

The metamorphosis by franz kafka essay

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Franz Kafka, a world famous writer, was brought up in a family, where the dictatorship of the father prevented the family from having natural warm relationships. Maybe this factor allowed the author learn from the childhood that the relationships between people, together with the moral values, are often neglected, while the materialistic views have always been topical.

This is one of the key issues fairly depicted by Franz Kafka in his story “ The Metamorphosis”, the bright example of modernism story highlighting realistic problems concerning traditional values perverted by the surrounding society.

Having described an outcast in his family, the writer shows alienation of a person with his or her traditional values and views in the cruel today’s society which is, day by day, losing its important human values, caring only of material values, oppressing distinctive and extraordinary individualities and spreading gregarious way of behavior.

Within several thousand years each generation have been creating and passing down their assumptions, moral and values considered to be conventional and humane, which were held both by families and by societies.

Family values have been transferred into common values of community and society, but still their essence stayed and still stays the same as it was at the very beginning. However, the present society has quite perverse understanding of values, and today a reverse process can be traced – society influences family and dictates its own values to it.

Such loss of traditional humane values like empathy, love, respect, loyalty, and honesty has affected Franz Kafka who illustrated the metamorphosis or transformation of customary values on the example of the family of the Samsas. " The story presents the reader with the metaphor for a human existence in which spiritual reflection and interpersonal communication have been sacrificed for the sake of materialistic efficiency" (Die Verwandlung 1915: 1).

Indeed, showing the main character Gregor Samsa, who has found himself transformed " into a gigantic insect" physically (Kafka, 29), however, stayed human mentally, Kafka outlines his ability to preserve and keep humane values despite the fact of being an insect and having ugly appearance which is not accepted by his family, or society (in broader understanding).

His sincere genuine feelings towards his family contradict their cruelty and careless behavior towards him, a suffering insect. Hence the main character impersonates traditional values which are lost by his family and society, in general.

One of the most important values such as empathy is not inherent in our life any more, as Kafka shows. The family of Gregor-insect is not able to accept him as he is - with " his domelike brown belly" and " numerous legs, which were pitifully thin compared to the rest of his bulk" (Kafka, 32). Practically, the same happens in the society which is not willing to accept anything or anybody extraordinary and distinctive. In order to illustrate this issue more brightly, the writer uses a great paradox in his story.

The mentioned family feels no empathy for miserable Gregor, who really needs it, while the latter sympathizes his family, who do not require his sympathy at all. During his whole life Gregor Samsa has been working hard for the family, caring about them more than about himself, trying to give them the best he could, nevertheless he meet no giving back. Consequently, his idle care, love without answer and excessive empathy for his family turned him into helpless insect.

The only hope of the main character is loyalty of his sister Grete who has been always kind and caring towards Gregor, however, she also betrays him. Hence his hopes have been broken and loyalty has been lost. This illustration was used by Kafka to depict community's assumptions neglecting loyalty when it becomes of no use.

It is shown that Grete was loyal to Gregor until he had " the firm intention of sending her to the Conservatory" (Kafka, 44) and had decent work where he could earn money to provide her with respectable life. However, she changed her attitude drastically as soon as Gregor suffered transformation and became helpless and indigent. Thus, it is ironic that insect continues to possess the feeling of loyalty till its last days while people of the surrounding society have forgotten about it.

Moreover, such significant value as honesty is also lacking since all people's relationships are built on intrigues and pretence, what is highlighted in the story on the example of surface relationships between the main character and his family.

Neither family nor Gregor himself were honest in their lives – the family was pretending to love and care about Gregor all their life until metamorphosis changed him, and Gregor, in his turn, was pretending to be satisfied by everything including his way of living. Equally, honesty is ignored by communities and forgotten in the surrounding society in which success is achieved by deceitful means and self-interested measures, but not honesty.

Speaking about the greatest value of true love in Kafka's story, it seems to be replaced by selfishness and egoistic love. Gregor's parents seem to love him until he is a bread maker in his family, has respectable position in the society and socially acceptable appearance, thus it appears that love depends on outer factors.

Contrary, this value does not require any attractive appearance, but is of inside ground. The loss of love, especially inside the family, is a typical burning issue of modern society, thus Kafka depicts the main character of the story as lonely young man suffering from lack of any love.

All in all, on the sample of the family described in the story, Franz Kafka created an imagery of ill cruel society which is losing the most important traditional human moral values which have been passed down from generation to generation. That's why the problems which take place in the family of Gregor Samsa concern not only family life, but each surrounding community and the whole society.

Having analyzed the loss of customary human values referring to moral in Kafka's story, it is necessary to contrast assumption of the society which has

material values as a ground. In the story contrast of moral and material values is represented by insect having moral and family having material values. It is an irony that an insect possesses humane moral values, however, surrounding society, in the person of Samsa's family, has lost them and has only material concerns.

Franz Kafka has chosen such a harsh transformation of imposing Gregor's appearance into an ugly insect for the purpose of highlighting the role of appearance and social position as the most important material values in the society. To illustrate, family is merely shocked by the altered appearance of the son and brother, on his physical state; contrary, no member of the family pays attention at his emotional state and feelings, nobody notices that he stayed human inside.

