

Analysis on The Metamorphosis

Authored by: Samnang Pheng

Submitted to: Professor: Aseel Belal Saleh

Course: ENGL 101 106 – English Composition I

American University of Phnom Penh

Submission date: May 02, 2022

CONTENTS

- i. Abstract
- ii. Introduction
- iii. Character analysis
 - a. Gregor's father
 - b. Gregor's mother
 - c. Grete
 - d. Gregor
- iv. Reflection of The Metamorphosis on modern society
- v. Conclusion

Abstract

One of the most famous novels which is under Franz Kafka's works is The Metamorphosis. Being a salesman, the main character, Gregor Samsa barely enjoys his life until one day he becomes a monstrous creature. This paper aims to extract values inside the story which are related to the perspective of modern society. Each point in this paper represents the main ideas that Kafka wants to deliver by the characters of the story while most research papers on the same topic tend to analyze the whole story without diving deep into a specific character. The conclusion can be drawn that the metamorphosis reflects how modern people live their lives in the fast-paced world without the awareness of self-happiness.

Keywords: Kafka, The metamorphosis, Modern society, Self-happiness.

Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* is one of the most popular modern works of literature which was published in 1915. After reading the title of the story, the meaning of the whole story can be revealed easily. The main character, Mr. Gregor Samsa, has been transformed into a gigantic insect one morning when he woke up late. When he became an insect-like creature, at first, there was only his sister, Grete, who looked after him by cleaning his room and taking food for him twice per day. However, after months, Grete and Gregor's parents no longer keep an eye on Gregor; they thought that Gregor had made their family deteriorate, and in the end, Gregor died. Before this transformation happened, Gregor was a traveling salesman and he didn't enjoy his job; all he did was just earn money and pay the debt to his boss for his family as his father and his mother were very old and his sister also needed money to pay for tuition fees for her violin school. Similarly, in modern society, most people pay attention only to their future without satisfying their present. The four main characters of *The Metamorphosis*, including Mr. Samsa, Mrs. Samsa, Grete, and Gregor, not only reflect different characteristics which make up the whole story full of invaluable meaning, but also make this novel have a tangible connection with real life.

As a reader, it can be seen clearly that Gregor's father, Mr. Samsa, appears as a selfish father who obsesses with money and does not care about his son as he always tries to attack Gregor after Gregor undergoes his metamorphosis until he dies of a serious injury. Mr. Samsa was a failed businessman and he forced Gregor to work to pay for his bankrupt debt and support the whole family as he decided to quit his job (Sparknotes). At the time that Gregor is not a human anymore,

his father just worries about the finances of his family without trying to find solutions to help his son. Moreover, as Gregor's change makes the family's condition even harder to handle, Mr. Samsa is very furious with Gregor. First, he beats Gregor back into the room and later on he throws apples at Gregor which leads to a serious infection that takes Gregor's life. In this sense, Kafka wanted to illustrate that the relationship between Gregor and his father was fragile because his father just paid attention to the income that Gregor earned, regardless of Gregor's situation.

Gregor's mother, who has trouble with asthma, on the other hand, although she cannot take care of her son because of her difficulty confronting Gregor's condition, she still worries, shows love to Gregor and tries to work as a sewer for an underwear manufacturer to support the finances of her family (Structural Elements in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, 1993, p.151). She thought that one day Gregor would return to his former state. For instance, when she tries to remove furniture from Gregor's room to make Gregor be able to crawl easily on the wall and ceiling, she told Grete that doing this might make Gregor forget all about the time when he was a human which causes the situation even worse (*The Metamorphosis*, p.43).

Apart from Gregor's mother, his sister, Grete, is the only Gregor relative that entirely takes care of Gregor after his transformation. At first, Grete supplies food to Gregor two times daily and she even notices that Gregor prefers rotten food such as rotten vegetables, bones, cheese, dry bread, and salted bread with butter (*A Study of Franz Kafka's The Metamorphosis*, p.1602). Kafka

illustrates the change in Grete's behavior toward Gregor when she becomes an adult as she has a job for being a salesgirl. Before, Grete thought that taking care of her brother was a duty because her mother always fainted whenever she saw Gregor as a vermin. As time passed by, Grete's pity for Gregor was starting to gradually diminish until one day Grete came up with the idea of getting rid of her brother, Gregor (Sparknotes). At the end of the story, Kafka shows us as readers about the beautiful transformation of Grete which makes the whole story shift from a sorrowful scenario to an upbeat ending.

