

Original Article

A Sense of Depression of the Protagonist in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*: A Study

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Abstract - The paper focuses on the depression of the novella's protagonist, who suffers from a painful dream which changes him into a horrible vermin. This transformation disturbed the whole family and self, giving us a modernistic vision of the upcoming world. The upcoming modern world metamorphoses a family man into a modern man who leads a natural life to a modern mechanical life. The single transformation of the protagonist changes the whole family's notion of him who loves his own family before the transformation. This novella exhibits the modern world that subtracts love and happiness and, moving fast towards an unrealistic modernistic ideology, symbolises a full-fledged machine man. The modernistic vision we face today is faced by the author and the protagonist as a shadow. Kafka shadows the reality of the modernistic world, full of alienation, depression, and absurdity. Though it is fiction and does not tell anything directly, it remembers reality through the protagonist's metamorphosis. Kafka lensed him in the eyes of Gregor, the protagonist, and symbolically proposed the characteristics of the modern man through the transformation. So, this transformation would move the people from the late 19th and 20th centuries to the upcoming nuclear world.

Keywords - Metamorphosis, Depression, Alienation, Transformation, Kafka, Modernistic.

1. Introduction

Kafka, a German-speaking bohemian and a modernist writer who highly focuses on individual perspectives in his fiction is widely regarded as one of the major figures of 20th-century literature. Literary modernism, or modern literature emerging in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, introduced a new style of writing motivated by a conscious intention to deconstruct old representation techniques to communicate their generation's new sensibility.[2] The inner self and consciousness were major themes in modernist fiction. The modernist writer observed a collapse in civilisation and culture rather than advancement. Instead of new technology, modernist writers perceived cold machinery and growing capitalism as the source of individual alienation and loneliness. Modernist stories were frequently written in a stream-of-consciousness style, allowing the reader to walk alongside the characters to influence them to do anything they choose. Modernist writers were divided into early and late modernists [3]. Early modernists began to write from an individual's perspective, and the elements of modernism fused symbolically. Later, modernists wrote on the essence of modernism and touched on it for a specific purpose. Some modern writers are Franz Kafka, W.B Yeats, Thomas Mann, E.M Foster, T.S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, George Orwell, Samuel Beckett, and W.H Auden. These writers focused on the individual, technological development causes, and capitalism that stings like bees.

The characters of modernist fiction experience isolation, existentialism, alienation, loss, and exile because their life is quite challenging, and spiritual emptiness engulfs their minds. It cannot be said that modern writers only showed the loss of identity and isolation. Still, they indirectly demystified the reason for the loss and painful environment by the rule of science and technology. Of course, the spiritual emptiness, disbelief in God, and rational thinking pave the way to create a new world where the innocents are destructed everywhere. In other words, the modern age sows seeds of rational thinking that separate the creator from creation, resulting in destruction and growth in the following decades. Modernist writers inject high values and meanings in



symbols and objects that provide multiple meanings from an individual's perspective. The theme of isolation, sense of fragmentation, and loss of faith leads to chaos and confusion. The author pours pessimism, disillusionment, and melancholy into writing.

2. Sense of Depression of the Protagonist

The caterpillar's transformation into a butterfly shows the struggle for survival until it reaches its goal. Kafka starts with Gregor's transformation and ends in a mournful tone. It shows that human transformation is impossible to adapt to because he is more than animals and nature. Kafka deeply stressed the significance of love and respect for human beings to make the world a better place to live.

The protagonist, Gregor Samsa, a travelling salesman troubled by dreams, transforms into a horrible vermin the next day. He was excited about his transformation and thought, "What happened to me?". He went to sleep about what had happened but thought of his travelling salesman job to ensure his presence towards his master. He had been thinking about his travels and train connections, lousy and inconsistent food, and interactions with other individuals for a long time. He felt an itch on his belly that disgusted him when he tried to touch his many thin legs. His thoughts ran out about his boss's harsh behaviour if he was not on time on the spot. The debt to their family urges him to move for his work, but he cannot because of his transformed body.

