Die Verwandlung

1. **Compare and contrast the representation of gender roles** in TWO of the following texts: Kafka’s Die Verwandlung; Mann’s Der Tod in Venedig; Walser’s Jakob von Gunten and Schnitzler’s Fräulein Else.
2. Discuss the significance of **space and place** for TWO of the following texts: Kafka’s Die Verwandlung; Mann’s Der Tod in Venedig; Walser’s Jakob von Gunten; Kaiser’s Von morgens bis mitternachts.
3. Focussing on **roles and relationships within the family**, analyse the following passage from Kafka’s Die Verwandlung and its significance for the story as a whole.
4. According to Franz Kuna: “The feeling of not quite fitting into the age, of being strangely out of tune, was a matter of considerable moral and psychological concern to the ‘moderns’; and they contrasted the solid bourgeois spirits who seemed to sit so harmoniously in the world with their own situation: passive, nervous, decadent, ugly, men without qualities**.” To what extent do you agree with this assessment of modernism?** Refer in your answer to two of the following texts: Walser’s Jakob von Gunten, Mann’s Der Tod in Venedig, Kafka’s Die Verwandlung.
5. **Focusing on the father-son** relationship in Kafka’s Die Verwandlung, analyse the following passage and its significance for the novella as a whole.
6. **Compare and contrast the break with tradition and the longing for renewal in** two of the following texts: Kafka’s Die Verwandlung, Mann’s Der Tod in Venedig, Walser’s Jakob von Gunten, Kaiser’s Von morgens bis mitternachts. You must base your argument on examples from the texts.

The transformation of the lives of others:

* **Depict spaces of enclosure and spaces of spectatorship.** Spaces are simultaneously stifling and exposing.
* **Gregor shifts from his successful Oepidal development, being the family breadwinner and slowly climbing the career ladder, to being financially, socially and physically impotent-** symbolic withdrawal from the ‘centre stage’ **(shift in family significance**). But even when his sister enters the room to give or clear away food, he retreats as far as possible under the sofa as to avoid being seen.
* **Protagonists location acts as mirror to their inner worlds and symbolic objectifications of their beings.** Gregor’s changes are also mirrored in the changes to his room- comfortable, familiar room to an animalistic, lonely cave. His family soon see him as synonymous with the room, and after his sister has cleared the food while their parents wait outside, ‘**musste sie ganz genau erzahlen, wie es in den Zimmer aussah, was Gregor gegessen hatte, wie er sich dismal benommen hatte’.** The state of the room + food thus appear to tell them more than Gregor himself.
* **By listening and watching the space around him rather than the people in it, Gregor notices a change in his family:** (143-144) In the absence of human gesture, G begins to read the gestures of space, even silence tells him something of human feelings, so the space itself almost comes to life. Eg. Presence of the lit gas lamp, sound of hesitant doors opening and closing. **Space begins to be more telling while the family fall silent.** The increasing importance of space is symbiotically linked too to the increasing sense of human isolation.
* **The transformation of his room reflects his own subjective perceptions,** much of this transformation is orchestrated by the actions of his family who remove the furniture, then his sister is made to recreate the room for the benefit of her parents waiting outside.
* **By the end of story, G has become so tightly interwoven with the spaces they inhabit, that when the G disappears (dies) so do the spaces. Samsa family elect to leave the space infected by Gregor.**
* **Change in Gregor’s father:** where Herr Samsa was previously weak and frail, a man ‘der mude im Bett vergraben lag, wenn fruher Gregor zu einer Geschaftsreise ausgeruckt war; gar nicht recht imstand war, aufzustehen, sondern zum Zeichen der Freude nur dieArme gehoben hatte‘ he is now ‚**recht gut aufgerichtet‘**
* **Loss of language:** importance of conversation in order to stay human; his attempt at communicating is essentially an attempt at communicating his humanity to them. Moreover, the newspaper is symbolic of the home’s power dynamics, the person in power at any moment reads or manipulates the newspaper; his evening custom as head of the family had been to sit at the table and read the newspaper aloud. **Loss of power indicated by his first meal of garbage being served on newspaper.** Gregor has lost both his ability to communicate as well as the symbolic representation of (patriarchal) power that comes in the form of the newspaper, (no longer reads aloud to his family). The loss of language involves the heightened significance of sensory perception, and this is a dehumanizing shift.
* **Während sie sich so unterhielten, fiel es Herrn und Frau Samsa im Anblick ihrer immer lebhafter werdenden Tochter fast gleichzeitig ein, wie sie in der letzten Zeit trotz aller Plage, die ihre Wangen bleich gemacht hatte, zu einem schönen und u¨ppigen Ma¨dchen aufgebluht war. (200)** Story ends on the transformation of Gregor’s sister rather than of Gregor himself. The family wish simply to rid themselves of Gregor and all that came with him (as the breadwinner). The parental plans to find a suitable husband for Grete indicate not simply a transformation, but a kind of circularity; their son will be replaced by a son-in-law. As Grete becomes a woman full of possibility and life, Gregor dissolves into nothing.

