

The Metamorphosis

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This article is about the literary work by Franz Kafka. For the biological process, see

[Metamorphosis](#). For other uses, see [Metamorphosis \(disambiguation\)](#).

"Gregor Samsa" redirects here. For the post-rock band, see [Gregor Samsa \(band\)](#). For their eponymous EP, see [Gregor Samsa \(EP\)](#).

Metamorphosis



First edition cover

Author(s)	Franz Kafka
Original title	<i>Die Verwandlung</i>
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Language	German
Genre(s)	Philosophical novella , absurdist fiction
Publisher	Kurt Wolff Verlag , Leipzig
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The Metamorphosis ([German](#): *Die Verwandlung*) is a novella by [Franz Kafka](#), first published in [1915](#). It is often cited as one of the seminal works of fiction of the 20th century and is widely studied in colleges and universities across the western world. The story begins with a

traveling salesman, Gregor Samsa, waking to find himself transformed into a monstrous insect-like creature.

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[\[edit\]](#) Plot summary

[\[edit\]](#) Part I

One day Gregor Samsa, a travelling salesman, wakes up to find himself transformed into a giant insect. Confused, he looks around his room which appeared normal. He decides to fall asleep again and forget what happened in the hope that everything will revert back to normal. He tries to roll over to his right but discovers that he cannot due to his new body - he is stuck on his hard, convex back. He feels an itch on his stomach and tries to touch the area with his leg. He retracts immediately as the area was highly sensitive.

He reflects on how dreary life as a travelling salesman is and how he would quit his job if his family were not dependent on his income. He looks at the wall clock and realizes that he has overslept missed his train for work. Gregor's mother knocks on the door and he answers her. She notices that his voice has changed and gets worried, also because he has never been late for work. His sister, Grete, to whom he was very close whispers through the door and begs him to open the door. All his family members think that he is ill and ask him to open the door. He tries to get out of bed but himself incapable of moving his body. While trying to move, he finds that his office manager has showed up to check up on him. He finally rocks his body to the floor and calls out that he will open the door shortly.

Feeling offended by Gregor's delayed response in opening the door, the manager warns him of the consequences of missing work. He adds that his recent performance has been unsatisfactory. Gregor disagrees and tells him that he will open the door shortly. None of persons on the other side of the door could understand a single word he uttered (Gregor was unaware of the fact that his voice has also transformed) and conclude that he is seriously ill. Finally, Gregor manages to unlock and open the door with his mouth. He apologizes to the office manager for the delay. Horrified by the sight of Gregor's appearance, the manager bolts out of the apartment. Gregor tries to catch up with him but his father drives him back into the bedroom with a cane and a rolled newspaper. Gregor injures himself squeezing back through the doorway, and his father slams the door shut. Gregor, exhausted, falls asleep.

[\[edit\]](#) Part II

Gregor wakes and sees that someone has put milk and bread in his room. Initially excited, he quickly discovers that he has no taste for milk, once one of his favorite foods. He settles himself under a couch. The next morning, his sister comes in, sees that he has not touched the milk, and replaces it with rotting food scraps, which Gregor happily eats. This begins a routine in which his sister feeds him and cleans up while he hides under the couch, afraid that his appearance will frighten her. Gregor spends his time listening through the wall to his family members talking. They often discuss the difficult financial situation they find themselves in now that Gregor can't provide for them. Gregor also learns that his mother wants to visit him, but his sister and father will not let her.

Gregor grows more comfortable with his changed body. He begins climbing the walls and ceiling for amusement. Discovering Gregor's new pastime, Grete decides to remove some of the furniture to give Gregor more space. She and her mother begin taking furniture away, but Gregor finds their actions deeply distressing. He tries to save a picture on the wall of a woman wearing a fur hat, fur scarf, and a fur muff. Gregor's mother sees him hanging on the wall and passes out. Grete calls out to Gregor—the first time anyone has spoken directly to him since his transformation. Gregor runs out of the room and into the kitchen. His father returns from his new job, and misunderstanding the situation, believes Gregor has tried to attack the mother. The father throws apples at Gregor, and one sinks into his back and remains lodged there. Gregor manages to get back into his bedroom but is severely injured.

