

Metamorphosis by franz kafka and why



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1. Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka and Why " Literature may never make you richer in the pocket, but it will certainly make you richer in the mind... for... it deepens the understanding of others and self" (Joseph Satin)

Although written in 1915, there is much in this book to connect it to modern life as it is led by many people today. The way in which it deals with families, change, trauma and loss reflects a timeless quality which makes the reader ask many questions about himself and his own life. The hard-working, selfless, responsible Gregor, despite his own awful predicament, is mainly concerned for his family, worried about his boss, his job, and his responsibilities. He has many features and characteristics which can be recognized in aspects of living in the fast paced age of the 21st century. My reactions to Gregor surprised me, for the creature he has become, 'monstrous vermin', and the habits he develops as his condition deteriorates, eating rotting food and leaving sticky messes, is one most likely to cause revulsion. Instead, he elicits most positive emotions. In particular, he arouses feelings of pity, compassion and sympathy for his plight, while his family tend to make me feel disgusted with them and their treatment of this changed Gregor. Only his mother continues to want to protect him, even after seeing him as 'an enormous brown patch against the flowers on the wallpaper.'

In asking myself why I should feel this way, I am led to look deeply at my own beliefs and values. I begin to liken Gregor's plight to someone having a mental breakdown, a stroke, or being terminally ill, or suffering dreadful disfigurement. If this happened to me or someone I cared about, coping would be hard but I would hope that kindness and concern would be given to the 'changed' me, and that people would remember that the real person is

still in there somewhere.

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Although Grete does initially look after her brother, it is she who wants to kill him, telling her father, 'It's got to go.... you've got to get rid of the idea that that's Gregor'. I found the father's chasing him and causing him dreadful mental and physical pain with the apple throwing, a really frightening image, which stays in my mind. Here was a good son who had done everything for his family, and because he has changed, is abused and excluded.

I accept that it must be difficult for them, as indeed for any family suffering with a loved one who is ill or radically changed, but the way Kafka takes us inside Gregor's mind, even as he displays his deterioration in harrowing detail, makes me want to comfort and support poor Gregor and speak up for him. There is something familiar in the way the family want to hide matters and deal with it themselves, while the three lodgers and the cleaning lady might be of assistance, as they are not so repulsed and are more objective. This makes me think of how outsiders can often help families dealing with such trauma and crisis, if only they are allowed to do so.

The story also highlights the relationships between mothers and sons, fathers and daughters and fathers and sons. In the scene where Gregor is aware of how big his father's boots are, there is such a frightening undertone of violence to come, and it calls to mind that this is how some fathers treat their children, when those children are no longer 'good' and obedient. It is also interesting to see how the change in Gregor, resulting in a change in family circumstances, forces them all to get up and do something for themselves. The father stops sitting about in his nightshirt, gets a job and a smart uniform, Grete works and studies and even the mother busies herself

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sewing for a wage. I wonder if, by being so caring and supportive, Gregor was in fact preventing the people he loved from taking more responsibility. I wonder how this impacts on my views regarding modern family life

The most important aspect of the story for me is how change is dealt with in different ways by different people. Though this family pulls together, it excludes the suffering person and feels only relief when he is dead. It seems heartless when the father says 'Come here, .. let's forget about

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all that old stuff.' but then, they have done their grieving over the previous weeks and maybe should not be condemned. I realize that people have to find ways of dealing with loss and trauma, sickness and change, but would like to believe that I would be a more compassionate and caring individual than those in Gregor's family, should something dreadful occur.

When at the end of the story, they are out enjoying themselves and planning for the future, I realize the truth in two things: one, nobody is indispensable, and two, life goes on. These might be old cliches, but they could act as a warning for hard-working, materialistic high-fliers today. This book has made me look at my strengths and weaknesses, my attitude to loss, illness, change, at families and how they work, selfishness and kindness, fear, horror and the inevitability of dying. It is a memorable and thought-provoking piece of literature, full of universal truths.

Works Cited

Kafka, Franz , 1915 Metamorphosis Translated by David Wylie, Copyright 2002 ebook no.#5200

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