Kafka’s Die Verwandlung

* **Kafka’s central themes: (one of three other stories) the punishment- fantasy associated with an extremely primitive father image**. The son- figure (Gregor) has replaced the father as practical head and bread- winner of the family, decline of the father and his dramatic recovery which causes or follows the self- effacement of his son is stressed by Kafka. The ‘metamorphosis’ itself is not manifestly connected with any idea of punishment or self-punishment.
* **As far as the story’s manifest contest is concerned, this metamorphosis is intended to be taken literally, not merely a symbol of physical of mental illness**. Irony here is subtle: the metamorphosis (an impossible event) represents objective reality for Gregor and his family- something monstrous, inacceptable, but actual; whereas it is their behaviour that is strange, inappropriate and for this very reason- the ordinary behaviour of humanity confronted with the ugliness of fact.
* **Gregor at first, as the person most closely affected, behaves as if it had not happened at all: it is through these reactions to it, at least as much as through the event itself, that Kafka conveys an impression of nightmare horror, nightmare comedy, and even more disturbingly, of nightmare truth.**
* **After the metamorphosis Gregor remains almost continuously behind locked doors: in the two or three months till his death he leaves his room only three times, and from these three 'outbreaks' are developed the three main episodes of the story, which thus achieves a diversified unity in the classical manner. s:** the family, as a concession, leave Gregor's door open in the evenings, but neglect him more and more;1 they take in three lodgers who eat succulent meals in the living-room; Gregor's sister one evening plays the violin to them after dinner, and Gregor, strangely attracted by the music and longing to regain his sister's attention, slowly crawls out once more, weak with starvation and covered with dirt; the lodgers give notice, Gregor's sister becomes hysterical and declares that Gregor must be got rid of, Gregor crawls back into his room and dies; with him out of the way, the family's economic position seems to improve overnight and his parents decide, significantly, that it is time to find a husband for his sister.
* their very acceptance of the situation is as comic as it is appalling: at most they are distressed and physically nauseated, but they are too limited, imaginatively and intellectually, to be in any way fundamentally puzzled or shaken.1 Even Gregor's mother at last grows used to the sight of him; and she clings for weeks to the hope that he may still recover from his 'affliction'. His sister does, as she says, 'das Menschenm6gliche, (dieses Untier) zu pflegen und zu dulden'. His father, further distorted into conformity with Kafka's own father-image, seems to think that the metamorphosis is very much what might have been expected of Gregor.
* **episode of Die Verwandlung, that of the violin, the climax of the last chapter**. Gregor's 'meta morphosis' has been, in all other respects, a degradation, a regressive, retrogressive change. He can no longer support himself economically, has lost all contact with the outer world (a situation stressed by the removal of his furniture and pictures); he has become inarticulate, evil-smelling, mechanical, instinct-dominated, and goes on his belly. But whereas Gregor as a man had shown no taste for music, Gregor as an insect is irresistibly drawn towards the sound of a violin. It is an effect on which Kafka does not dwell, passing straight on to Gregor's fantasy about his sister with which it is closely associated. We have learnt earlier in the story that Gregor had intended to send Grete, at his expense, to the college of music, thus using his position as economic head of the family to make a positive claim on her, in opposition to his parent's wishes. This comparatively innocent plan now reverts to a more primitive form, expressed in an extraordinary complex of pathetically erotic and obscurely aggressive impulses.

