

Kafka's metamorphosis: vision of the body

Literature



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Through the metamorphosis of Gregor Samsa, Kafka not only traces modern man's sense of alienation from his body, but also anticipates Postmodernist visions on identity—the way that identity relates to the body, and the social constructs of marginality and normality, that infallibly reminds us the works of Michel Foucault, who examined the disciplining and medicalization of body as a form of social control. Gregor Samsa's sudden discovery of his transformed body is another form of the horrible confusion that Samuel Beckett later explores in his plays. There are no such pretty, healthy bodies in Beckett.

His characters are infirm, decrepit figures that are, as Beckett described them, “falling to bits”. Some theorists of the Body trace the emphasis on ‘normal’ body to industrial capitalism, which required a standardized body for factory work and labeled the ‘different’ body as ‘abnormal’. This social conditioning can also be associated with the recent dreads like anorexia and bulimia in especially teenage girls, who in the desire to wear ‘size zero’ dress, that is extremely popular in America and to look ‘wonderfully thin’ endanger their lives with starvation.

This is an example of how the market forces of capitalistic power play manipulate the concept of identity by constructing a ‘norm’ of the body. In spite of the traces of the modernist horror of fragmented identity, there is also an element of Postmodernist fantastic in Kafka's tale; where the transformation of the body is more marvelous than terrible. The 2001 film *Amelie* had a protagonist who literally melts when her love interest leaves the restaurant in which she works without asking her for a date—unmistakably reminding the viewer Kafka's vision of the Body as marvelous.