

Rejection of the abnormal in the metamorphosis and the stranger

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



Both Gregor Samsa from Franz Kafka's novel *The Metamorphosis* and Meursault from Albert Camus' *The Stranger* struggle to communicate with the people around them. Although Samsa suffers from physical abnormalities while Meursault possesses ideological differences, both characters - through the two authors' use of imagery - are portrayed as social outcasts and face extreme challenges in their lives. Kafka uses imagery in *The Metamorphosis* to show how Gregor transforms physically, which leads to his rejection by society. He wakes up one morning to find himself in a man-size insect's body. Even before he reveals the details of the transformation, Kafka clearly illustrates the change when he describes Samsa as "he lay on his armored back and saw, as he raised his head a little, his domes, brown belly, divided in arc segment" (Kafka 13). Gregor Samsa's physical irregularities serve to show his alienation from other humans. Another example of imagery that is used to portray his physical abnormality is the description of Gregor's unusual white spots on his back, "(h)e felt a slight itching on top of his abdomen... and he found the itchy area which was entirely covered with small white spots" (Kafka 14). This quote immediately gives the image of a disturbing and strange appearance that is not usually experienced with a human being, but an insect. His new body that he is trying to settle in is unusually broad that makes him difficult to live with. Furthermore, the novel states that "(i)t was very easy to throw aside the blanket... but to continue was difficult, particularly because he was so unusually wide" (Kafka 16). The way Kafka uses imagery in this sentence by including the difficulty of throwing over the blanket creates a picture for the reader, showing the struggle Gregor faces with his new body. At one point in the text, it becomes

apparent that Gregor suddenly cannot communicate with other human beings. This inability is one trait that cuts him off from his family and the rest of the characters in the story. Kafka uses imagery to let the reader imagine the struggles to communicate with his mother. As the narrator describes, his mother calls Gregor's name, wondering why he is still locked up in his bedroom when he is supposed to be at work. Once he responded to his mother, "Gregor was startled when he heard his voice answering... as if from below, an irrepressibly painful squeaking, which left words positively distinct" (Kafka 16). By Kafka using the words "voice" and "squeaking", the situation that Gregor is in becomes very visual, as if we can hear him struggling to speak with his squeaky voice. Gregor loses a significant means of communication, and connecting with people; thus, he spends most of his days alone in his room, away from his family. Kafka has strongly used physical imagery in the novel to support Gregor's abnormal look. Physical irregularities are often greeted harshly by other people. Kafka now uses imagery to let the reader easily visualize the reactions from Gregor's family and friends about his appearance. The attorney asked in a remarkably quiet and curious voice, "(h)ave you heard Gregor speak yet? That was an animal's voice" (Kafka 23). By this short quote, the reader can already visualize the attorney's curious and suspicious expression while asking. Clearly, Gregor is unable to communicate with the attorney and explain to him his situation; the attorney starts to realize the abnormality. The reaction of his family, gives him a sense of rejection where he feels different, and has nobody to turn to. As shown in the novel, the reactions that came from his family and his attorney made him quite cautious, from the sudden scream of

“(o)h!” from his attorney, to when his mother “ collapsed right in the middle of her skirts,” and to when his father “ clenched his fist, showing a hostile expression, as if he wanted to push Gregor back into his room” (Kafka 25). All these examples are visual to the reader, showing his parents’ and attorney’s shocked and frightened reactions. Before Gregor was transformed into a vermin, Gregor’s isolation was self-inflicted. He chose the lonely life of a traveling salesman, and chose to lock his doors in his own home at night. After the change, it is more likely for others to lock him up in his room. This shows his rejection by society and how he has no control of it. Rather than being patient and concerned, his own father grabs a stick and a newspaper, forcing Gregor back into his bedroom with prods and fierce hisses. Kafka uses imagery to show the signs of rejection from the people around him. The reader can visualize the father’s quick and frightened instinct when he faced Gregor the gargantuan pest. Gregor begins to get the idea that since he is now a pest, society only views him as a bug and does not rely on him or take him seriously anymore, “ at Gregor’s first words, the attorney had already turned away, and now he only looked back at Gregor, pursed his lips and shrugged his shoulders” (26). Kafka uses small actions done by the attorney, such as cutting Gregor off, or shrugging his shoulders, to portray imagery and make the attorney’s rejection visual for the reader. This also shows that the attorney’s indifference toward him further illustrates that Gregor is now considered useless due to his appearance. With Gregor having an unusual physical look, he struggles to live his everyday life, rejected by society. Similarly, Meursault, the protagonist of *The Stranger*, is rejected by society, however, unlike Samsa, he is an outcast due to his refusal to play the game