The Metamorphosis: Kafka’s study of a family

* Gregor’s mother: it is the mother who insists that Gregor is a member of the family and who objects to moving furniture out of the room, but is also hysterical at the sight of him, husband and Grete feel obligated to protect her from Gregor.
* Grete: more complex, her metamorphosis is as complete as Gregor’s, takes a form which is more positive. From being dependent, she becomes a young woman who works hard, earns, ambitions of bettering herself by learning French. Rapidly develops desire to gain power. As she becomes ‘Grete’, Gregor gradually becomes ‘it’ (get rid of it). Story ends on the promise of Grete’s sexual maturity and inevitable marriage- would have been inconceivable so long as Gregor was alive to shame them. Gregor imagined an alternative happy ending for his sister- sending her to the Conservatorium.
* Inverse relationship between Gregor and his father. Plot describes Gregor’s decline and his father’s coming to power. He gets a job, take in a group of boarders. Throws an apple which lodges in his back.

Transforming Franz Kafka’s ‘metamorphosis’

Modernism/ gender roles/ break with tradition

* Grete’s simultaneous liberation/ Gregor’s deterioration.
* Only recently have critics expressed interest in the idea that Grete’s experience is crucial to the meaning of Kafka’s tale + Kafka’s attitude towards women need further interpretation.
* **Marxist interpretation**: sympathetic towards Gregor as he is the symbol of all men who work, carry burden to provide for the family. This interpretation fails to recognize the women also work eg. Cleaning up after Gregor.
* **Undeniably, the story suggests a grotesque escape from burdensome patriarchal obligations, also about Gregor’s exchange of roles within his family.**
* **Once transformed, Gregor consigned inactivity, hindrance typically associated with the female role.**
* **Primary conflict occurs between Gregor and Grete, hourglass shaped progress of the plot as they switch positions. Suggests the idea that the ‘metamorphosis’ is Kafka’s fantasy of a gender role change.**
* **Only when Grete blooms into an eligible young woman, ripe for the job and marriage markets, can we recognize that her empowerment is also an ironic reification.** She has been transformed at another's expense, and she will carry within her the marketplace value that has ultimately destroyed Gregor.
* **As many readers have noted, Kafka records the damage that patriarchal capitalist-oriented society inscribes in the psyches of men, but Kafka also records the damage that is done to women. Kafka's transformation of the male role into the female, of Gregor into Grete, mitigates the differences between them and the disrespect accorded to women in a culture concerned with men's upward mobility, a concern with which Kafka was well acquainted in his professional and private.**
* **The image of this gender neutrality emerges when Gregor is referred to as a "thing," an "it." "It's dead," the charwoman announces. "It's lying here dead and done for!" (128).27 The increasing reification or it-ness of Gregor's body is the ground for Grete's ultimate repudiation of him as a brother and for her own transformation**. "But how can it be Gregor?" (125) she asks, a question which echoes Kafka's own response in writing to Felice.
* Grete tires of functioning as Gregor's charwoman and nurse, he becomes dirtier, less human; without her ministrations he ceases to care for himself. As she withdraws her service from him, her female voice begins to rise independently in the text, alongside the conflated voice of narrator and male character.
* It is Grete, not the oedipal father or desultory mother, who announces that Gregor " 'must go ... that's the only solution, Father. You must try to get rid of the idea that this is Gregor.
* Having passed through stages of submission and sympathy, through the burden of symbolically mothering a being that resembles a sickly and degenerate child and having replicated her brother's stages of maturation and professionalism (for she now has a job), **Grete initiates her liberation.**
* " Her decision that Gregor "must go" involves her in a "tit-for-tat psycho-moral solution"38 that dehumanizes her ethically as it inspires the bloom of her body and confidence.
* **With this emphasis, Kafka transfers power and responsibility from the traditional patriarchal inheritor, Gregor, to his sister Grete. The exchange is complicated by the fact that it occurs through the horrific metamorphosis** and death of one whose doubles are both male and female: both father Samsa who beats his son, and sister Grete whose "young body" emerges in spring from the "completely flat and dry" corpse (129) of her bro.
* **In the finale of "Metamorphosis" a return to normal sex roles is parodically celebrated. Grete has "bloomed into a pretty girl with a good figure" for whom "it would soon be time to find a good husband" (132). The final irony of Kafka's text is that despite the bizarre experiences that the Samsas have endured, no tragic meaning has been attached to them.**
* The exchange of Grete for Gregor represents the idea that persons, like utilities, can be replaced. Grete can serve as her family's breadwinner either as a woman married to a salaried husband, or as a woman who has learned to exploit (and be exploited by) the system that has exploited her brother

