

A Study About Criticism and Appreciation in the Novel ‘The Metamorphosis

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ABSTRACT

"Metamorphosis" by Franz Kafka is a novella that explores themes of alienation, identity, and the absurdity of human existence through the surreal and grotesque transformation of its protagonist, Gregor Samsa, into a gigantic insect.

Kafka delves into the dehumanizing effects of modern society and the isolation felt by individuals who are unable to conform to its demands.

The novella is a powerful critique of societal norms and expectations, highlighting the fragility of identity and the ease with which it can be shattered.

1.INTRODUCTION

The Author

Franz Kafka (1883-1924) was a German-speaking Bohemian writer known for his surreal and existential works. Born in Prague to a middle-class Jewish family, Kafka studied law and worked at the Workers Accident Insurance Institute. Despite his successful career, he felt deeply alienated, a theme reflected in his writing.

Kafka's major works include "The Metamorphosis," where Gregor Samsa turns into an insect, "The Trial," about Josef K.'s mysterious arrest, and "The Castle," depicting K.'s futile attempts to access a remote authority. His writing style is clear and precise, contrasting with the bizarre and nightmarish scenarios he describes.

Kafka's personal life was marked by troubled relationships and poor health, including tuberculosis, which led to his early death at 40. Most of his work was published posthumously by his friend Max Brod, despite Kafka's wishes for it to be destroyed. Kafka's exploration of alienation, existential dread, and bureaucratic absurdity has made him a pivotal figure in modern literature.

Study 1.1 “The Metamorphosis”

"The Metamorphosis" by Franz Kafka is a seminal work of 20th-century literature, known for its surreal and existential themes.

Part I:

Gregor Samsa, a traveling salesman, wakes up one morning to find himself transformed into a monstrous insect. Initially, he is more concerned about missing work than his transformation. His family, consisting of his parents and sister Grete, is horrified by his new form. Despite his condition, Gregor's primary worry is his inability to support his family financially.

"As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect."

Part II

As Gregor becomes accustomed to his new body, his family struggles to cope. Grete initially cares for him, bringing him food and cleaning his room, but her attitude soon changes from sympathy to resentment. Gregor's transformation forces the family to make significant adjustments; his father, who had been idle, returns to work, and they take in lodgers to make ends meet.

Part III

The family grows increasingly hostile towards Gregor. They begin to neglect him, and Grete eventually declares that they must get rid of him for the family's sake. In a moment of despair, Gregor succumbs to his injuries and neglect, dying alone in his room. His death brings relief to his family, who immediately begin to plan for a hopeful future without him.

Study 1.2 Themes

1. **Alienation and Isolation:** Gregor's transformation symbolizes extreme alienation. His physical metamorphosis mirrors his psychological and emotional separation from his family and society.
2. **Identity and Self-worth:** Gregor's sense of identity is tied to his role as the family's breadwinner. His inability to work after his transformation leads to a crisis of self-worth and identity.
3. **Family Dynamics:** The story highlights the fragile nature of familial bonds, especially when faced with adversity. Initially, Gregor is the provider, but his transformation shifts the family dynamics, exposing their underlying tensions and dependencies.
4. **The Absurdity of Life:** Kafka's story is often seen as an exploration of the absurdity and meaninglessness of existence. Gregor's inexplicable transformation and the indifferent reactions of those around him underscore the randomness and futility of human life.
5. **Absurdism:** "The Metamorphosis" exemplifies absurdist literature through Gregor's sudden transformation into a giant insect. The absurdity is heightened by Gregor's immediate concern about being late to work and the characters' acceptance of his condition without questioning its cause. This reflects the meaningless absurdities of life that must be endured and overcome.
6. **Guilt:** In "The Metamorphosis," guilt is a pervasive theme, especially in Gregor Samsa, who feels profound guilt for no longer being able to support his family after his transformation. Kafka uses this theme to highlight how guilt can destroy relationships and alienate individuals from their loved ones.

Study 1.3 Characters

1. **Gregor Samsa:** The protagonist who transforms into an insect. His character represents self-sacrifice and the crushing weight of familial expectations.

"What a strenuous career it is that I've chosen! Traveling day in and day out. "

2. **Grete Samsa:** Gregor's sister who initially cares for him but ultimately rejects him. Her character arc highlights the shift from compassion to self-preservation.

"He's got to go," said Grete. "That's the only solution, Father. You must try to get rid of the idea that this is Gregor. The fact that we've believed it for so long is the root of all our trouble."

