell that she is capable of doing extraordinary tasks. There are also contradictions in the narrator’s narrative about the little woman. At one point he says about the little woman that:

“people wouldn’t be interested enough to get so far as belief; they would simply note the answer I gave concerning such a frail, sick woman.”

And then, as the narrative moves forward, he opines about her:

“since I should be really capable of admiring the little woman for the decisive quickness of her judgment and her persistent vitality in leaping to conclusions.”

The narrator has a deep awareness of the qualities of the little woman but out of his feelings of superiority and being a product of the patriarchal structure, overlooks her positive traits and rather focusses on her frailties hyperbolically. The narrator calls the little “a fighter by nature” and that “she is hardy and tough” but on other occasions, charges her with excess of emotions, by using phrases like “anyone who flies into a violent passion” and “she would fall into transports of rage.” The view of Harding (2006) and other Standpoint theorists prove true, when they say that “there is no possibility of a perspective, which is completely neutral and free from any bias and in isolation from a historical background” (Harding, 2006). They further promote the idea that social sciences are situated in time and place. Harding (2006) says that “In the social structure, each person can make a partial view of reality from his or her own standpoint in the given culture.” This view of the Standpoint theory appropriately applies to the narrator of “A Little Woman.” The narrator is presenting his perspective of the little woman to the reader, without taking into consideration the little woman herself, rather with her exclusion from the affair. Even the very minute details about the gestures, actions and responses to the reader in the manner, as if it is the only perspective about her. The narrator, as Harding says, is presenting his partial view of reality in the social hierarchy from his superior position.

According to Mead and, as has been cited by Griffin in “A First Look at Communication Theory” (2011, P. 56), humans possess the ability to name things and develop a whole universe through this way. He says that symbolic naming stands as a basis for human society. Interactionists also make a

claim that the extent of human naming is dependent on the extent of knowing. The point of Mead has been taken forward by Kramarae (2001), who says that those, who have the ability to name possess an unsurpassed power over others. Kramarae adds upon the point that due to men's powerful position in social structures, they also possess dominant control over the mode of expression, which has given them the power to create gender-specific derogatory terms, while talking about women. In this perspective the narrator of the little woman, uses words and phrase for her like "little woman," "my small critic," "with feminine guile," "tears of rage and despair rolled down her cheeks," "grown faint at the very sight of me" and that "women faint easily." These derogatory expressions about the little woman by the narrator, as he is observing her throughout the narrative and, is recording the very minute details about her expressions and gestures, which she expresses at the sight of him, is a one-sided male perspective, where nowhere the woman's perspective has not been taken into consideration. Another significant point about the narrative is that the male narrator is looking at the little woman from his superior position in social hierarchy. So, woman's perspective has not been accounted for in the male's account. One point about the Standpoint Theory is that (Wood, 1994) the term strong objectivity means that in social science, researches about women and other marginalized groups are not conducted from their perspective. Their standpoint is mostly overlooked. These standpoint theorists further extend the view that knowledge is generated from the position of dominant groups offer weak objectivity. In that perspective, the narrative about the little woman from a male narrator, with her utter exclusion from it, comparatively offers a weak objectivity. If woman had been provided the chance to speak her perspective, even for a little time, the reader would also have been provided with a chance to observe, with profundity, the hidden cause behind her suppressed anger, which the narrator believes, transforms into "violent passion" and which he believes is directed towards him.

Throughout the narrative, the reader notices that the narrator has not made an attempt to understand the cause of the anger of the little woman. Moreover, he calls her by the name of little woman throughout but at the end also clarifies that he is not very young. He is in advanced age and by calling the woman a little woman, he means her literal age. He also stresses upon the idea that he is in older years, so he has to be wary of any happening around him. Maybe the suppressed anger of the little woman is her hidden love for the narrator, which he, with his superficial and practical masculine approach, is unable to recognize. He is looking at the little woman from a biased lens of masculine superiority. The other factor is his advanced age. The age difference between the narrator and the woman in the story is a hurdle between the two but it is he himself, who is conscious about his age. It is due to the same age factor that the narrator is unable to perceive even for a moment that her intense passions, which she wants to convey to the narrator through "transports of rage" and then when she is in sheer helplessness, through her "tears of rage and despair," may be an indication of her love for him. One other factor can also be that men are more open in the expression of love and so, do they expect from women. Women, on the contrary, can not be so open because of the social norms. Moreover, the age gap may also be a hurdle in the way to the expression of love of the little woman for the narrator. The narrator is looking at the expressions and gestures of the little woman from his perspective and does not think of putting himself in her place and to comprehend the causes of her "fury," "disgust," "vexation" and "rancor," as from his superior position in the patriarchy, he does not feel the need of doing so, and till the end of the narrative has not been successful in reaching the depth of the issue with the little woman.

