

# A VERY LARGE MOLE: A chamber opera after Franz Kafka

Contributed by Claudia Stevens

(A room with table and chairs, screen or curtain in background. Light up on Journalist)

Journalist (to audience):

I am a person who gets disgusted by even a small ordinary mole. So, I might have died of disgust had I actually seen the giant mole that was discovered not far from here. The sighting of the mole created a huge stir at first – people came from far and wide hoping to get a glimpse of it. Allegedly the mole was first reported by the local school teacher.

Teacher (entering):

That's me! I saw it, let nobody forget that! Oh, how quickly things sink into obscurity unless one writes them down. I have observed that tendency in the classroom . . .

Journalist:

Things do have that tendency – especially if the written account is boring. The teacher produced a little pamphlet about the mole, and copies of it were circulated widely; but I have to say, his literary powers weren't equal to the task. Interest in the alleged mole died away quickly, and the school teacher was left with a pile of unsold pamphlets.

Teacher:

There's no need to be dismissive. He reminds me of all the others! Their apathy toward the mole was exceeded only by their condescending response to my pamphlet! But I don't let that kind of thing get me down. When an extraordinary phenomenon, such as this mole, occurs in nature, one must persist in one's efforts.

Journalist:

And so the teacher followed up the pamphlet with a little brochure, not only about the mole, but about the disappointing public response to his first account of it.

Teacher:

It was not I, but they, who behaved like pedantic school teachers!

Journalist:

Surely a distinguished scholar at one of our leading universities could appreciate such a find, so the teacher set up an appointment with the learned man.

(Scholar enters, seats himself at table looking very bored)

Teacher (servile): It is most kind of you, Dr. Professor, holder as you are of the Distinguished Chair in Zoology, to grant me an audience . . . ((

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Scholar (snooty, drawling):

Well, you were so very persistent - a good quality in a school teacher, to be sure. Yes, amateur naturalists deserve an occasional nod . . .

Teacher (obsequious):

You are too kind . . .

Scholar (continuing):

. . . as they do turn up specimens of some passing interest (repeat – 'some passing interest' many times).

Teacher (turning on projector during Scholar's remarks, image of huge star-nosed mole coming into view): More than passing in this case! Why, the animal measured well over a meter!

Journalist:

Pamphlet in hand, the Teacher delivered a long report about the various attributes of the mole.

Teacher:

The specimen was discovered in a hedgerow bordering an uncultivated field in the northeast corner of our township. I estimate its weight at over twenty kilos. I was unable to identify the species with any certainty. Notwithstanding its most peculiar size, the specimen exhibits characteristics of two or possibly three of the known species of mole, the snout resembling that of *talpa caeca* and the hairless tail that of *scapanus orarius*, while the mottled fur is typical of neither. Now, the question arises whether we are dealing with an anomalous mutant of a common species, or a species hitherto unknown. In this I humbly defer to your far greater taxonomical experience. (text insert by Allen Shearer)

Journalist:

During this, the Great Scholar took no pains to hide his growing impatience and boredom. At last he remarked,

At

Scholar:

The soil in your area is particularly black and rich (many repetitions of 'soil' and/or 'black and rich.'). Consequently it provides moles with especially rich nourishment in the form of worms (many repetitions of 'in the form of worms'), and so they grow to an unnatural size.

At

(Journalist has been drawn into the exchange, now insinuating himself between Teacher and Scholar)

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Teacher, Scholar, Journalist (trio):

An unnatural size, etc.

At

Scholar (continuing):

...but still, clearly within the bounds of the possible. So you see, your "discovery" is hardly noteworthy at all.

At

(a dramatic pause during which Scholar, who has finished his commentary, stares ahead with glazed expression. Teacher suddenly lunges at Scholar, attempting to throttle him, and is restrained by Journalist)

Teacher suddenly lunges at Scholar, attempting to throttle him, and is restrained by Journalist)

At

Journalist (as if nothing had happened):

And with that the interview came to an end. Imagine the chagrin, the dashed hopes of the teacher! When I considered how he had been slighted, humiliated, my own thought was to beat up the pompous professor. Then I said to myself, 'No, violence is never the way.' And so I resolved to do all in my own power to validate the mole. (pause) Show my support for the poor teacher. (pause) I started looking into the whole affair. (pause) I wrote a pamphlet of my own. (long pause)

At

Teacher (sly):

It's rumored that a certain journalist is snooping around, poking his nose into the mole. It's too much to hope that he is a supporter. More likely, he is out to undermine me. I doubt he has even read my pamphlet.