There was a cautious knock at the door near his head. "Gregor," somebody called- it was his mother- it's quarter to seven. Didn't you want to go somewhere" That gentle voice! Gregor was shocked when he heard his own voice answering, it could hardly be recognised as the voice he had had before (19) [1]

A gentle voice called him that was his mother. He found that his voice had changed. Soon, his father and sister Grete also knocked on the door to learn about his appointments, but he managed them with his answers. It was difficult for Gregor to get up from his bed because of his huge cervical body, but slowly, he moved towards the door. The chief clerk visited Gregor's home to find out why he was absent. Gregor's parents tried to convince the chief clerk about his inability to get back to a job. The family asks Gregor to open the door, but Gregor cannot even move toward the door. Slowly and painfully, Gregor tried to open the door within the gap, his mind wavering between being ready for his next train. The chief clerk and the family members did not know about his transformation, so the chief clerk got angry about his irresponsible answer.

The flight of the chief clerk seemed, unfortunately, to put Gregor's father into a panic as well. Until then, he had been relatively self-controlled, but now, instead of running after the chief clerk himself, or at least not impending Gregor as he ran after him, Gregor father seized the chief clerk's stick in his right hand, picked up a large newspaper from the table with his left and used them to drive Gregor back into his room, stamping his foot at him as he went (39) [1]

When he opened the door, they all were frightened of his appearance. His father beats him with a newspaper and throws him into the room. The chief clerk left his belongings and ran away. His father shut the door, and everything became quiet. At dusk of the day, Gregor gets up from his comma-like sleep and watches the outside world. His sister handed him a glass of milk with a few bread crumbs floating in it. Because of his massive bulk, he could not eat it. He was hungry the entire night, with hazy hopes and concerns. His sister presented him with half-rotten vegetables, a bone from the evening meal with white sauce, raisins, almonds, a dry roll, and bread coated with butter and salt. Gregor felt bad about food that was inedible and not good to eat, but he ate. Gregor's parents did not want him to starve. Now, his father goes to work, and Grete helps her mother with cooking and other households; the family goes well.

The family tries to overcome the absence of Gregor in conversation and income. Grete took care of Gregor for some days, and the maid cleaned the room. Gregor thanked Grete for her care and attention, but she pretended nothing was burdensome about it. Though Gregor was calm in his room and staring out the window, She quickly shut the door behind her; a stranger would have assumed he had threatened her and bit her. It shows that she still finds his presence unbearable and does not know how to throw him away from home. His parents do not come into the room to see him but appreciate Grete's good works. Gregor heard this

from his room. His mother wants to see him but waits for her husband to leave home. Gregor began to crawl up and down the room's walls and ceiling and avoid staring outside through the window. It is the new entertainment for Gregor; we understand that he is slowly transforming into an insect. Grete had done all things favours to Gregor to make him feel better about living in the room. Gregor's family replaces the maid with a lady who tolerates his appearance, and sometimes she speaks to him. When Gregor left his room, his mother fainted with his appearance, and the maid locked herself in the kitchen. The walk of Gregor terrible the family members and maid severely they thought of Gregor as a monster which may eat them if they present before it.

When Gregor's father arrived, he searched for Gregor and threw red apples at him. The apples are attached to Gregor's flesh, and no one is ready to remove them, even Grete. Grete begs her father to spare his life. For a month, he suffered from an injury; by this, he could not move. Gregor's family also seems dull and overworked for their income and peace. The three gentlemen rented out Gregor's house. Grete requested that she play the violin for the gentlemen, but they announced they would leave the house immediately without paying rent due to the disgusting conditions. Gregor's thoughts about his family make him lonely when he is not needed or good for nothing.