The main character, Gregor, even though he was physically transformed into a huge bug, his mind was still mentally a human. For example, Kafka demonstrates that Gregor was obsessed with the picture of a woman with a fur hat and a fur boa that hangs on a wall next to Gregor's bed (Kafka and the Metamorphosis of the Human Body, p.41). When his sister and his mother try to remove the picture of the lady, Gregor intentionally hides it with his insect body to mentally deliver a message to his sister to not take it out of his room. In addition, to support the concept of being human-minded, there is a scenario illustrating that Gregor is attracted by the tone of the violin. Gregor was thinking that the three boarders didn't respect the beautiful violin's sound while his sister was playing as all the boarders seemed to just blow the smoke of their cigars. Gregor, instead, tried to show his sister that he valued the music that Grete was playing (The Metamorphosis, p.64). Getting back to when Gregor was a human, he has never enjoyed his life. He hated his boss as his boss never cared about employees, so he forced himself to work as a salesman just to pay the debt

of his family. He thought that after the debt was fully paid back, he could quit his job and enjoy his life. Sadly, bad things happen in just a night as he has been through the metamorphosis process. As soon as he became useless to his family, he was hit by his father several times and in the end, there was no one taking care of him until he peacefully died.

In Kafka's view, the protagonist of the tale is a symbol of **selflessness** and **dutifulness**. The first characteristic of Gregor that Kafka wanted to illustrate is **selflessness**. From the beginning of the story until the end, it can be seen clearly that Gregor seldom thinks about himself, except in the scene where he shows love to a picture of a woman by hiding it with his belly to prevent his sister from removing it from his room. There is much evidence showing that he always put his family in the first place while putting himself as the least priority. Before the metamorphosis takes place, Gregor feels disappointed with his job as a traveling salesman, he said that he is not only physically exhausted but also mentally tired with his boss as well. All the irritating stuff he does is just to help his family to live a proper life. He takes his salary to pay for his father's debt and saves some amount of his wage to pay for the admission and tuition of her sister's musical college as he knows that his sister is talented in playing music. From day to day, Gregor has to confront his constant anxiety about traveling, catching the train on time, getting up early before 5a.m, and having meals with an irregular habit (Shame and Alienation in Kafka's The Metamorphosis, p.126). Gregor hopes that he will quit his bothersome job in the next 5 or 6 years when he fully pays off his father's debt to a dirty-minded boss. If he were not selfless, he would probably resign

to allow himself to have his freedom without forcing himself to do what he does not want to do. Furthermore, Gregor's selflessness still mentally remains even though he has turned into a giant insect. The primary concern that came up in his thought was going to work, worrying about waking up late, and missing the 5 a.m. train. Then, when the chief clerk comes, he tries to respond and explain that he is not lazy, he is just having some problems with his health. Gregor also asks the chief clerk to tell his boss not to fire him as he is the breadwinner of his whole family. Besides this, he knows that his transformation makes his family in trouble but he cannot leave because of his condition-physically trapped in an insect. Consequently, the only way to fade away from his family is to die. As an example, in chapter three, Gregor stops eating anything until he cannot crawl anymore; and as the infection becomes more serious, it causes him to die peacefully while wishing his family's condition will be improved. In comparison to our real-world society, Kafka wants to depict that we all live mostly just to please people around us such as parents, siblings, friends, girlfriends, boyfriends, or neighbors instead of satisfying ourselves (The Metamorphosis and other stories, p.7). We all often never enjoy the moment that we have for ourselves and try to do our jobs daily to get money although they contradict our happiness. If we dive deep into Kafka's mindset, it can be revealed that the author's real life is similar to the protagonist of his novel.