3. **Mr. and Mrs. Samsa:** Gregor's parents, who react with fear and repulsion to his transformation. They represent the societal and familial pressures that Gregor faces.

"Let me go to Gregor, he is my unfortunate son! Can't you understand that I must go to him?"

Study 1.4 Symbolism

- **The Insect:** Gregor's transformation into an insect symbolizes his dehumanization and the loss of his identity and humanity.
- **The Room:** Gregor's confinement to his room represents his isolation and the physical and emotional barriers between him and his family.
- **The Apple:** When Gregor's father throws an apple at him, it becomes lodged in his back, causing a festering wound. This act symbolizes the family's rejection and the violence that results from their inability to understand Gregor's plight.

Study 1.5 Literary Style

Kafka's writing is marked by its clear, straightforward prose, which contrasts sharply with the bizarre and unsettling events of the story. This juxtaposition heightens the sense of the absurd and the surreal. The narrative is imbued with a sense of dread and existential anxiety, capturing the alienation and helplessness that define Gregor's experience.

2.METHODOLOGY

- **Sources of Data:** The study is mainly based on secondary data and partly Primary Data. The data analyzed and interpreted in this study relating to the novel is collected from various websites, book, articles and the novel 'The Metamorphosis'
- **Nature of study:** The study is analytical and descriptive in nature

3.LITERATURE REVIEW

- **Elias Canetti said**

The story was something Kafka "could never surpass, because there is nothing which Metamorphosis could be surpassed by". As endorsements go, the bar could not be set higher.

- **Emily said**

I definitely agree that Kafka was probably writing from his own experience in this one– I'm pretty sure that it's believed he had social anxiety. I do as well, so I related to the whole ethos of this book for that main reason.

4. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL “THE METAMORPHOSIS

Study 4.1 Criticism

1. **Ambiguity and Lack of Explanation:** Some critics argue that Kafka’s failure to explain Gregor’s transformation leaves too much to interpretation. The lack of a clear reason for Gregor’s metamorphosis can be seen as frustrating for readers who seek concrete answers and logical coherence
2. **Character Development:** Critics have noted that the secondary characters, particularly Gregor’s family, can appear one-dimensional, driven primarily by their reactions to Gregor’s transformation rather than by fully developed personal motivations.
3. **Pessimism and Dark Themes:** Kafka’s bleak and pessimistic worldview is seen by some as overly negative and oppressive. The novella’s themes of isolation, despair, and existential dread can be distressing and off-putting

Study 4.2 Appreciation

1. **Exploration of Alienation:** Kafka masterfully depicts the profound sense of alienation that Gregor experiences, both physically and emotionally. This resonates with readers who have felt marginalized or misunderstood, making the novella deeply relatable on a personal level.
2. **Symbolism and Allegory:** The novella is rich in symbolism, with Gregor’s transformation serving as a powerful metaphor for dehumanization and the loss of identity. The story can be interpreted in various ways, including as a critique of modern society, a reflection on mental illness, or an exploration of familial obligations.
3. **Psychological Depth:** Kafka’s insight into the human psyche is profound. He captures the inner turmoil and existential anxiety of his protagonist with remarkable precision, making Gregor’s emotional journey as compelling as his physical transformation.
4. **Narrative Technique:** Kafka’s straightforward, almost detached narrative style contrasts starkly with the surreal events of the story, enhancing the sense of absurdity and horror. This technique effectively draws readers into the bizarre world Kafka has created, making the fantastical elements feel disturbingly real.
5. **Universal Themes:** "The Metamorphosis" addresses universal themes such as identity, family,

5.CONCLUSION

In "The Metamorphosis," Franz Kafka masterfully blends themes of alienation, guilt, and absurdism, creating a deeply unsettling and thought-provoking narrative. The story opens with Gregor Samsa's surreal transformation into a giant insect, setting the tone for the exploration of human existence's absurdity. Gregor's feelings of guilt for his inability to support his family and his family's mixed reactions underscore the destructive power of guilt and alienation. The characters' acceptance of Gregor's condition without questioning its cause highlights the meaningless absurdities of life, a core element of absurdist literature.

Notable phrases from the characters, such as Gregor's lament about his strenuous career, Grete's ultimate rejection of Gregor, and Mr. Samsa's initial paternal concern, all contribute to the novella's rich tapestry of existential themes. Kafka's work remains a poignant critique of societal norms and the human condition, emphasizing the fragile nature of identity

and the profound impact of external transformations on personal and familial relationships. "The Metamorphosis" continues to resonate with readers for its profound insights into the absurdity and isolation inherent in modern life.

6. References

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