In his loneliness, Grete's words make him feel horrible about his present state of existence. After the three gentlemen's departure, Grete shouts that Gregor's presence is disgusting and says it is not Gregor and will ruin the family. Her father also admits to Grete's point. Gregor understood it and slowly moved back to the bedroom. He determined to get rid of the family of his presence. The next day, the cleaning woman found Gregor dead in his room. The family feels great relief, and Gregor's body has been disposed of. The family rides out to the countryside, and his parents see Grete, a beautiful young lady. They found that it was time for Grete to bring a good man for her. Gregor's death also paves the way to bring the family back into a normal one. This time, the family is not bound by debt or other unexpected situations. In other words, they are happy about Grete's maturity, which symbolises that Grete may occupy Gregor's place soon.

The character of Gregor reflects the author's background, and the transformation is mysterious. Through the character of Gregor, Kafka injects realism into an illusion or fictional world that proposes the growth and fall of the inner being. In every man's inner being, his soul is present and keeps on alarming its impending dangers. The soul is also considered a man. It grows daily and falls from depression and the external forces of the world. Every account of the novella claims a certain meaning deeply to the upcoming modern world. It is surely known that the modern era is the continuation of the postmodern world, and the story prophesies the changes of the upcoming generation. Gregor is a symbolic representation of the postmodern world. The story projects autobiographical elements of Kafka's life, where he becomes an insect in the hands of his authoritative father.

Gregor is a dear brother to his sister and a lovable son to his parents, who bears all the family's debts. He loves his family more than himself. So, in his transformed situation, he also hurried to move for a job. However, he hates this travelling salesman job. He does it for his family earnestly to support all their needs. In his rush, he maintains a smooth relationship with them and never blames them for anything.

On the other hand, he is a good, honest, and hard worker who did everything accurately and perfectly. So that he may think that his transformation can be acceptable to his family and they never throw him, it becomes quite the opposite. His appearance threatens his family, and everything changes. It is unexpected for Gregor that his family's behaviour shocked him. The transformation is physical, but Kafka records Gregor's mental depression and thoughts that stimulate him to like death. In a deep sense, it is not death but suicide. For weeks, Gregor stopped eating when he felt his family needed his absence. At last, he felt so depressed by Grete's words that they crushed him. Every word is a thunderbolt for him that he never expected.

Father, Mother", said his sister, hitting the table with her hand as introduction, "we can't carry on like this. Maybe you can't see it but I can. I don't want to call this monster my brother, all I can say is that we have to try and get rid of it. We've done all that's humanly possible to look after it and be patient, I don't think anyone could accuse us of doing anything wrong. (88) [1]

By Grete's words, he was depressed and decided to fulfil his family's wish. From the first day of his transformation till his death, he gradually undergoes depression. When Grete and her mother go to Gregor's room, he begins to entertain himself by the habit of crawling up and down to the walls and ceiling. This habit ensures that he gradually transforms into insect behaviour and creates an impression that it is not Gregor. Of course, this may be the beginning stage for his family to see Gregor as an insect, not a human, but he is still human. With eyes, we can see the appearance, not one's soul. Appearances are deceptive. For eyes, brother or sister are not exceptional. When Gregor understands his family's mentality, he stops taking food and feels lonely. Here, the question arises. Don't they analyse why he stopped eating for some days? If so, does this is Gregor or an insect? If they asked this question, surely they would find the truth and take Gregor out of depression. It is not examined that they went to reject Gregor from their home. When they know Gregor cannot lead the family, they begin to lead on their own, and now Gregor is useless in their eyes.

For a man, what types of responsibilities are there to run his family? It is a simple query but a lengthy answer. Gregor does his salesman job for his family's income and to clear the debt. He hates this job, but he moves on for his family. It is also a sense of depression he undergoes in his job. No one can tolerate what they hate. These depressions create troubled dreams and transform them into vermin. Suppose it is deeply analysed that he is depressed for his family. Though he hates the job, he stands perfectly in front of his boss and is sincere in his every move.