At

Journalist:

It's true, I couldn't bring myself to read it. But, I ask you, why should I allow my own objectivity, my journalistic values to be influenced by his feeble, sloppy work?

At

Scholar (still glazed over):

Coming from him, it would be feeble and sloppy . . .

At

Journalist (continuing):

My plan is, get to the heart of it! Interview anyone who ever saw or heard of the mole, correlate the evidence and corroborate his findings. And in my preface I'll be sure to state for all time: the mole exists and the school teacher is its discoverer!

At

Teacher:

You see? Now he's published a pamphlet of his own.

At

Journalist:

Using basic tools of journalistic research . . .

At

Teacher:

He never even came to interview me . . .

At

Journalist:

I now have proved beyond a doubt the existence of the mole, and the teacher has been vindicated!

At

Teacher (holding article):

Just look at this! He represents my pamphlet as some feeble sloppy effort, intimates that I exaggerated the size of the mole. . .

At

Scholar (chiming in, expressionless):

Exaggerated beyond credibility . . . (Scholar exiting, ignored by Teacher and Journalist)

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Teacher:

...and that hypocritical introduction of his, claiming only to validate my account, give me all the attention! He just wants to belittle my discovery, rob me of my fame!

At

Journalist:

He enjoys no fame whatever, only a ridiculous notoriety " which is on the wane." See how he greedy he is for fame " and money, too!

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(gradually Teacher and Journalist have turned to confront each other, taking seats facing each other at the table in front of screen, from which mole image has disappeared)

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Journalist (continuing):

What I see is a man clinging on to his mole! No one else can lay a finger on it. Moreover, where is the mole now? Can you produce it? You make very exaggerated claims for yourself, sir!

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Teacher (quietly smug):

Apparently your pamphlet has not achieved particular success. I hear it is a critical failure (he goes on repeating "critical failure' during following).

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Journalist:

Many factors could account for that. Possibly they are confusing my pamphlet with yours. Reviewers never read things properly. Besides, the causes of success and failure are always ambiguous . . . (duet - Journalist repeating "causes of success,' overlapping with Teacher's "critical failure')

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Teacher (reading review with sadistic pleasure):

". . . the mole has exhausted the interest of the public. It was laughable at first, but the public doesn't feel like laughing a second time." Ha! I hear you have withdrawn your pamphlet from circulation!

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Journalist (patronizing):

You are taking things rather badly. I wish you could see, I had only the best of intentions from the first. In a certain way, you have become my teacher " I've almost grown fond of the mole itself. And if you like (crescendo), I can publish a declaration of my continuing admiration for you, your work, and the mole! (short pause)

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Teacher (sarcastic):

Yes . . . And I am exceedingly grateful to you, you with your so superior connections among artists, literati. Well, then! I give you my permission to arrange it all! A residency for me at our best university as a public intellectual. A reception in my honor, a lecture followed by panel discussion, then a dinner with colleagues at a fine restaurant " Italian would be acceptable . . .

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Journalist:

Come now, let's not be snide. And cheer up, it's Christmas! (putting up wreath) Lets try to see your discovery for what it is. (Grandly, striding around) For what did you expect? The best you could hope for is that some graduate student would bring out his own pamphlet, put your discovery on a scientific basis. His pamphlet might also be held up to ridicule. But even if it were accepted - and that is only "if " - you would be a mere footnote in his text. Yes, a footnote in his text. A few learned people might be sorry for the abuse heaped on you over the mole, they might even think of apologizing to you. Think of it! They might even think of apologizing! As good as actually doing so! (standing behind teacher, who still sits, as image of mole gradually comes into view, projected over them)

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Teacher:

So that is what I have to look forward to?

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Journalist (continuing):

Well, things are not altogether bleak. There might be a small stipend (handing him money, which Teacher pockets immediately). Someone could designate the spot where the mole surfaced an official "point of interest." And just to show our good will, allow us to present you with this token: this set of pens, to write down your researches, perhaps another pamphlet! What would you say to that? (As he speaks, Scholar comes back on stage bearing a small cheap box of pens, grandly presents it to the teacher who holds it up against his chest)

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Scholar:

Yes, what would you say to that?

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Teacher and Scholar:

What would you say to that?

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Teacher (after long silence):

Just what I always wanted.

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