Modernism/ gender roles/ break with tradition

* Only recently have critics expressed interest in the idea that Grete’s experience is crucial to the meaning of Kafka’s tale.
* **Marxist interpretation:** sympathetic towards Gregor, symbol for men who work, who carry the burden of providing for a family. Interpretation however fails to recognise that women also work eg. Take care of Gregor.
* Undeniably, story interpreted as an escape from burdensome patriarchal obligations- Gregor exchanges roles. Becomes inactive, hindered, typically associated with female roles.
* **Primary conflict occurs between Gregor and Grete**. Hourglass shaped plot progression as she seemingly transforms and becomes liberated, Gregor deteriorates- suggesting Kafka’s idea of ‘metamorphosis’ is an exchange in roles.
* Many have noted that Kafka records the effect that patriarchal, capitalist orientated society has had on the psyches of men, also women.
* By exchanging the roles, mitigates the differences between them and the disrespect accorded to females in a culture concerned with men’s upward mobility.
* Image of gender neutrality emerges when Grete refers to Gregor as ‘it’. Increasing reification as him as ‘it’ is the grounds of her repudiation of him as her brother/ own transformation.
* Grete’s liberation: initiated through stages of sympathy, after symbolically mothering her brother, replicated stages of maturation and professionalism for she now has a job.
* With this emphasis, Kafka transfers power and responsibility from traditional patriarchal inheritor, Gregor to Grete. Exchange is complicated as it occurs through metamorphosis.
* In the finale, return to normal gender roles is parodically celebrated, Grete has developed into a beautiful young woman, who will be married off to a good husband. Bizarre irony that despite everything, no tragic meaning has been attached to them.

Space/ place

* Protagonists location acts as a mirror to inner worlds and symbolic objectifications of their beings.
* **Gregor’s changes also mirrored in the changes in his room- comfortable** room an animalistic lonely cave. State of his room becomes more telling.
* **By listening and watching the spaces around him, Gregor notices a change in his family behaviour.** Eg. Presence of lit lamp, hesitant opening and closing of doors. Space itself becomes more telling while the family stay silent.
* **Increasing importance of space is symbiotically linked to the increasing sense of human isolation.** As he deteriorates further and further from his family. Much is orchestrated by his family. Who remove the furniture.
* **Newspaper is symbolic of homes power dynamics**. The person in power would read the newspaper; his evening custom as head of the family would be to be sat at the table and read the newspaper aloud.
* Loss of language: importance of conversation in order to stay human, attempt at communicating his humanity.
* Loss of power further indicated by his first meal being served on a newspaper. G lost ability to communicate+ patriarchal power that comes in the form of the newspaper.