Gregor is a sincere, hardworking gentleman who sacrifices himself for his own family and is thirsty for his dream to uplift his family in modern society. When society develops in its technology, science, and invention of new things, a middle-class man must uplift his own family. It is the only thought he always has in his mind; Gregor also seems dull. Amid burdens, he lost his dreams and wishes and failed to seek a partner for him. The Father of Gregor's authoritative approach keeps Gregor submissive, and he cannot overcome his depressed state till the end. In other words, his father is the reason for his depression partly. The name "Kafka" and "Samsa" sounds similar. Kafka connects himself to Samsa, which sounds like his deep soul, which he cannot speak in the real world. Like Gregor's transformation, Kafka also suffers from pulmonary tuberculosis. So, the transformation is considered a disease from the author's point of view. In every incident, Kafka injects his life and indirectly pours his depression and agony into Gregor's head. It can be seen by comparing both personalities.

There are numerous parallels between Kafka's life and Gregor's. It proves the author's intention towards the novella and its theme. The story aims at the themes of alienation, existentialism, and loss of hope, and the protagonist's identity reflects Kafka. Gregor's appearance is huge, and even a single step threatens all. His parents and sister saw his appearance and feared how society accepted him. How is society possible if they do not accept the change? His father mistakes his actions and tries to beat him. This incident makes him so depressed and paves the way to the end. He tries to communicate with Grete and his mother, but it goes wrong, and his father arrives.

He lay there for a while numb and immobile, all around him it was quiet; maybe that was a good sign. Then there was someone at the door. The maid, of course, had locked herself in her kitchen so that Grete would have to go and answer it. His father had arrived home. What's happened" were his first words; Grete's appearance must have made everything clear to him. She answered him with subdued voice and openly pressed her face into his chest: "Mother's fainted, but she's better now. Gregor got out." "Just as I expected", said his father, "just as I always said, but you women wouldn't listen, would you." It was clear to Gregor that Grete had not said enough and that his father took it to mean that something bad had happened that he was responsible for some act of violence." (66) [1]

His father mistakes him so that he may try to do anything wrong with both women, and it is impossible for him to clarify what happened. He is totally out of communication, and they serve him just for life's sake. His father never thinks of Gregor's attitude. He just picked up some red apples and searched for him. When he finds him, he is severely beaten with apples, creating great physical and mental pain. No one dared to remove the apples from his flesh. With this incident, Grete's words lead to death. He does everything and pours his strength to uplift his family, but the same family neglects his presence. The reason for his death is not starving; it is exactly hunger for love. He gets rid of it when he confirms it is unavailable in his home. He expects his family to live a peaceful life; that is the great thing he left for them. They wanted him to live well in this transformation, but it was not effective for him to lead his next part of life peacefully. Their treatment is somewhat burdening, not to live for a long time. Here, Gregor and his family are also in the process of metamorphosis. Grete is one step closer to taking care of her life. His parents also in the same manner.[7]

"What a quiet life it is the family lead," said Gregor to himself, and gazing into the darkness, felt a great pride that was able to provide a life like that in such a nice home for his sister and parents. But what now, if all peace and wealth and comfort should come to a horrible and frightening end? (44) [1]

Gregor is happy about his family's present state, but the end frightens him because he is the only person who knows what happened after. When there is a sudden peace, there must be a horrible end. The basement of the peace is essential to see the family's growth. In such a way, Gregor prophesies the upcoming danger when peace is not perfectly based. What peace he sees in his family may not protect them, as known by Gregor. This is what is seen in Kafka's life exactly. Kafka's father is authoritative and dominant, often mistaking his love for his mother and feeling jealous of him. It makes his sisters see differently.

In the same way, Gregor and Kafka suffered a lot. Their agony cannot be said but sensed. Kafka transferred himself as Samsa and prophesized the upcoming metamorphosis in the world[5]. "The Metamorphosis" is a modernist fiction where the traditional way of writing is broken down: industrialisation, globalisation, horrifying world wars, etc. It speaks of the decline of civilisation, the machinery world, and capitalism. The same thing Kafka proposes in this story is that capitalism in Gregor's workplace declines civilisation in his family and several notifications made by him in this novella. Even women will replace men in the 20th-century world, which is foretold by the character of Grete. The incidents that happened in Gregor's life in his family are proof of the postmodern era. He talks about the replacement of machines in human life, the thirst for love for every middle-class man from his family, and the dangers of rising capitalism. Kafka wrote everything from his experience and how he saw and experienced the world. The intentions of Gregor are real in the fictional world. Gregor is a fictional character, but whatever he experiences is real and foretells the fate of the upcoming generations. It was written in a third-person narrative but exposed the voice of Gregor. While writing the novella, some difficulties are there that Kafka overcame.