CONCLUSION

"A Little woman" by Franz Kafka can be taken an extended allegory, as the reader since the beginning develops an understanding that behind the simple story at the surface, there is a deeper story, which goes throughout the narrative. The narrator's contemptuous and inferior treatment of the little woman continues from the beginning till the end, as has been indicated by the title and which

also leaves the reader bewildered in the beginning as to why does the narrator call her a little woman. It is with the passage of time and as the narrative moves forward that the reader perceives the profundity behind the surface meaning and understands the metaphorical meaning of the title of the story and also as to why does the narrator call the female mute character as “a little woman.” The narrator provides all the possible details about the facial expressions and gestures of the little woman, which the reader observes throughout. He knows quite well that his (the narrator’s) sight fills the little woman with unpleasant feelings, which get intense with the passage of time and a moment comes, when she loses control over her rage and fury, whenever he encounters her. The narrator is a good observer in the sense that nothing escapes his observant eye about the physical character of the woman, who is the only silent protagonist in the narrative but he lacks in understanding the inner soul and mind of the character. He does not even to do so. He thinks that such observation of the physical self is enough for reaching the depth of a person. He is utterly mistaken here and it is here that clash of perspectives take place.

There can be two reasons, as to why the narrator fails in the inner self of the character, around whom his whole narrative revolves. The first point to this lack of understanding can be the narrator’s perspective, which has been shaped by his superior feelings and looking at the woman with inferiority. From his superior standpoint, the narrator does not bother himself with taking too much interest in the “little woman.” The only concern with the male narrator and which irritates him throughout are the feelings of resentment, vexation and rancor of the little woman at the very sight of him. The whole situation fills him with discomfort but he knows that the suffering, which the little woman endures are greater than his own discomfort. His discomfort is nothing in comparison to the mental turmoil of the little woman. The thing, which appears incredible to him about the mental suffering of the little woman is her little physical self and her endurance for mental suffering. He does not consider himself capable of so much mental suffering, when he compares himself to her. The second reason to the narrator’s lack of understanding can be that he is looking at the little woman from masculine perspective, which stands a hurdle in his way, as biased observations and understandings do not provide an open window into the formation of objective opinion about the other gender, groups and even races.

The analysis of “a Little Woman” through the Standpoint theory provides an understanding the motives and intentions of the little woman, which the narrator from his very close observation is not able to understand. Standpoint theory is about the perspectives of different individuals and groups in the social structure and it is from their own position. The standpoint from which the powerful look towards the weaker groups is shaped and furthermore, molded by their superior and privileged position. The says that superior makes one’s opinions and perceptions biased and do not let them look at with objectivity towards of the inferior. It is the same issue with the observation of the narrator in Kafka’s story. Throughout the narrative he has been able to get with a neutral eye the message in the actions and behavior of the woman. The lens of patriarchy does not let him think about the mental sufferings the woman is undergoing at the very sight of him and he considers her a stranger. The vexation and discomfort, which his presence causes the little woman, makes the reader think a strong connection exists between the narrator and the woman. Feelings of resentment and rancor are also demonstrative of the fact that a strong bond exists between individuals, which the narrator is unable to discern. Another point about the Standpoint theory is that the position of weaker and marginalized sections is very important for the reaching the depth issues and problems. The feelings of the mute woman in the narrative are not ordinary feelings and the narrator is only an observer, who expresses them to the reader with his one-sided biased perspective and never once has the observed been provided with a chance to make her point clear. The facial expressions and gestures of the little woman need a deeper analysis by the reader. One perspective cannot bring forth all the motives behind the suppressed anger and resentment of the mute character in the story, as the little woman has been presented the typical gendered character of the patriarchy, with lack of sympathy and concern

towards her. She is typical stereotype for the narrator with “feminine guile,” with which she makes appeal of sympathy to the public against the narrator (as the narrator believes). The resentment, rancor, vexation, fury and discomfort of the little woman can be her love for the narrator, which he is unable to discern, in the pride of his masculine superiority.

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