set by social conventions rather than for his physical appearance. He is simply considered strange and an outcast because he refuses to lie and live the world of fantasy that his society participates in. Meursault does not care about hiding his lack of feelings by shedding false tears over his mother's death, "The sky was already filled with light. The sun was beginning to bear down on the earth and it was getting hotter by the minute... I was hot in my dark clothes. (Camus 15)" Camus uses this imagery to show that Meursault is thinking about the hot weather instead of praising for his mother, like the rest of the crowd. This quote that he uses is visual and can let the reader imagine the heat that Meursault is complaining about during his mother's wedding. Meursault has his own set of morals and might think an action of his is very normal, when completely illegal to society, "The trigger gave; I felt the smooth underside of the butt; and there, in that noise, sharp and deafening at the same time, is where it all started" (59). Camus first starts with this quote, mentioning two of the five senses, feel and hear, to let the reader picture the situation Meursault is in when attempting to shoot the Arab. Camus continues to use imagery in this scene by using a lot of words that release sound: "Then I fired four more times at the motionless body where the bullets lodged without a trace. And it was like knocking four quick times at the door of happiness" (59). This scene that Camus includes clearly distinguishes Meursault from the rest of the people, hence his actions are unacceptable leading to consequences. Usually when a person is sent to jail, ambivalent feelings arrive concerning their future plans and attention to small detail is not considered; however, that is not the case with Meursault, "The two policemen took me into a small room that smelled of darkness".

Camus portrays imagery in this quote by mentioning “ smelled of darkness”, which lets the reader visualize the small room that is buried in darkness (82). This demonstrates how Meursault paid attention to his surroundings rather than taking his faults into consideration. Camus has pointed out Meursault’s differences compared to the people around him. These distinctions lead to the rejection by society that is also shown through imagery. He only follows his beliefs, resisting society’s, which why he is considered as a monster and later filed for execution where Meursault feels threatened by society: “(f)or the first time in years I had this stupid urge to cry, because I could feel how much all these people hated me” (90). For the first time in years, Meursault cries because he feels that so many people will view him differently, and that he is now considered guilty since he did not cry at his mother’s funeral. By this quote, one can imagine the pressure surrounding Meursault, thus having a will to cry. As much rejection Meursault receives, he still refuses to change who he is, “ I have never seen a soul as hardened as yours. The criminals who have come before me have always wept at the sight of this suffering image” (69). Camus uses this scene to show how he is different and how negative they think of him. With Meursault’s different ideology, he has difficulty in facing society since they consider him a criminal, isolating him from the rest. Gregor Samsa stands out due to his hideous body structure. Meursault holds a system of beliefs that alienates him from society. Through the vividly imagistic lives of the two characters, Kafka and Camus display the idea that social outcasts encounter harsh rejection from society and suffer as a result. We create a set of acceptable social and physical standards in our societies, and anyone who fails to follow such rules suffers painful

consequences. Works Cited
Camus, Albert. *The Stranger*. Trans. Trevor Le Gassick. New York, USA; Anchor Books, 1984. Kafka, Franz. *The Metamorphosis*. Trans. Max Hayward. New York, USA; Bantan Books, 1990.