[\[edit\]](#) Part III

Gregor's family begins leaving the bedroom door open for a few hours each evening so he can watch them. He sees his family wearing down as a result of his transformation and their new poverty. Even Grete seems to resent Gregor now, feeding him and cleaning up with a minimum of effort. The family replaces their maid with a cheap cleaning lady who tolerates Gregor's appearance and speaks to him occasionally. They also take on three boarders, requiring them to move excess furniture into Gregor's room, which distresses Gregor. Gregor has also lost his taste for the food Grete brings and he almost entirely ceases eating.

One evening, the cleaning lady leaves Gregor's door open while the boarders lounge about the living room. Grete has been asked to play the violin for them, and Gregor creeps out of his bedroom to listen. The boarders, who initially seemed interested in Grete, grow bored with her performance, but Gregor is transfixed by it. One of the boarders spots Gregor and they become alarmed. Gregor's father tries to shove the boarders back into their rooms, but

the three men protest and announce that they will move out immediately without paying rent because of the disgusting conditions in the apartment.

Grete tells her parents that they must get rid of Gregor or they will all be ruined. Her father agrees, wishing Gregor could understand them and would leave of his own accord. Gregor does in fact understand and slowly moves back to the bedroom. There, determined to rid his family of his presence, Gregor dies.

Upon discovering that Gregor is dead, the family feels a great sense of relief. The father kicks out the boarders and decides to fire the cleaning lady, who has disposed of Gregor's body. The family takes a trolley ride out to the countryside, during which they consider their finances. Months of spare living as a result of Gregor's condition have left them with substantial savings. They decide to move to a better apartment. Grete appears to have her strength and beauty back, which leads her parents to think about finding her a husband.

[\[edit\]](#) Characters

[\[edit\]](#) Gregor Samsa

Gregor is the main character of the story. He works as a traveling salesman in order to provide money for his sister and parents. He wakes up one morning as a large insect-like creature. After the metamorphosis, Gregor is unable to work. This prompts his family to begin working once again.

The name "Gregor Samsa" appears to derive partly from literary works Kafka had read. The hero of *The Story of Young Renate Fuchs*, by German-Jewish novelist [Jakob Wassermann](#) (1873–1934), is a certain Gregor Samsa. The Viennese author [Leopold von Sacher-Masoch](#), whose sexual imagination gave rise to the idea of [masochism](#), is also an influence. Sacher-Masoch (note the letters Sa-Mas) wrote *Venus in Furs* (1870), a novel whose hero assumes the name Gregor at one point. A "Venus in furs" literally recurs in *The Metamorphosis* in the picture that Gregor Samsa has hung on his bedroom wall.^[1] The name Samsa is similar to Kafka in its play of vowels and consonants: "Five letters in each word. The S in the word Samsa has the same position as the K in the word Kafka. The A "is in the second and fifth positions in both words."^[2]

Gregor Samsa appears to be based upon Kafka himself. As when Kafka suffered from [insomnia](#) he feared he was repulsive and a burden to his family, during this time his sister was his caretaker.^[3]

[\[edit\]](#) Grete Samsa

Grete is Gregor's younger sister, who becomes his caretaker after the metamorphosis. Initially Grete and Gregor have a close relationship but this quickly fades. While Grete initially volunteers to feed him and clean his room, she grows more and more impatient with the burden and begins to leave his room in disarray out of spite. She plays the violin and dreams of going to the conservatory, a dream Gregor had intended to make happen. Gregor planned on making the announcement on Christmas Day. To help provide an income for the family after Gregor's transformation, she starts working as a salesgirl.

[\[edit\]](#) Mr. Samsa

Mr. Samsa is Gregor's father. After the metamorphosis, he is forced to return to work in order to support the family financially. His attitude towards his son is harsh; he regards the transformed Gregor with disgust and possibly even fear. Mr. Samsa may have been based on Kafka's father, who treated Kafka harshly.