After turning into insect Gregor is alienated by the family since his appearance became not like society used to see. This is his appearance and exterior that bothers the family to have decent life and be respected in the society. It is obvious that surrounding society, analogically to Gregor's family, does not care of any moral and personal emotions; the only concern of the surrounding community or society is outward forms and material values.

Furthermore, the writer shows an urgent conflict between moral and material values by illustrating Gregor's behavior as an instance. On the one hand, the main character feels empathy for his parents and sister who stayed without money and have to work in order to survive, and he feels even shame at that. His worrying has very complicated emotional ground and makes him

depressed each day more and more. On the other hand, feeling empathy and shame Gregor's thoughts are only of material conditions and welfare of the family.

He concerns about material values like his family does; thus there is an evident trace of surrounding society's influence. However, at the end of the story the writer presents the resolution of this conflict - Gregor dies because of shame and lack of moral values, but not due to lack of some material things and conveniences. Thus Kafka stresses on a significant role of true moral values and their predominance rather than transitory material values, which are widely dictated by the surrounding society therefore.

Everything that differs usually faces harsh reaction and deprecation, every extraordinary person revokes criticism and non-acceptance, unusual people are oppressed and even suppressed by the society. Alike, Gregor Samsa faces aversion and moral oppression by the surrounding people after his transformation into an ugly huge insect, what is out of the common and not acceptable by the surrounding society at all.

Describing how much the family is not willing to accept Gregor because of his appearance, the writer rigidly illustrates society's not willingness to accept individuals who differ from others. Though Gregor had only his appearance changed, but mentally he stayed the same, nevertheless surrounding people alienate from him. This imagery shows how society avoids unusual and non-standard personalities isolating and exiling them, making them outcasts among people.

Moreover, depicting Gregor's metamorphosis the writer shows his social alienation not only because of his altered appearance, but also because of his inner world which differs from the rest of society. Despite the fact that the surrounding human society lost the values, Gregor-insect managed to preserve them and stays an individual distinctive from the others.

In addition, Kafka draws an individual, who is completely helpless in the society. It is ironic that a person is lonely among persons; as a matter of fact, it is not an exception even in our present society. The person is alienated until he or she differs from the rest of society.

In this story, therefore the writer shows a try to accept the values which are dictated by the society. Numerous tries of Gregor-insect to get out of his bed are his tries to live in new body and image, what can be interpreted as a try to accept the values dictated by the society. However, at the end of the story Gregor dies, he was not able to live as an insect, thus Kafka means the failure to join the surrounding society and highlights that Gregor-insect stayed an individual person despite his appearance.

The fact that Gregor dies in the body of insect and no transformation happens shows us a clear position of the writer who does not accept the society as it is. It is better to die as an insect, however with values and being unusual, than to leave as a human having no values but possessing socially acceptable appearance and decent position in the surrounding society.

Despite the fact that any society has being formed by each separate individual, it is evident that the surrounding society dictates its principles

and values. In "The Metamorphosis" Kafka shows how Gregor's parents dictate him their own rules and values showing their gregarious behavior.

As Karl Marx noted on the story, "Once Gregor loses his cash value to his parents, well, then he ceases to be of interest to them" (Marx, 1). In addition, the parents completely comply with the rules of their flock i. e. surrounding society as their unwillingness to see socially non-acceptable appearance of insect shows.

In other words, they try to stay in their flock with their own assumptions and not to allow others to separate and differ from them. Such behavior can be explained by the fact that after separation from the flock, one differs from the rest and receives more freedom. Analogically, Gregor has been separated from his family because of his altered appearance, though he obtained subconsciously desirable freedom. However, his freedom does not satisfy the surrounding family and society in whole.

It is known that society keeps people in flock and wants them to behave like sheep of this flock for the reason that in such a way it is much easier to rule them. Once separate and behaving in other way, society isolates that person, what actually can be seen in the analyzed story.

The family makes Gregor to be outcast and isolates him in his room since he behaves in the manner contradicting to socially acceptable one. The main concern of the characters is to look like the others, like a flock, but not the inner world of the person whose feelings and emotional experience are of no interest.

A bright instant of the gregarious way of behavior is shown by Gregor's sister Grete. Analyzing her behavior towards her brother within the course of the action in the story, it is clearly seen that she was greatly influenced by the flock, which is her family in this case. At the very beginning Grete was trying to be individual person with her own views and values, she helped her brother and loved him.

However, day by day she begins to avoid Gregor more and more, and consequently, alienates completely from him under the influence of her parents and society. Thus being an individual with values Grete gradually joins the flock and changes her way of behavior. She is not interested in her brother any more; she has no love, empathy and respect; she gradually turns into sheep following its flock and losing its personal values.

Making up a conclusion, it should be highlighted that the story which has been analyzed is a bright example of Kafka's way to depict urgent social issues which amaze with their compelling arguments and up-to-dateness.

By means of detailed illustration of Gregor's life and his family, the writer wants us to recognize our cruel society in the image of the family, to see the values which are being lost by the society and to realize possible consequences. Thus, Kafka has successfully outlined importance of moral values which gradually weakens under the pressure of the surrounding community or society which tries to impose gregarious way of life to all individualities.

“ Die Verwandlung 1915.” Encyclopedia of German Literature. London: Routledge, 2000. Credo Reference. Web.

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Marx, Karl. “ On Franz Kafka’s Metamorphosis”. University of Liverpool. 11 June 2010.