

A family influence in franz kafka's the metamorphosis

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The Symbolic Measures of Gregor in The Metamorphosis

“The Metamorphosis” is an awe-inspiring piece of literature that entraps the reader by Franz Kafka’s haunting style and layers of symbolism embedded in his writing. In Franz Kafka’s, “The Metamorphosis”, Gregor Samsa was physically transformed into a bug, but with the transformation came the realization that the real parasite was Gregor’s family. This is exemplified by the results of the change in socioeconomic class of Gregor Samsa himself, before the metamorphosis, and his family’s afterwards, the burden that Gregor had posed, and the altering of Gregor and Grete’s relationship throughout the story.

A parasite is an organism that lives in or on another organism (its host) and benefits by deriving nutrients at the host’s expense. Pre-metamorphosis, Gregor Samsa was the financial backbone, providing more than enough to pay off his family’s debt to his superior, and allowing them to live comfortably. However, this drained Gregor. Throughout the story it was displayed that Gregor wanted to benefit his family while they deprived Gregor of what he wanted. It was clear that Gregor did not want to work but did so out of obligation; Gregor was too dependent on his family to do this, he relied on his family emotionally as they used to depend on him financially. “Well, there’s hope yet; as soon as I’ve saved enough money to pay back what my parents owe him- that should take another five or six years- I’ll go do it for sure. Then I’ll cut myself completely free” (Kafka 303). Gregor realized that he was simply a slave to the society around him and his family. He would never serve the purpose that he, himself, would’ve wanted. Critic

Walter Sokel noted that Gregor only served those around him. “ Gregor Samsa’s transformation into vermin presents self-alienation in a literal way, not merely a customary metaphor become fictional fact [...] No manner more drastic could illustrate the alienation of a consciousness from its own being than Gregor Samsa’s startled and startling awakening” (Sokel 216). Gregor was seen by his family and the community around him as a worker. He was to do nothing more but provide the service that he was responsible for. The metamorphosis was not only a physical transformation, but also the transformation of Gregor as he finally began to realize what he was in the eyes of society and his parasitic family, and with the metamorphosis came not only clarity, but his demise.

Without his work, Gregor lost his own status in life. The family shut him out and began to realize they were forced to depend on themselves. They rented out a room and each acquired their own job, grudgingly. The parents loved the way of life they had achieved pre-metamorphosis. They never had to work or worry financially, achieving a level of leisure and comfort that they had adjusted to. Gregor’s father was set off by their predicament, and continued to maintain a job in spite of his age and physical injuries. “ What a life. So this is the peace of my old age” (Kafka 322), the father’s disgruntledness is justifiable, since this would be his point of retirement. Instead of the peace that he had envisioned for himself and his wife, they are stuck working and taking care of what used to be their desired son. Finances tend to bring a level of stress on anybody, but this was much more for the

family not only because of the amount of loss they had endured, but also the new burden Gregor posed.

The parents are hard working people, and they show respect for those who contribute something. In the beginning, they were doing everything to keep Gregor out of trouble from his boss, making excuses and pleading with his manager. However, once he stopped providing any benefit to the family they wanted nothing to do with him, only furthering the parasitic nature. This affects not only Gregor, but also Grete. Kafka pointed out that their parents were more or less bothered with Grete because she lived a cushioned life, “ he frequently heard them remarking how much they appreciated his sister’s efforts, whereas previously they’d often been annoyed with her for being, in their eyes, somewhat useless” (316). When she began taking over control of Gregor’s hospitality, they began to show her respect and listened to her. Gregor was the burden that nobody wanted.

He was a burden to himself because he desperately wanted to be helpful and solve the problem. He couldn’t though, and he knew he wouldn’t last locked in a dark room. Professor Fernando Bermejo Rubio saw the abusive absence of his family and the effect it had on Gregor, “ Gregor is presented always at his family’s beck and call. His emotional dependence is graphically expressed in the image of a Gregor who, every time he hears the others speak, rushes immediately to the door, As a result, his self perception is heavily, even decisively, influenced by the judgments of his three relatives, even when they are unfair” (292). They no longer saw him as Gregor, and saw him as “ that thing.”

Gregor and Grete's relationship was a main example of parasitic behavior. The metamorphosis caused Grete to become resentful towards Gregor, the responsibility of the household became hers, resulting in resentment fueled by this newfound responsibility. Gregor expressed that he felt close to Grete, compared to their parents, and was conscious of what Grete would've liked. Covering himself with a sheet was his own way of respecting their newfound boundaries. Grete's overtaking of responsibilities gained a new level of authority and respect for her from the parents. Grete no longer thought of the bug as Gregor, was no longer conscious of him as a being, " I refuse to utter my brother's name in the presence of this monster, and so all I have to say is: we've got to get rid of it" (Kafka 327). Grete's turn on Gregor was the hardest on him. He had gone through this enormous change for himself, only leading to his own suffering, because his family stopped providing him the emotional support he needed. After the collapse of their mother, Grete's actions set in stone the way she felt towards Gregor, " Grete's rejection of Gregor takes a twofold form: words and gestures. The words, the first ones that Grete had addressed directly to her brother since his transformation, adopt the form of a threat. Also note that Grete's fist evokes the same gesture used by the father" (Rubio 286). Grete was the last thing Gregor was holding onto. Her growing absence drained him, leaving him with no emotional attachment to want to be alive. He wanted her support and compassion, but the more he tried to do as his family wanted, it furthered the resentment Grete expressed on her brother.

The story can be related to any family because it makes one question who is the bug and who is the parasite. Every family has them. Alfred Kampf, a friend of Kafka, questioned the meaning behind the story and asked, "Is it perhaps delicate and discreet to talk about one's own family?" (Kafka 353) Kafka wouldn't openly disclose the meaning behind much of the story, leaving it open to interpretation. Literally, Gregor Samsa was the bug of the family. The metamorphosis created a burden to himself and his family emotionally and socioeconomically. However, the three family members showed a greater transformation than Gregor had because they exemplified the true actions of a bug.