[\[edit\]](#) Mrs. Samsa

Mrs. Samsa is Grete and Gregor's mother. She is initially shocked at Gregor's transformation, however she wants to enter his room. This proves too much for her, thus giving rise to a conflict between her maternal impulse and sympathy and her fear and revulsion of Gregor's new form.

[\[edit\]](#) Translation

Kafka's sentences often deliver an unexpected impact just before the full stop—that being the finalizing meaning and focus. This is achieved from the construction of sentences in the original German, which requires that the participle be positioned at the end of the sentence. For example, in the opening sentence, it is the final word, *verwandelt*, that indicates transformation:

Als Gregor Samsa eines Morgens aus unruhigen Träumen erwachte, fand er sich in seinem Bett zu einem ungeheueren Ungeziefer verwandelt.

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

These constructions are not directly replicable in English, so it is up to the translator to provide the reader with the effect of the original text.^[4]

English translators have often sought to render the word *Ungeziefer* as "insect", but this is not strictly accurate. In Middle German, *Ungeziefer* literally means "unclean animal not suitable for sacrifice"^[5] and is sometimes used colloquially to mean "bug" – a very general term, unlike the scientific sounding "insect". Kafka had no intention of labeling Gregor as any specific thing, but instead wanted to convey Gregor's disgust at his transformation. The phrasing used by [Joachim Neugroschel](#)^[6] is "transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect" whereas David Wyllie says "transformed in his bed into a horrible vermin".

However, in Kafka's letter to his publisher of 25 October 1915, in which he discusses his concern about the cover illustration for the first edition, he uses the term *Insekt*, saying "The insect itself is not to be drawn. It is not even to be seen from a distance."^[7]

Ungeziefer has sometimes been translated as "[cockroach](#)", "[dung beetle](#)", "[beetle](#)", and other highly specific terms. The term "dung beetle" or *Mistkäfer* is in fact used in the novella by the cleaning lady near the end of the story, but it is not used in the narration. *Ungeziefer* also denotes a sense of separation between himself and his environment: he is unclean and must therefore be secluded.

[Vladimir Nabokov](#), who was a [lepidopterist](#) as well as writer and literary critic, insisted that Gregor was not a cockroach, but a beetle with wings under his shell, and capable of flight. Nabokov left a sketch annotated "just over three feet long" on the opening page of his (heavily corrected) English teaching copy.^[8] In his accompanying lecture notes, Nabokov discusses the type of insect Gregor has been transformed into, concluding that Gregor "is not, technically, a dung beetle. He is merely a big beetle."^[9]

[edit] Adaptations to other media

There are many film versions of the story, mostly [short films](#), including a 1975 TV version by [Jan Nĕmec](#), a 1977 [animation](#) by [Caroline Leaf](#), a 1987 TV movie by [Jim Goddard](#), a 1993 video by [Carlos Atanes](#), and a longer (80-minute) 2002 version directed by [Russian](#) theatrical director [Valery Fokin](#).

A stage adaptation was performed by [Steven Berkoff](#) in 1969. Berkoff's text was also used for the [libretto](#) to [Brian Howard's](#) 1983 [opera](#) *Metamorphosis*.^[10] Another stage adaptation was performed in 2006 as a co-production of the [Icelandic](#) company [Vesturport](#) and the [London](#)-based [Lyric Hammersmith](#), adapted and directed by Gisli Örn Gardarsson and [David Farr](#), with a music soundtrack performed by [Nick Cave](#) and Warren Ellis, premiering at the Lyric Hammersmith in London. That production has since been performed in 2007 in the [National Theatre of Iceland](#) in [Reykjavik, Iceland](#), in a 2008 [UK](#) tour in [London](#), [Liverpool](#), [Manchester](#), [Birmingham](#), [Newcastle](#), [Plymouth](#), and again [London](#), also in 2008 in [Seoul](#), [South Korea](#), and [Dublin, Ireland](#), in 2009 in [Hong Kong, China](#), and in [Hobart, Tasmania](#), [Wollongong](#), and [Sydney](#), all [Australia](#), in 2010 in [Bogotá, Colombia](#), [Reykjavik, Iceland](#), and [New York City, USA](#), and in 2011 in [Saint Petersburg](#) and [Norilsk](#), both [Russia](#).^[11] Another stage adaptation was performed in [Dhaka, Bangladesh](#) in 2005 by the Centre for Asian Theatre.^[12] As of March 2007, that performance was still continuing in Bangladesh.