In addition, the second characteristic of Gregor is **dutifulness**. Gregor serves himself as a slave to his family's financial needs. Gregor dedicates his life to his family requirement as he thought that it is his duty as a son and a brother (The tragedy of modern individual in society: A

Kafkaesque view, p.3). Gregor tries to work every day just to fulfill his duty as a good son because his father owes lots of money to his boss which is needed to be paid off, and he chases money just to fulfill his duty as a good brother because his sister is talented in playing violin so she wants to pursue her study in a musical school.

After analyzing the whole story of *The Metamorphosis*, there are several reflections to consider as the entire story displays the difficulties of living in modern society and the complications of accepting the truth of other's changes in the time of need (Kafka's personal life reflected on *The Metamorphosis*, 2021). Since technology has been growing at an unprecedented rate, students, workers, businessmen, businesswomen, almost everyone, seems to be very busy and barely enjoy their lives in the present time and just hope to tranquilly relax in the future. Mostly, people in this modern era, tend to spend their daily lives working to earn as much money as they can, regardless of the enjoyment of what they are doing. As time passes by, they will feel regret when they are old because they don't live their lives properly when they can enjoy their moments. Additionally, when people begin to reach old age, their surrounding people will not take care of them as they are expected and definitely, they will never experience a joyful life for the rest of their lives. Moreover, although technology enhances the connectivity between friends, family, or colleagues, many people feel alienated. Like Gregor, people work in a workspace where they can communicate with each other, but this type of communication is fragile, so people will have no

real relationship; and later in their life, they will experience the feeling of estrangement (Kafka's "Metamorphosis": Life in Modernity).

In conclusion, Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* includes lots of invaluable morals inside each character, including Gregor's father, Gregor's mother, Grete and Gregor. At the same time, in our modern society, our lives are not much different from Gregor's life and this is the main moral that Kafka wants to deliver to us as readers to be aware of these issues before it is too late to modify, otherwise we all will have a heartbreaking ending like Gregor.

References

- Franz, K. (1915). *The Metamorphosis*. Retrieved from
<https://instapdf.in/metamorphosis-book/>
- Hamedreza, K., Fatemeh, A., & Mahboubbeh, N. (2012). *A Study of Franz Kafka's The Metamorphosis*. Retrieved from
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330370425_A_Study_of_Franz_Kafka's_The_Metamorphosis
- Arnab, D. (2019). *Kafka and The Metamorphosis of The Human Body*. Retrieved from
<https://www.questjournals.org/jrhss/papers/vol7-issue4/H0704013941.pdf>
- Scott, J. (1993), *Structural Elements in Franz Kafka's The Metamorphosis*. Retrieved from
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/230026278_Structural_elements_in_Franz_Kafka's_The_Metamorphosis
- SparkNotes. (n.d.). *The Metamorphosis* (April 20, 2022), Retrieved from
<https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/metamorph>
- Stephens, J. (2021, January 9). *Kafka's personal life reflected in the Metamorphosis*. Retrieved from
<http://www.kafka.org/index.php?aid=218>
- Minar, K. S., & Sutandio, A. (2017). *Shame and alienation in Kafka's The metamorphosis*. *Jurnal POETIKA*, 5(2), 123. Retrieved from
<https://doi.org/10.22146/poetika.27100>
- Zafer, Z. (2015, May 22). *The tragedy of modern individual in society: A kafkaesque view*. Academia.edu. Retrieved May 2, 2022, Retrieved from

[https://www.academia.edu/11683795/The Tragedy of Modern Individual in Society A Kafkaesque View](https://www.academia.edu/11683795/The_Tragedy_of_Modern_Individual_in_Society_A_Kafkaesque_View)

Kafka, F., & Pelzer, K. (2017). *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories*. Sterling Publishing Co., Inc. Retrieved from

<https://adamancritique.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/kafka-franz-metamorphosis-other-stories-oxford-2009.pdf>

StudyCorgi. (2021, February 26). *Kafka's "Metamorphosis": Life in Modernity*. Retrieved from

<https://studycorgi.com/kafkas-metamorphosis-life-in-modernity/>