

INTRO

In this essay, I will look at the situations in which Gregor Samsa (Metamorphosis) and Poseidon (Poseidon) find themselves. I will claim that we can understand Kafka's attitude towards modern society by looking at the similarities between those two situations.

ANALYSIS OF TEXT

Kafka begins the Metamorphosis (75) with Gregor Samsa literally finding himself transformed into a giant cockroach. Ironically, he seems more worried about being late for his 'exhausting profession' than by the fact that he is now an actual insect. This tells us a lot about how his job affects him. At one point he thinks to himself, "If I didn't have to exercise restraint for the sake of my parents, then I would have quit a long time ago" (Metamorphosis 76). He hates his job with a passion, but for reasons (such as his parents' debt) is unable to quit his job.

Poseidon's situation is very similar. At the beginning of the short story, we see Poseidon sitting at his desk, doing figures. This image of Poseidon betrays all expectations of what people would typically have of the 'God of the Sea'. Later in the text, we even hear of how Poseidon is irritated by the conceptions that people have of him 'riding through the tides with his trident'. When, in fact, what he actually does for a living is a boring office job. Poseidon and Gregor both experience similar dissatisfaction towards their jobs.

Even though they are both dissatisfied, they are somehow unable to rid themselves of their

situation. The familial ties binding Gregor to his family as well as his concern for his sister prevent him from quitting his job to do what he wants. He is also tied down by hopes that he has towards the future. He hopes to pay off his parents' debt after 5-6 years of working, and to afford sending his sister to study music at the conservatory with the money he's been saving up. These two factors force Gregor to endure the current (past?) situation that he is experiencing. Poseidon, on the other hand, is able to switch jobs but unfortunately 'nothing suited him quite as well as his current position'. Poseidon's attachment to the sea is also described physically. At the very idea of a job away from the sea, Poseidon's 'divine breathing would become troubled and his brazen chest began to tremble'.

Their jobs seem to act like parasites that latch onto their lives. They feel great discomfort, but are unable to rid themselves of it due to the unbearable pain that it would cause. As parasites, their jobs cause them to have no energy for anything else. For example, Gregor is, for all intents and purposes, a robot. He carries out his tasks diligently, has no social life, and never misses a day of work (until the fateful incident). Poseidon doesn't seem to have friends either (aside from his 'assistants' whom he never asks for help) and has a habit of joking about the 'fall of the world' that would finally allow him to quit his job.

KAFKA

Kafka presents no hope of escape for his characters. Poseidon could quit his job, but he would not find meaning in anything else. Gregor *might* be free after 5-6 years of working, however, there is nothing stopping his parents from taking on more debt to improve their social standing and forcing Gregor to pay it off again.

Kafka's writings tell us that modern society presents us with all sorts of hopes and dreams.

However, the future that these hopes represent are not real. In Gregor's case, it is unlikely that his parents would stop leeching off of him, and very unlikely for him to transform back into a human after becoming a cockroach. In Poseidon's case, fantasizing about the fall of the world distracts him from the situation that he is currently in, and waiting for something to happen to him won't help Poseidon either. It is meaningless for them to suffer for a future that does not exist. Indirectly, Kafka tells us that we must live in the present. He does not dismiss the idea of hope, however, we must hope for a future that is achievable and possible. The individual must be careful not to confuse what society presents as meaningful to him/herself with what is truly meaningful.

If Gregor and Poseidon were to take Kafka's advice seriously, maybe they might end up with a happier ending. For example, Gregor could cut ties with his parents permanently while secretly sending money to his sister to support her. After transforming into a cockroach, Gregor could even accept the nature of his being and move out of the house immediately to look for a better life (possibly in nature). Poseidon could learn to accept his situation and try to make it better by delegating parts of his job to his assistants and providing them with training when necessary. That way, he would be able to take days off to travel the sea and let his assistants handle everything (once he gains enough confidence in them). These new situations are not as ideal as Gregor transforming back into a human, or Poseidon being the 'God of the Sea' that travels for a living. However, these hopes and futures are real and much more tangible than the ones that Gregor and Poseidon hold on to.

REFERENCES

Kafka, Franz. "Metamorphosis and other stories (M. Hofmann, Trans.)." *London, NY: Penguin* (2007).

Kafka, Franz. "Poseidon." jlet.org/poseidon.html.