

The Novella *Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka

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ABSTRACT: *Metamorphosis* (German: *Die Verwandlung*) is a novella written by Franz Kafka and first published in 1915. One of Kafka's best-known works, *Metamorphosis* tells the story of salesman Gregor Samsa, who wakes one morning to find himself inexplicably transformed into a huge insect (German: *ungeheueres Ungeziefer*, lit. "monstrous vermin") and subsequently struggles to adjust to this new condition. The novella has been widely discussed among literary critics, who have offered varied interpretations. In popular culture and adaptations of the novella, the insect is commonly depicted as a cockroach.

KEYWORDS: metamorphosis, insect, novella, critics, cockroach

I. INTRODUCTION

With a length of about 70 printed pages over three chapters, it is the longest of the stories Kafka considered complete and published during his lifetime. The text was first published in 1915 in the October issue of the journal *Die weißen Blätter* under the editorship of René Schickele. The first edition in book form appeared in December 1915 in the series *Der jüngste Tag*, edited by Kurt Wolff.^[1]

Plot

Gregor Samsa wakes up one morning to find himself transformed into a "monstrous vermin". He initially considers the transformation to be temporary and slowly ponders the consequences of this metamorphosis. Stuck on his back and unable to get up and leave the bed, Gregor reflects on his job as a traveling salesman and cloth merchant, which he characterizes as being full of "temporary and constantly changing human relationships, which never come from the heart".² He sees his employer as a despot and would quickly quit his job if he were not his family's sole breadwinner and working off his bankrupt father's debts. While trying to move, Gregor finds that his office manager, the chief clerk, has shown up to check on him, indignant about Gregor's unexcused absence. Gregor attempts to communicate with both the manager and his family, but all they can hear from behind the door is incomprehensible vocalizations. Gregor laboriously drags himself across the floor and opens the door. The clerk, upon seeing the transformed Gregor, flees the apartment. Gregor's family is horrified, and his father drives him back into his room, injuring his side by shoving him when he gets stuck in the doorway.

With Gregor's unexpected transformation, his family is deprived of financial stability. They keep Gregor locked in his room, and he begins to accept his new identity and adapt to his new body. His sister Grete is the only one willing to bring him food, which they find Gregor only likes if it is rotten. He spends much of his time crawling around on the floor, walls, and ceiling and, upon discovering Gregor's new pastime, Grete decides to remove his furniture to give him more space. She and her mother begin to empty the room of everything, except the sofa under which Gregor hides whenever anyone comes in, but he finds their actions deeply distressing in fear that he might forget his past, while he still was a human, and desperately tries to save a particularly loved portrait on the wall of a woman clad in fur. His mother loses consciousness at the sight of him clinging to the image to protect it. When Grete rushes out of the room to get some aromatic spirits, Gregor follows her and is slightly hurt when she drops a medicine bottle and it breaks. Their father returns home and angrily hurls apples at Gregor, one of which becomes lodged in a sensitive spot in his back and severely wounds him.³

Gregor suffers from his injuries for the rest of his life and takes very little food. His father, mother, and sister all get jobs and increasingly begin to neglect him, and his room begins to be used for storage. For a time, his family leaves Gregor's door open in the evenings so he can listen to them talk to each other, but this happens less frequently once they rent a room in the apartment to three male tenants, since they are not told about Gregor. One day the charwoman, who briefly looks in on Gregor each day when she arrives and before she leaves, neglects to close his door fully. Attracted by Grete's violin-playing in the living room, Gregor crawls out and is spotted by the unsuspecting tenants, who complain about the apartment's unhygienic conditions and say they are leaving, will not pay anything for the time they have already stayed, and may take legal action. Grete, who has tired of taking care of Gregor and realizes the burden his existence puts on



each member of the family, tells her parents they must get rid of "it" or they will all be ruined. Gregor, understanding that he is no longer wanted, laboriously makes his way back to his room and dies of starvation before sunrise. His body is discovered by the charwoman, who alerts his family and then disposes of the corpse. The relieved and optimistic father, mother, and sister all take the day off work. They travel by tram into the countryside and make plans to move to a smaller apartment to save money. During the short trip, Mr. and Mrs. Samsa realize that, despite the hardships that have brought some paleness to her face, Grete has grown up into a pretty young lady with a good figure and they think about finding her a husband.⁴

Characters

GregorSamsa

"*GregorSamsa*" redirects here. For other uses, see *GregorSamsa* (disambiguation).

