

The Metamorphosis And Modernism

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ABSTRACT

In the 'metamorphosis'; a traveling salesman named Gregor Samsa wakes up to find he has transformed into a giant beetle. The story follows Gregor as he adjust to his new form and his family's reactions. In the end, he straves himself and dies, and his family was relieved. One element of modernism in this story is the absurd nature of the plot. A man turns into a giant beetle overnight, with no explanation or even much surprise on his part. Absurd situation is not uncommon in modernist literature. The scientific and industrial revolution that affected Europe and the rest of the world in the nineteenth century was further developed with the arrival of the twentieth century. The literary field have a drastic change. Braking away from literary movement of the other centuries such as romanticism or realism authors of the modernism borrow from new ideas in anthropology, psychology, political theory, psychoanalysis and physics to create their works. In this essay we will study the impact of any of the field in creating a sense of disillusionment, fragmentation or isolation in the particular work of Kafka called 'The Metamorphosis'.

Keywords: Modernism, Alienation, Fragmentation, Isolation, Disillusionment, and Psychoanalysis.

THE METAMORPHOSIS AND MODERNISM

The article aims to study modernism in Franz Kafka's. 'The Metamorphosis'. Kafka was perhaps one of the best writers of fiction of the twentieth century. During his life time he remained almost utterly unknown. 'The metamorphosis' is probably the best known story written by the Czech born German Jewish writer Franz Kafka. The haunting story of a man transformed into an insect has attracted numerous commentators, who while agreeing on the high quality and importance of the story, and also strongly disagree about what it means. Frecedian, Marxist, Existentialist and religious interpretations have all been proposed and there has been debate over whether Gregor Samsa, the man turned insects symbolize human conditions. It is generally agreed, however that the story portrays a world that is hostile and perhaps absurd. The major themes in the story include father-son antagonism (Perhaps reflecting Kafka's difficult relationship with his own father), alienation, isolation and self sacrifice. The story is sometimes praised for its symmetrical three-part structure and it use of black humour. The symbols of the story are sometimes puzzled over, but what make the story memorable is the central situation of the transformation of man into an insect and the image of the man-Insect lying on his back helplessly waving his little insects legs in the air.

'The metamorphosis' stands out among Kafka's shorter narratives. It is clearly divided with three parts. The first part shows Gregor in his relation to his profession, The second to his family and the third to himself. The three parts are united by Gregor's fate which always remains an enigma. 'The metamorphosis' would be an escapist wish dream come true. Gregor seems to be more than a cog in a capitalistic machine. There is also a human side to his relationship with the firm. His parents once borrowed money from the boss and stated Gregor's services as guarantee for the sum advanced to them. Nobody can deny that he is a slave, but even slaves are men. If his animal shape were but a dream then he would have paradoxically sacrificed his humanity in his attempt to escape slavery by his change into an insect.

Gregor's metamorphosis need not represent the escape from reality. Kafka is not very keen on depicting Gregor's flight from day to dream. He is locked up in his room, and nobody can change this solitude any more, the family can only adjust to it. At the beginning of the story the individual members of the Samsa household were introduced by the insects' reaction to their voice. The mother's voice was soft and her softness is Gregor's comfort. Here Kafka has captured his own mother's selflessness and the superficiality of her understanding of him.

The little of the story is more applicable to Grete, Sister of Gregor. Her transformation is developed beautifully. Grete has become a turn of events. From a good Samaritan she changed into the Father's daughter. She has joined the force with him. In the catastrophic scene she calls him 'Gregor' to hold him responsible for his fate. His advocates become his prosecutor and almost his executioner. Probably Kafka allows some biographical materials to come into the story. He seems to be hunted by ideas of incestuous love. In 'Metamorphosis' he was playing with psycho-analysis.

Kafka's story describes the invasion of the material world by power that resides beyond empirical experience. In Kafka's world the empirical world has its limit. The unusual world goes beyond the limit, because of Gregor Samsa's common place character, it is difficult to agree to the description of novel as a fairy tale in reverse, an antifairy tale. "The Metamorphosis" seems to be in tune with Gregor's unheroic character. The beast is as nondescript as Gregor himself. Kafka doesn't want to interpret Gregor's insect shape as an expression of his physical or mental disorder. The principle law of the force, which caused metamorphosis in its incomprehensibility. The negative quality is imparted to the animal itself, which Kafka couldn't describe by words. By his metamorphosis Gregor Samsa has been turned into an untouchable in the most literal sense of the world.

Outwardly, at least Gregor's transformation, is complete and immediate. He wakes up to find that his body is that of an insect. Inwardly, however, the transformation seems more gradual. One common interpretation of 'The Metamorphosis' is this: Kafka is telling us that some people, for the lives of some people lead, are so insect like that they may as well wake up one morning as insect. Another way to translate the German word Kafka uses to describe Gregor is "Vermin". Certainly Gregor's job is degrading, frustrating and unfulfilling, but he is 'vermin' and vulnerable.

In an essay on 'The Metamorphosis' Walter Sokel defines "Self-alienation" as "The individual's estrangement from his humanity or human species being, that is from the individual's membership in the human species. The individual is estranged from himself in so far as he is alienated from his essential nature as human being." In Arendtian terms, Sokel is describing "loss of the world". In order to

overcome self-alienation, in the Marxist view, work must not be “dictated by external needs or the commands of others; but chosen, partially atleast, for its intrinsic pleasure”. Only in this way can work be an end in itself and not a means for something else, and thus man can realize his humanity through his own free will. It is characteristic of modernity that the possibility for this kind of free labor is excluded, a fact Sokel sees exemplified in Gregor Samsa’s activities – always “externalized”, always belonging to someone else.

Franz Kafka’s ‘The Metamorphosis’ chronicles the bizzrre tale of Gregor Samsa’s transformation into an insect and the despiring isolation and personal quest for a meaningful existence that follows. A masterpiece of modern literature, it explores the universal concerns and struggles of modernity. Franz Kafka is a forefather of the modernist movement of ideological enlightenment, his literature is profound and shocking, shaking the previous notions of thinking to the ground as can be conveyed in his story ‘The Metamorphosis’ where human existence and economy is blurred. A major focus of modernism is on how society alienates people from one another, and how modern society is actually damaging to its citizens. We can see this in Gregor’s job as a travelling salesman. “Men defined by jobs, endless hierarchies which obey arbitrary law, hawk-eyed attention paid to private activities and desires, the inexorable progression of processes which seems completely outside human control. Totalitarianism, the most atrocious example of socialization taken to extreme, appears latent in kafka’s world view. Moreover, the effect of modern processes like capitalism and self-alienation achieve expression in stories like ‘The Metamorphosis’ that are the non-plus ultra of modern human experience, giving voice to “socially forbidden feelings and thoughts”. while also reveling a censoring concealing and thus repressive site that made the rebellion they tried to express an recognizable to consciousness. There are two major reason this novel can counts as modernist literature-firstly the themes Kafka deals with in the novel, and secondly, the way that he write it. Kafka’s novel deals with a number of themes that were specifically addressed by modernist writers. It deals with disillusionment, the concept of self-consciousness and identity in an expanding world. Gregor Samsa is the predecessor of the disillusioned character. Secondly, the novel written in stream of consciousness style, which is particular among modernist writers and in this novels, has the added effects of compounding the confusion, frustration and fright expressed by the cast of characters throughout the

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