

# Kafka and grimm



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Kafka presents a very different story line themed to alienation than Tolstoy: The Metamorphosis is not subtle in its allusion to how Gregor feels, nor is it sly in its presentation of how Gregor is treated. Upon awakening one morning Gregor finds that he has been transformed into a monstrous vermin. Despite this reality, Gregor does not preoccupy himself with his own change but focuses on the dreary weather outside; the rain, the wind. He does not fully realize his situation in least and goes about his diurnal routines without worrying about his great transformation: " When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin.

He was lying on his back as hard as armor plate, and when he lifted his head a little, he saw his vaulted brown belly, sectioned by arch-shaped ribs, to whose dome the cover, about to slide off completely, could barely cling. His many legs, pitifully thin compared with the size of the rest of him, were waving helplessly before his eyes." (P. 3). This description of change is extreme and yet, despite its severity or alternating course of life, Gregor does not recognize it as anything in particular. Through this, the reader realizes the extent of Gregor's alienation from himself, when such a physical difference is presented to him from his own body he chooses not to recognize it, and thus, the theme of alienation from self is made clear from the start of the novella.

Through Gregor's family the reader realizes a sense of extreme change. Despite Gregor's displaced emotion of his own body and geography, his family recognizes quite clearly the situation. It is in this moment that Gregor's previous alienation of him takes on a more physical and apparent

form as seen when Gregor first steps or crawls out of his bedroom after his discourse of loathing his job, " And now he could see him, standing closest to the door, his hand pressed over his open mouth, slowly backing away, as if repulsed by an invisible, unrelenting force.

His mother - in spite of the manager's presence she stood with her hair still unbraided from the night, sticking out in all directions - first looked at his father with her hands clasped, then took two steps towards Gregor, and sank down in the midst of her skirt spreading out around her, her face completely hidden on her breast. With a hostile expression his father clenched his fist, as if to drive Gregor back into his room, then looked uncertainly around the living room, shielded his eyes with his hands, and sobbed with heaves of his powerful chest." (P. 15). It is in this revealing narrative that the reader grasps how grotesque Gregor has become. He has already been alienating himself from his family, and keeping to himself, and not being relatable and thus, his family truly cannot recognize him anymore, it merely took the physical representation of his alienation for this to occur.

It is through Gregor's family that the theme of alienation persists. Gregor had been the provider of the family and with recognition, " Those had been wonderful times, and they had never returned, at least not with the same glory, although later on Gregor earned enough money to meet the expenses of the entire family and actually did so. They had just gotten used to it, the family as well as Gregor, the money was received with thanks and given with pleasure." (P. 27). Thus it would seem that Gregor's alienation has erupted because he is displeased with his job, yet he keeps his job because that is his

role in his family and with this in mind, it seems that Gregor does not want to be placed in that role any longer.

The theme of alienation is seen in Kafka's narrative, " Into a room in which Gregor ruled the bare walls all alone, no human being beside Grete was ever likely to set foot." (P. 30). So, with his family no longer seeing him as the provider the manifestation of harbored feelings rise in the form of a vermin and Gregor cannot hide the truth of his existence any longer from his family; his family rejects Gregor, and he dies.

Thus, Gregor's death is the ultimate alienation, and his rejection by his family is the tribute to such a theme, " Gregor's serious wound, from which he suffered for over a month - the apple remained imbedded in his flesh as a visible souvenir since no one dared to remove it - seemed to have reminded even his father that Gregor was a member of the family, in spite of his present pathetic and repulsive shape, who could not be treated as an enemy; that on the contrary, it was the commandment of family duty to swallow their disgust and endure him, endure him and nothing more." (P. 40).

The concept of metamorphoses is not a foreign idea in literature as the Brother's Grimm have used this technique in many instances. The transformation side of a fairy tale is found in a plethora of tales including, The Frog King or Iron Henry, and to an extent, Little Red-Cap. Each of these stories illustrates a stage of transformation either as a curse, or as a means to gain something. In The Frog King or Iron Henry a prince is transformed into a frog in a tale of bewitchment. The story differs on the concept

between whether the princess kisses or throws the frog in order for the frog to transform back into a prince.

The tale of this kind is different from Kafka's due to the nature and the way in which the transformation changes the main character. For Gregor, the metamorphoses relates to his family and other problems with life, while with the prince/frog the concept of the tale revolves around the change of the people around the prince/frog such as the princess and Henry, the servant.

The transformation of the people around the prince/frog is well established with the snide behavior of the princess changing into a more civilized person, and the prince's servant Henry who had bound his heart with gold bonds in order so that it would not break on the prince having been cursed into being a frog. Thus, the fundamental difference between these two stories rests with the outside characters being changed in the Grimm's tale and the physical change in Gregor only relating to him.

In another Grimm tale Little Red-Cap a little girl who adores her grandmother goes to see her only to find a wolf in her place dressed in her grandmother's clothing in order to deceive the little girl and to consume her. Although the element of consumption is similar in Kafka's story as in Gregor feeling consumed by the world he lives in and does not feel satisfaction in and thus is consumed by it, so does the wolf desire to consume the little girl.

The story of transformation in Little Red-Cap involves changing an animal into a human and thus the change regarded for these two stories revolves around a human changing into an animal (insect) and an animal changing into a human each for the purpose of consumption but in different regards. Gregor changes into an insect in relation to an unfulfillment of life while the <https://assignbuster.com/kafka-and-grimm/>

wolf changes into a human in order to be fulfilled. For both stories their desires are not met as the wolf is only fulfilled with stones and then skinned and Gregor is not given a chance to find fulfillment as he was a wastrel in life having neither goal nor purpose and thus his ebb of desire lessens and lessens until he is killed.

#### Work Cited

Kafka, F. *The Metamorphosis*. Crown. 2003.

<http://www.familymanagement.com/literacy/grimms/grimms20.html>

<http://www.familymanagement.com/literacy/grimms/grimms01.html>