

Furniture and character in kafka's metamorphosis

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



The human mind is so active that an individual experiences approximately 70, 000 thoughts each day. These thoughts are often conflicting in their nature, as the stream of consciousness does not readily divide thoughts into categories, and thoughts enter and exit the mind freely. The novella *Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka strongly presents a character that faces two conflicting desires and tendencies of character. Gregor is plagued between his social desire of being human and belonging and a new animalistic side, which oppresses these social constructs. Kafka successfully uses furniture within *Metamorphosis* as a portal between these two sides, and how they both aid but also hinder Gregor in keeping what is left of his humanity. This work by Franz Kafka can also be read as a critique of the human inclination and how individuals place too much value on social constructs, in terms of identity, relationships, and values- a topic that will be discussed in the conclusion.

The conflicting tendencies of Gregor's character commence at the preamble of this novella when Gregor first awakens in his transmogrified state. He is no longer a human, but a cockroach - an insect exaggeratingly less complex in thought process and thought-movement correspondence. Yet Gregor is given no time to process his new body and mind due to his family's constant questioning regarding his absence from work. Gregor, in this frenzy, tries to reach his parents and the chief clerk in order to reassure them that he is all right. In order to do so, Gregor, still not accustomed to his new physique, must use a chair in order to reach the door leading out of his bedroom. "Gregor slowly pushed himself across the door with the chair, there let go of it and dropped against the door... and there rested a moment from his

exertions" (p. 99). It is clear that this task is no easy feat for Gregor, yet he pays no mind to how excessively strenuous this endeavor is. Reaching his parents and the chief clerk becomes even more difficult when Gregor tries to open the door; his thin and dangly arms are not strong enough to turn the doorknob and he owns no teeth to grip the doorknob with. " Luckily his jaws were very powerful... he got the key to move, and he didn't stop to consider that he was certainly damaging himself in some way, because a brown liquid came out of his mouth " (p. 99). Although Gregor is seemingly injuring himself while trying to open the door, his desire of social interaction overrides the pain he is in. It is very clear here that a conflict between Gregor's social desire and animalistic identity is starting to arise. The main character's remaining human tendency is latching on to whatever social desires are left; that is, the desire of pleasing his family and not troubling his chief. " He truly had it in mind to open the door, to show himself and to speak to the chief clerk; he was eager to learn what the others, who were all clamoring for him, would say when they got to see him" (p. 97) Gregor's only human identity is that of a salesman, and in a desperate attempt to conceal his newfound animalism, Gregor desperately tries to function as a human would. However, this new animalistic side is in defiance and opposes his social inclinations, bringing into question the direct nature of Gregor's character. The use of furniture within this scene works as a gateway between what he desires and where the capacities of his actions lie.

Gregor's overriding animalistic identity becomes even more obtrusive as the plotline progresses. The scene preambular to Gregor's death, where the whole family along with their three tenants, sit at the dinner table and

attentively listen to Grete vigorously playing her violin, is significant in portraying the dominance of his cockroach tendencies over his human social desire. Gregor advances out of his room here for the first time since an apple strikes him, thrown by his father in a fit of rage for frightening both his mother and sister. Gregor wishes not to bother his parents or his sister since the realization that his presence unsettles him, but this introverting sense of self is pushed away by his attraction to the music his sister plays. "Could he be an animal- to be so moved by music?" (136) Kafka uses free indirect speech within this rhetorical question in order to bring Gregor's emotional and social perspective into the light. Gregor, in his slowly deteriorating state, is confused as to why he still has such passion for human constructs that his transmogrified state cannot perceive or comprehend to the same extent anymore. However, Gregor is unluckily caught in the act and forced to retreat slightly, as his father rises from the dinner table in great hostility. Grete, tired of the suffering she feels, makes an outspoken remark: "dear parents, things cannot go on like this... I don't want to speak the name of my brother within the hearing of that monster, and so I will merely say: we have to get rid of it" (138) This reflects the breaking away from the family's previous mantraic mode regarding Gregor's existence, as they simply tolerate him before. It is here that Gregor fully realizes that his existence now is one of redundancy as his sister has finally given her honest opinion regarding his existence and which tendency of his character is more prominent- "the monster" (138). He therefore turns around in order to retreat to his room, yet faces difficulties. "He was struck by the great distance that seemed to separate him from his room, and was unable to

understand how, in his enfeebled condition, he had just a little while covered the same distance, almost without noticing" (140). It is here where the reader fully comprehends Gregor's deteriorating state. Gregor's animalistic side has strengthened to the point where he can no longer use his social desire to the same extent in order to reach the door. Additionally, with this retreat towards his room, Gregor now understands that he must let go of his human self and die as a cockroach. Insects live short, simple lives without emotional desire. His animalistic character cannot be withdrawn and this inevitable truth must be accepted. His family agrees: " If it was Gregor, he would have long ago seen that that it is impossible for human beings to live together with an animal like that" (139). Gregor passes away the next morning. The dinner table and door in this scene can be seen as the transition from Gregor as an existence with conflicting character tendencies to an existence with only one character.

Gregor's use of furniture in *Metamorphosis* clearly illustrates his conflicting tendencies of character, specifically between his social longing and monstrous identity after his transmogrification into a cockroach. It is clear since the beginning of the novella that Gregor attempts at accepting this new animalistic side to him, and once it becomes a normalcy, his desperation to keep his humanity leads him into using furniture as a means of obtaining these social desires. Yet at the end of the novella it is clear that Gregor cannot keep these conflicting tendencies on the same plane, and chooses to abandon his humanity in order to save his family from eternal unhappiness. *Metamorphosis* may also be viewed as a critique of human inclination as due to the fact that Gregor tries to contain his human longing,

he sacrifices the relationship with his family and damages himself physically as well as mentally. Kafka argues that such a longing for human inclination will only hurt an individual in the long run, and should be avoided.

Works Cited: Kafka, Franz. *Metamorphosis*. London: Penguin, 2006. Print.