[American](#) cartoonist [Robert Crumb](#) drew a comic adaptation of the novella, which is included in the 1993 book *Introducing Kafka*, an illustrated biography of Kafka also known as *Kafka for Beginners*, *R. Crumb's Kafka*, or simply *Kafka*. American comic artist [Peter Kuper](#) illustrated a graphic-novel version, first published by the [Crown Publishing Group](#) in 2003.^[13]

[edit] Allusions/references from other works

[edit] Stage

- [Philip Glass](#) composed incidental music for two separate theater productions of the story. These two themes, along with two themes from the [Errol Morris](#) film *The Thin Blue Line*, were incorporated into a five-part piece of music for solo piano entitled *Metamorphosis*.
- [Jewish Community High School of the Bay](#) wrote and performed an adaptation of the book, re-imagined as a production performed by a Jewish theater company in the Warsaw Ghetto. They also performed this adaptation at the [Edinburgh Fringe Festival](#) (through the [American High School Theater Festival](#)) where it received a 4/5 star review from [ThreeWeeks](#).^[14]

In 1952, a then-unknown [James Dean](#) took part in a staged reading of the book at The Village Theater in New York. <http://www.jamesdean.com/about/timeline.html>

[\[edit\]](#) Literature

- [Marc Estrin](#)'s debut surrealist novel *Insect Dreams: The Half Life of Gregor Samsa* (2002)^[15] "resurrects Kafka's half-cockroach Gregor character"^[16] vis-à-vis the world between 1915 and 1945.
- [Brian Keenan](#)'s autobiography *An Evil Cradling* makes reference to Kafka 'My thoughts were preoccupied by my loss of humanity. Was I a kind of Kafkaesque character transformed out of human form into some animal? Something to be locked away from the world?'
- [Lance Olsen](#)'s novel *Anxious Pleasures: A Novel After Kafka* retells Kafka's novella from the points of view of those inside his family and out.

Jake Beasley played an uncanny Gregor Samsa as a Gigantic Insect in last year's production of *Metamorphosis*.

[\[edit\]](#) Film

- The 2011 short film *Metamorphosis*, directed by David Yohe and written by Jason Goldberg is inspired by Kafka's literary classic about a teenage boy transforming into a human-sized cockroach. Nick Searcy, Patricia Bethune and Matt Angel star in the film.
- Both the [1968 version](#) and the [2005 version](#) of the film *The Producers* include a scene where the two protagonists are searching for a sure flop. The opening for the play of *Metamorphosis* is read and rejected for being too good.
- The 2008 film *The Reader* features [Ralph Fiennes](#) reading aloud from Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*.
- In 2002 a Russian version titled *Prevrashchenie* was directed by [Valery Fokin](#) with [Yevgeny Mironov](#) as Gregor.^[17]
- In 1995, the actor [Peter Capaldi](#) won an Oscar for his short-film *Franz Kafka's It's a Wonderful Life*. The plot of the film has the author (played by [Richard E. Grant](#)) trying to write the opening line of *Metamorphosis* and experimenting with various things that Gregor might turn into, such as a banana or a kangaroo. The film is also notable for a number of [Kafkaesque](#) moments.
- In 1993 [Carlos Atanes](#) directed *The Metamorphosis of Franz Kafka*, a controversial adaptation based on *The Metamorphosis* as well on biographical details from Kafka's family.
- in [Noah Baumbach](#)'s *The Squid and the Whale*, [Jeff Daniels](#)'s and [Jesse Eisenberg](#)'s characters make several references to *The Metamorphosis*.
- The novella is referenced in the 1986 film *The Fly* when Seth Brundle, nearing the end of his own metamorphosis into "Brundlefly", says to Ronnie Quaife, "I'm an insect...who dreamt he was a man...and loved it. But now the dream is over...and the insect is awake."
- In the Mel Brooks film *Space Balls*, President Scroob orders the crew of 'Spaceball One' to begin Metamorphosis, prompting Dark Helmet to ask "Ready Kafka?"