Gregor is the main character of the story. He works as a traveling salesman in order to provide money for his sister and parents. He wakes up one morning finding himself transformed into an insect. After the metamorphosis, Gregor becomes unable to work and is confined to his room for most of the remainder of the story. This prompts his family to begin working once again. Gregor is depicted as isolated from society and often both misunderstands the true intentions of others and is misunderstood.⁵

The name "GregorSamsa" appears to derive partly from literary works Kafka had read. A character in *The Story of Young Renate Fuchs*, by German novelist Jakob Wassermann (1873–1934), is named GregorSamassa.^[2] The Viennese author Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, whose sexual imagination gave rise to the idea of masochism, is also an influence. Sacher-Masoch wrote *Venus in Furs* (1870), a novel whose hero assumes the name Gregor at one point. A "Venus in furs" recurs in *The Metamorphosis* in the picture that GregorSamsa has hung on his bedroom wall.^[3]

Grete Samsa

Grete is Gregor's younger sister, and she becomes his caretaker after his metamorphosis. They initially have a close relationship, but this quickly fades. At first, she volunteers to feed him and clean his room, but she grows increasingly impatient with the burden and begins to leave his room in disarray out of spite. Her initial decision to take care of Gregor may have come from a desire to contribute and be useful to the family, since she becomes angry and upset when the mother cleans his room. It is made clear that Grete is disgusted by Gregor, as she always opens the window upon entering his room to keep from feeling nauseous and leaves without doing anything⁶ if Gregor is in plain sight. She plays the violin and dreams of going to the conservatory to study, a dream Gregor had intended to make happen; he had planned on making the announcement on Christmas Day. To help provide an income for the family after Gregor's transformation, she starts working as a salesgirl. Grete is also the first to suggest getting rid of Gregor, which causes Gregor to plan his own death. At the end of the story, Grete's parents realize that she has become beautiful and full-figured and decide to consider finding her a husband.^[4]

MrSamsa

MrSamsa is Gregor's father. After the metamorphosis, he is forced to return to work in order to support the family financially. His attitude towards his son is harsh. He regards the transformed Gregor with disgust and possibly even fear and attacks Gregor on several occasions. Even when Gregor was human, MrSamsa regarded him mostly as a source of income for the family. Gregor's relationship with his father is modelled after Kafka's own relationship with his father.⁷The theme of alienation becomes quite evident here.^[5]

MrsSamsa

MrsSamsa is Gregor's mother. She is portrayed as a submissive wife. She suffers from asthma, which is a constant source of concern for Gregor. She is initially shocked at Gregor's transformation, but she still wants to enter his room. However, it proves too much for her and gives rise to a conflict between her maternal impulse and sympathy and her fear and revulsion at Gregor's new form.^[6]

The Charwoman

The charwoman is an old widowed lady who is employed by the Samsa family after their previous maid begs to be dismissed on account of the fright she experiences owing to Gregor's new form. She is paid to take care of their household duties. Apart from Grete and her father, the charwoman is the only person who is in close contact with Gregor,



and she is unafraid in her dealings with Gregor. She does not question his changed state; she seemingly accepts it as a normal part of his existence. She is the one who notices Gregor has died and disposes of his body.⁸

Interpretation

Like most of Kafka's works, *Metamorphosis* tends to be given a religious (Max Brod) or psychological interpretation by most of its interpreters. It has been particularly common to read the story as an expression of Kafka's father complex, as was first done by Charles Neider in his *The Frozen Sea: A Study of Franz Kafka* (1948).⁹ Besides the psychological approach, interpretations focusing on sociological aspects, which see the Samsa family as a portrayal of general social circumstances, have also gained a large following.^{[7][11]}