From this, we know the delay in publishing the text in German and the difficulties in translating the text. For some words, it is not easy to get equivalent English translations. In English, vermin, bug, insect, and the monstrous cockroach are used, but the original is "Ungeheueres Ungeziefer"[6]. Thus, Kafka tries to draw a picture of the animal in our mind, which means different. An explanation of vermin is needed to know what he tries to speak through vermin. The transformation does not matter; the picture he determines is also linked to the change. The meaning of "vermin" is different, but he shows as nasty, unclean, and unfit to sacrifice here. When Gregor transforms into vermin, it denotes that he is not clean and is seen as a disgusting vermin whom no one can serve him. There may be some reason for the author to use this type of animal. It may be a symbolic representation of a particular notion that the family members should throw him out. [9] But the transformation into a cockroach or vermin shows a pathological identification from waking up in the morning to his death. Unconsciousness of being human may be the exact thing seen in this identity change that makes Gregor not live as others. Of course, it picks up his identity.

Thus, depression of Gregor is deeply rooted in the novella in every incident. It is challenging to analyse characters like Gregor, where Kafka injects reality and magical realism into the fictional world. People like Gregor are always living in this world and undergoing difficulties like this. Though Kafka foretells certain

things through his novella, he cannot change Gregor and make him live in this world. This is what he tells as factual truth in fiction. Fortunately, we can see so many Gregors in this postmodern world. His depression is long-lasting.

2.1. Dream Becomes Reality

When we see the life of Gregor, it also mirrors Kafka. One of the terms used by Kafka is 'Kafkaesque.' The term 'Kafkaesque' was broadly used in his works where his character undergoes unnecessarily complicated and frustrating experiences, especially with bureaucracy and its laws. Kafka's 'The Castle' exactly talks about this term where the protagonist wants to live in the village but cannot meet the bureaucratic members. This delay leads to frustrated feelings and alienation. Of course, these kinds of feelings lead to death. Once the nightmarish dreams become a reality, it is troublesome when it connects society and individuals. Unknowingly, the characters of Kafka speak about the author and his age clearly and confidently to the world. In *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor experiences a nightmarish complex that leads to the urge to adapt himself to the bizarre, changing world. [10] Anyway, Kafka deals with the dream moderately, not examining it too closely because it is like an unopened letter. It is impossible to understand a dream, but anyone can be fascinated by it. But one day, the dream will become a reality where it is the path of the universe to speak with the man of the upcoming and warn about it.

3. Conclusion

"The Metamorphosis," published in the beginning days of the modern age, reflects the modernist themes closely attached to the decay of tradition and the rise of industrialisation and isolation. He focuses full attention on Gregor and entirely exhibits his perspective, thoughts, and feelings; it is also considered one of modernism's elements. From first to last, we can see what he thinks, and sometimes, it goes back to the past and skips forward if nothing happens for a few days. This is the routine thing we can watch the whole, and maybe the gap indirectly speaks of the depression he experienced. It is communicable when we get into the novella that pictures modern society and Gregor's depression and isolation.

From Gregor's point of view, the reason for depression is society and his family. When he worked as a civil servant, it was a successful career. Later, he adapted himself as a travelling salesman for his father to clear his debt; his life became miserable and overloaded with expectations and stress. This adaptation became a severe injury for him, and now his family has failed to rectify it. Within a short span, he understood his family and found it was not a place to live. Kafka provokes the face of capitalism through his suffering and loss of love and cares from his family, symbolising modern society and its failure to uplift individuals with their care and attention. For a man, it is essential to get emotional support from his family; that is the only way to show emotional bonding and love. Kafka wrote in the third person narrative, but it talked about Gregor's thoughts and expressed in the first person maybe to show the family's reaction after his death.

