

Metamorphosis by
franz kafka and the
outsider by albert
cammus essay



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“ Metamorphosis” is a novel written by Franz Kafka in 1912. It is set at an unknown European city at the same time it was published. It narrates the story of a typical salesman of in an industrialized society who wakes up one morning transformed into a giant cockroach. The novel tells about how his family deals with this event, and how Gregor (the salesman) eventually dies.

“ The outsider” is also a short novel written by Albert Cammus in 1944. It tells the story of Meursault, a bachelor clerk who lives in Algiers. It is also set at the time the novel was written. Meursault gets involved into a violent argument between a friend of his and an Arab, and ends up killing the Arab. This makes him go to trial and be sentenced to death. The theme of “ Metamorphosis” is a criticism of how an industrialized modern society affects the way citizens live. The Author criticises how this new formed society dehumanises a common working class individual, making him lose every human trait he has.

Kafka chooses to turn Gregor into a cockroach because his way of life is more like the one of an insect than of a man. On the other hand, the novel “ The Outsider” is a criticism of the typical hypocrisy of the society, where people have to act according to social rules. Cammus point out how anyone who does not follow these rules is condemned by society, in this case Meursault. Both novels speak, in a way, about how the forces of social conformity affect individuals in a society. They do so by different ways though. In “ metamorphosis” the protagonist is completely consumed by his profession. He is a slave to work and does not live a life of comfort at all. As his mother says so:

“ That boy has nothing but work in his head!”

Gregor follows a boring life based only on work. He has to maintain his whole family on his own, and his family, although capacitated to work, will not do it because they take advantage of Gregor. The money he provides is not even appreciated, as:

“ They had just become used to it, both the family and Gregor”

They all settle for this life, while Gregor does all the work and his family does nothing to help him. Gregor does not complain about this and continues to follow a profession he does not even like. He is also bound to work for at least six more years, so he can pay his parents debt to the company Gregor works for. He dislikes his profession, but he does not quit because he can not.

“ If I only didn't have to follow such an exhausting profession!”

As his time is constantly being consumed by this exhausting job, he does not manage to get a social life. He has no friends, no hobbies, and uses his free time to read the newspaper and occasionally a little woodwork.

Metaphorically, he therefore turns into a cockroach because he is living the life of an insect. He is enslaved by the society he is living in. On contrast to Mersault in “ The Outsider” Gregor is enslaved by society. He follows the rules of social conformity to an extent that he becomes an insect.

Mersault, on the other hand, ignores these rules to become an outcast of society. He lives his life doing and thinking only what he wants, and does not play by the rules of society, and he does this without knowing so. We can <https://assignbuster.com/metamorphosis-by-franz-kafka-and-the-outsider-by-albert-camus-essay/>

take as an example of this his mothers funeral. In his trial, they sentence him for not behaving as society expect in this funeral. He does not cry, he smokes, he drinks some coffee, and even takes a nap

“ I then wanted a cigarette. But I hesitated because I didn't know if I could smoke in front of mother. I thought it over, it really didn't matter”

Meursault responds only to his needs, ignoring what society expects him to do: to cry, to be respectful towards his mother, to see the dead body. He does not do any of this, because he just does not feel like it. By doing this he is then judged by society as a person of evil, someone who does not have feelings and does not care about the death of a mother. Mersault fails to understand the social consequences of his actions. Another example of his behaviour towards society is his relationship with Marie. He likes her and enjoys being with her, but unlike normal people he does not lie to please her when Marie asks questions that society considers of great importance. When Marie asks him if he loved her Meursault answers:

“ I told her it didn't mean anything, but that I didn't think so”

Instead of avoiding hurting Marie`s feelings and pleasing her with lies, he speaks openly and does not lie. This contrasts heavily with Gregors reactions. Gregor is constantly lying to please people and very few times he speaks openly. He is always pushed around by people because Gregors fails to impose authority and speak his mind of what he thinks is wrong. We can take as an example his reaction when the chief Clerk comes to look for him when he is late to work. He is threatened to be fired, and he has never been

late to work before. Still he apologizes and intends to please the chief Clerk using excuses.

“ I meant to set out on the eight o clock train”

Although he is being pushed around like an insect, he does not stand up for himself. This marks the contrast in how do both novels criticise social conformity. The difference between characters personalities and the effect social conformity has on them. While Meursault gets condemned for ignoring this rules, Gregor is condemned by being enslaved by the industrialized modern society and losing his right to live as a human being. But in both novels, the characters end up dead. They both do so because forces of social conformity sentence them.

In “ The Outsider” Meursault goes on a trial for killing a man. Although he is guilty, his intention were not bad and he committed the crime because he was forced into a situation he disliked. Still, he was tried for the murder and for his attitude towards social conformity. The prosecutor accuses Meursault of

“ burying his mother like a heartless criminal”

Although the case of his mothers funeral has no relevance at all with the murder, the prosecutor convinces the jury that Meursault is indeed an “ immoral monster”. This is because Meursault fails to understand how society works and he does not lie and please the public in the jury to save himself, it goes against the way he lives. Because he does not play by the rules, he is

therefore executed by society, as he is considered an outsider who does not fit in the social circle.

In *Metamorphosis*, Gregor is considered to be more of an insect than a man. This causes him to turn into a cockroach. Gregor condemns himself by not being able to live like a human being. He is a negative influence to his family and he has become so dehumanized by society he can no longer live amongst humans. Kafka uses therefore the metaphor of Gregor being turned into a cockroach, as only his physical aspect differs him from being an insect or a human. He dies because no one cares about him, if he can not provide anymore his family will not help him, he is useless to society. He also ends up being an outcast in society which no one can care for, no one can tolerate. In conclusion, it can be said that both novels have a theme in common: how individuals are affected by forces of social conformity. But the novels criticise different aspects of society.

While “*The outsider*” criticises the hypocrisy of society and how society rejects and condemns someone who does not follow its rules, “*Metamorphosis*” criticises how the new industrialized society can dehumanise men and leave no human trait inside them.