Vladimir Nabokov rejected such interpretations, noting that they do not live up to Kafka's art. He instead chose an interpretation guided by the artistic detail, but categorically excluded any attempts at deciphering a symbolic or allegoric level of meaning. Arguing against the popular father-complex theory, he observed that it is the sister more than the father who should be considered the cruelest person in the story, since she is the one backstabbing Gregor. In Nabokov's view, the central narrative theme is the artist's struggle for existence in a society replete with philistines that destroys him step by step. Commenting on Kafka's style he writes "The transparency of his style underlines the dark richness of his fantasy world. Contrast and uniformity, style and the depicted, portrayal and fable are seamlessly intertwined".^{[8][10]}

In 1989, Nina Pelikan Straus wrote a feminist interpretation of *Metamorphosis*, noting that the story is not only about the metamorphosis of Gregor, but also about the metamorphosis of his family, and in particular, his younger sister Grete. Straus suggested that the social and psychoanalytic resonances of the text depend on Grete's role as woman, daughter, and sister, and that prior interpretations failed to recognize Grete's centrality to the story.^[9]

In 1999, Gerhard Rieck pointed out that Gregor and his sister, Grete, form a pair, which is typical of many of Kafka's texts: it is made up of one passive, rather austere, person and another active, more libidinal, person. The appearance of figures with such almost irreconcilable personalities who form couples in Kafka's works has been evident since he wrote his short story "Description of a Struggle" (e.g. the narrator/young man and his "acquaintance"). They also appear in "The Judgment" (Georg and his friend in Russia), in all three of his novels (e.g. Robinson and Delamarche in *Amerika*) as well as in his short stories "A Country Doctor" (the country doctor and the groom) and "A Hunger Artist" (the hunger artist and the panther). Rieck views these pairs as parts of one single person (hence the similarity between the names Gregor and Grete) and in the final analysis as the two determining components of the author's personality. Not only in Kafka's life but also in his oeuvre does Rieck see the description of a fight between these two parts.^[10]

Reiner Stach argued in 2004 that no elucidating comments were needed to illustrate the story and that it was convincing by itself, self-contained, even absolute. He believes that there is no doubt the story would have been admitted to the canon of world literature even if we had known nothing about its author.^{[11][12]}

According to Peter-André Alt (2005), the figure of the beetle becomes a drastic expression of Gregor Samsa's deprived existence. Reduced to carrying out his professional responsibilities, anxious to guarantee his advancement and vexed with the fear of making commercial mistakes, he is the creature of a functionalistic professional life.^[12]

In 2007, Ralf Sudau took the view that particular attention should be paid to the motifs of self-abnegation and disregard for reality. Gregor's earlier behavior was characterized by self-renunciation and his pride in being able to provide a secure and leisured existence for his family. When he finds himself in a situation where he himself is in need of attention and assistance and in danger of becoming a parasite, he doesn't want to admit this new role to himself and be disappointed by the treatment he receives from his family, which is becoming more and more careless and even hostile over time. According to Sudau, Gregor is self-denyingly hiding his nauseating appearance under the sofa and gradually famishing, thus pretty much complying with the more or less blatant wish of his family. His gradual emaciation and "self-reduction" shows signs of a fatal hunger strike (which on the part of Gregor is unconscious and unsuccessful, on the part of his family not understood or ignored). Sudau also lists the names of selected interpreters of *The Metamorphosis* (e.g. Beicken, Sokel, Sautermeister and Schwarz).^[13] According to them, the narrative is a metaphor for the suffering resulting from leprosy, an escape into the disease or a symptom onset, an image of an existence which is defaced by the career, or a revealing staging which cracks the veneer and superficiality of everyday circumstances and exposes its cruel essence. He further notes that Kafka's representational style is on one hand characterized by an idiosyncratic interpenetration of realism and fantasy, a worldly mind, rationality, and clarity of observation, and on the

other hand by folly, outlandishness, and fallacy. He also points to the grotesque and tragicomical, silent film-like elements.^{[14][15]}