The experience of Gregor in the modern world or alienated world shows the absurdity of life and the spiritual emptiness in an individual. There is a belief that the almighty only cures man's injuries and brings happiness to his life. Modern society's lack of spirituality and bitterness brings a tragic end to Gregor. Kafka is also like Gregor, who loves their family very much, but they fail to seek inner happiness that is only from God. Introducing God in this analysis is to find the start of Gregor's depression. Of course, Gregor suffered a lot after his transformation into a modern society: an authoritarian father, a lovable sister and mother, and his boss. Other people can also experience it, but Kafka failed to do Jewish rituals and forgot his ways. It may be the drawback in Kafka's life and not shown in Gregor's transformation. Kafka's notion of Gregor is to pour the agony that he experienced.

If Gregor sought God, maybe he would get relief and no need to get depressed about reality. It has not happened in his life. So, it is mysterious. However, he alarms the upcoming generations through his characters to know life's difficulties and machines' replacement in day-to-day life. The love between mother and son is questioned, and there are stumbling blocks to seeing Gregor. He missed her, and his sister could not

understand him fully like his mother. It is the longing of his mother to see and appease him, but the situation is different. She could not move with Gregor. Kafka shows that the love and care between mother and son are also a question and impossible in a troubled society.

Thus, the family gets broken by a mysterious adaptation that fully exhibits an individual's depression that is not taken seriously by the family. Grete's affection towards Gregor is good at the beginning; when she finds insect-like behaviour in him, it becomes disgusting, and she changes her mind that it is not Gregor. So clearly, he was hated by his family, and the decision to leave was right for him. Society can reject him, but his own family is still an intolerable one for him. He runs, loves, and uplifts his family, and the same family expects his absence. Yes, Gregor is seen as a good, innocent man, but his mother can only understand and love his innocence. So, at last, we can see his mother seems dull when Grete wants to get rid of Gregor. She never wants her son to die; the situation accuses her of agreeing with Grete and Gregor's father. She never says 'NO' to Grete's words. It also seems mysterious: "Why did she not talk for his lovable son?" Yes, she remains silent. Like Grete, she also thinks, "Does this insect will be Gregor?" After a lot of confusion, she was there.

We can see the same thing in today's world, where so many Gregors are in the postmodern world. Fragmentation in family and disputes between individuals and society is not seen in a shallow manner. In the deepest of depth, it can be found that an individual searches for his identity to improve his presence. Gregor's transformation can be seen as mysterious, but it is unlocked today by experiencing alienation, isolation, and the absurdity of life. Surely, adapting ordinary life to machinery life and the upcoming sufferings brings drastic changes in the individual's world that they are experiencing today. It can be seen in the exaggerated mode in this novella. Gregor did not care about his transformation when he woke up; it was realised later. Likewise, we also live in Gregor's world and never feel the hardness of life, which is practiced later.

Comparing Kafka's world to the postmodern world, it is similar, and everything is unlocked, which is considered mysterious. His depression is sensed throughout the novella, which distributes his innocence, and his hunger for love is insufficient to consume and not given as he expects. This is how Kafka draws Gregor's world on his own and exhibits how bitter the depression is. He submits his life to Gregor's hands and reveals his presence until now to make him aware of his painful experience. Kafka's major term is 'Kafktrap' [4]; here, Gregor is trapped in the modern machinery world and loses his natural, ordinary life because of his family. There is guilt in his mind about the sudden change, and his family accuses his change as evidence of guilt that he has no eligibility to live at home. Still, at this point, we can understand the exact notion of how Kafka tries to exhibit his sufferings to society.

Thus, the novella alarms the depression of the protagonist and the reality of the age. The reality of the age shows people's mindset and forcible changes resulting in calamity. The novella makes sure about this and indirectly warns about stressed situations. Kafka is the greatest writer of the twentieth century; his works support all time and prove their presence in every age till now by their characters.

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