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The Purpose of Suffering in “The Metamorphosis”

Franz Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis” reveals the pointlessness of human achievement. The contrast between his simple and denotative diction and the bizarre world creates a dark yet satirical style. A narrator guides us inside and outside the thoughts of Gregor through third-person in free indirect discourse, allowing Kafka to rationalize the unnatural events that occur to Gregor. The narrative style gives the reader a sense of how the characters change after Gregor’s transformation. Kafka emphasizes how Gregor’s transformation causes misfortune for his entire family, however, in the final passage the tone of the text changes to one of hope. Through an analysis of the text’s characters, plot, setting, and tone, this essay will demonstrate how the final passage of “The Metamorphosis” is about how your response to your struggles define and shape who you become.

Gregor’s struggles start at the beginning of the text when he wakes up and discovers that he has been turned into a monstrous verminous bug. It takes him a long time to finally understand that he can’t continue working due to his transformation. Although Gregor does become more comfortable with his new body, preferring to be in tighter spaces and climb on the walls, he still struggles with his past human self and even puts up a fight when his mother and sister are “taking away from him everything he cherished” (Kafka 46). In his selfishness to preserve his childhood belongings, he terrifies his mother who was previously excited to finally get to see him since his transformation. Gregor continues to cause problems for his family in his own selfishness and eventually dies being unable to adjust to his new struggles.

Grete is the first person in their family who manages to accept Gregor’s grotesque transformation. Although she is terrified of Gregor at first, she becomes the main caregiver and eventually adjusts to the routine of feeding him and cleaning his room. She does the job as her role in the family and even goes as far as to get angry at her mother for trying to intervene to spare her the pain of seeing her transformed son. This is much different than her life before Gregor’s transformation, which she is described as “a somewhat useless young woman” (40). At the peak of conflict in the text, she ends up getting angry at Gregor and addresses him by name for the first time, showing authority. She continues caring for Gregor as a responsibility and ends up getting a part time job and studying to further her career. It is Grete who convinces her parents in a logical manner that it is time to get rid of Gregor. In the final passage with their family finally free of Gregor, her parents notice how much she has grown despite all the troubles she has faced. She manages to overcome the struggles of taking care of Gregor and supporting the family financially, and has promising prospects for the next stage of her life.

The events of “The Metamorphosis” mostly occur from the perspective of Gregor at the start of his transformation up until his death. The story shows how Gregor attempts to overcome his new struggles, but the plot indicates a deeper meaning to the events. In the final passage, the view has changed from mostly being on Gregor to being on his family. Each of the members of the family are now employed, while before they were all ungratefully relying on Gregor financially. Even though Gregor’s parents do not seem to improve throughout the story as much as Grete does, they still make some minor progress through enduring many sacrifices. Through their struggles with Gregor, working to support the family, and keeping the lodgers satisfied, they all managed to push through their hardships and plan new dreams for their futures.

Most of the text takes place in Gregor’s bedroom, and the setting doesn’t change until the final passage when they leave the house and ride the tram. The apartment was a place of confinement where they were stuck for months to endure Gregor because they were too afraid to leave him alone. The family considered their change in dwelling to be “the greatest improvement in their situation” (77). This is symbolic to how a caterpillar is confined to a cocoon until the metamorphosis is complete and it emerges as a butterfly. Additionally, this is indicated at the end when “at the end of their journey the daughter first lifted herself up and stretched her young body” (77). Grete manages to transform into a “beautiful and voluptuous young woman” after taking on new responsibilities after Gregor’s transformation.

Throughout the text, Kafka portrays the tone of the story to be tragic and helpless. Gregor continuously struggles with his human past and causes problems for his family. It isn’t until the final passage that there is a clear shift in the tone of the story. The diction and syntax changes to create a different atmosphere as before, as revealed in parts of the story such as describing the car as being “engulfed by the warm sun” (77). Furthermore, the Samsa’s are relaxed and content with their current life, which contrasts against all their earlier conflicts when Gregor was alive. Had the story ended before the final paragraph, it would have stayed a tragedy. The tone of the story changes to that of hope and optimism, and reveals the progress that the rest of the family has made throughout the text.

Everyone struggles through difficult parts of their life. Even though Gregor’s struggles are different than most, his response to them creates problems for his family because he is unable to let go of his human past. Through caring for Gregor and taking on new responsibilities, Grete is able to metamorphose into a woman and is prepared for the next stage of her life. Through the last passage in the text, the story changes to one of hope and optimism and highlights all the progress that the family has made through their hardships. These struggles change the characters in both positive and negative ways, and demonstrate that people cannot change without suffering.

Works Cited

Kafka, Franz. *The Metamorphosis*. www.planetebook.com/ebooks/The-Metamorphosis.pdf.