[\[edit\]](#) Comics

- American cartoonist [Robert Crumb](#) drew an illustrated adaptation of the novella which appears in the book *Introducing Kafka*.

- In the comic book [Johnny the Homicidal Maniac](#) by [Jhonen Vasquez](#), the eponymous Johnny is plagued by a roach that keeps appearing in his house no matter how many times he kills it (whether or not this roach is immortal or simply many different roaches is up to interpretation) and is affectionately named "Mr. Samsa".
- In [The Simpsons](#) book *Treehouse of Horror Spook-tacular*, [Matt Groening](#) did a [spoof](#) on the metamorphosis, entitling it "Metamorphosimpsons".
- [Peter Kuper](#) (illustrator of Kafka's [Give It Up!](#)) also adapted Kafka's *Metamorphosis*.
- [Corbeyran / Horne](#) illustrated Kafka's *Metamorphosis* in 2009.

[\[edit\]](#) Music

- [Gregor Samsa](#) is a band from Virginia formed in 2000 and fronted by Champ Bennett.
- The [Neue Deutsche Härte](#) band [Samsas Traum](#) gets its name from the story.
- [Widespread Panic](#) allude to this work in their song "Imitation Leather Shoes" off of the album [Don't Tell the Band](#).

My little brother is an insect / He likes to crawl around his room / His mother shudders at the sight of him / His pappy is a businessman / Every move he makes is torture / He cannot speak words any more / Our sister likes to flip him on his back / And watch little brother squirm

- The Christian rock band [Showbread](#) references The Metamorphosis in their song titled "Samsa Meets Kafka" on their album [No Sir, Nihilism Is Not Practical](#).
- [Extreme metal](#) band [Imperial Vengeance](#) adapted the story into the penultimate track of their 2011 album [Black Heart of Empire](#), "Of Insect and Allegory".
- Pakistani [ambient](#) musician Asfandiyar Khan has a song titled "Gregor Samsa is Dead, Long Live Gregor Samsa" off his debut release, [Snow Makes Things Perfect](#).

[\[edit\]](#) Television

- **On the TV Show** [Home Movies](#), the characters create a [rock opera](#) based on Metamorphosis.
- In one episode of the television show [Arthur \(TV series\)](#), Brain dreams that he is a giant cockroach because he is scornfully referred to as a 'pest' by his friends for being domineering.
- In one episode of the television show [My So-Called Life](#), the characters must read The Metamorphosis and write a paragraph about it as an assignment in English class. Jordan Catalano, Rickie Vasquez, Brian Krakow and Sharon Cherski all discuss the story and the meaning of The Metamorphosis.

[\[edit\]](#) References

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- ↑ Kafka (1996, 3 & 75).
- ↑ [Ryan McKittrick speaks with director Dominique Serrand and Gideon Lester about *Amerika*](#)
- ↑ Kafka, Franz (1996). *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, [ISBN 1-56619-969-7](#). (p. xi).
- ↑ [ungeziefer: Dictionary / Wörterbuch \(BEOLINGUS, TU Chemnitz\)](#)

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14. [^] ["ED2011 Theatre Review: Kafka's Metamorphosis As Performed By The Actors Of Nowy Teatr Kameralny \(The American High School Theatre Festival\)"](#). *ThreeWeeks*. Wednesday August 31, 2011. Retrieved 29 November 2011.
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16. [^] [San Francisco Chronicle](#)
17. [^] [Prevrashchenie](#) at the [Internet Movie Database](#)

[[edit](#)] External links



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Online editions

- (German) [Die Verwandlung](#) at DigBib.org (text, pdf, HTML)
- [The Metamorphosis](#), translated 2009 by Ian Johnston of [Malaspina University-College, Nanaimo, BC](#)
- [The Metamorphosis](#) at [Project Gutenberg](#), translated by [David Wyllie](#)
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Commentary

- [Lecture on *The Metamorphosis*](#) by [Vladimir Nabokov](#)
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