Fernando Bermejo-Rubio (2012) argued that the story is often viewed unjustly as inconclusive. He derives his interpretative approach from the fact that the descriptions of Gregor and his family environment in *The Metamorphosis* contradict each other. Diametrically opposed versions exist of Gregor's back, his voice, of whether he is ill or already undergoing the metamorphosis, whether he is dreaming or not, which treatment he deserves, of his moral point of view (false accusations made by Grete), and whether his family is blameless or not. Bermejo-Rubio emphasizes that Kafka ordered in 1915 that there should be no illustration of Gregor. He argues that it is exactly this absence of a visual narrator that is essential for Kafka's project, for he who depicts Gregor would stylize himself as an omniscient narrator. Another reason why Kafka opposed such an illustration is that the reader should not be biased in any way before reading. That the descriptions are not compatible with each other is indicative of the fact that the opening statement is not to be trusted. If the reader isn't hoodwinked by the first sentence and still thinks of Gregor as a human being, he will view the story as conclusive and realize that Gregor is a victim of his own degeneration.^{[15][16]}

Volker Driike (2013) believes that the crucial metamorphosis in the story is that of Grete. She is the character the title is directed at. Gregor's metamorphosis is followed by him languishing and ultimately dying. Grete, by contrast, has matured as a result of the new family circumstances and assumed responsibility. In the end – after the brother's death – the parents also notice that their daughter, "who was getting more animated all the time, [...] had recently blossomed into a pretty and shapely girl", and want to look for a partner for her. From this standpoint Grete's transition, her metamorphosis from a girl into a woman, is the subtextual theme of the story.^[16]

II.DISCUSSION

Translation of the opening sentence

Translators of the novel into English have given widely different texts, including of the opening sentence, which in the original is "*Als Gregor Samsa eines Morgens aus unruhigen Träumen erwachte, fand er sich in seinem Bett zu einem ungeheuren Ungeziefer verwandelt*". In their 1933 translation of the story, Willa Muir and Edwin Muir rendered it as "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect".^[17]

The phrase "ungeheuren Ungeziefer" in particular has been rendered in many different ways by translators.^[18] These include:

- "gigantic insect" (Willa and Edwin Muir, 1933)
- "monstrous kind of vermin" (A. L. Lloyd, 1946)
- "monstrous vermin" (Stanley Corngold, 1972, Joachim Neugroschel, 1993, Donna Freed, 1996)
- "giant bug" (J. A. Underwood, 1981)
- "monstrous insect" (Katja Pelzer, 1915, Malcolm Pasley, 1992, Richard Stokes, 2002)
- "enormous bug" (Stanley Appelbaum, 1996)
- "gargantuan pest" (M. A. Roberts, 2005)
- "monstrous cockroach" (Michael Hofmann, 2007)
- "monstrous verminous bug" (Ian Johnston, 2007)
- "some kind of monstrous vermin" (Joyce Crick, 2009)
- "horrible vermin" (David Wyllie, 2011)
- "some sort of monstrous insect" (Susan Bernofsky, 2014)
- "some kind of monstrous bedbug" (Christopher Moncrieff, 2014)
- "large verminous insect" (John R. Williams, 2014)

In Middle High German, *Ungeziefer* literally means "unclean animal not suitable for sacrifice"^[19] and is sometimes used colloquially to mean "bug", with the gist of "dirty, nasty bug". It can also be translated as "vermin".^{[18][20]} English translators of *The Metamorphosis* have often rendered it as "insect".

What kind of bug or vermin Kafka envisaged remains a debated mystery.^{[17][21][22]} Kafka had no intention of labeling Gregor as any specific thing, but instead was trying to convey Gregor's disgust at his transformation. In his letter to his



publisher of 25 October 1915, in which he discusses his concern about the cover illustration for the first edition, Kafka does use the term *Insekt*, though, saying "The insect itself is not to be drawn. It is not even to be seen from a distance."^[23]

Vladimir Nabokov, who was a lepidopterist as well as a writer and literary critic, concluded from details in the text that Gregor was not a cockroach, but a beetle with wings under his shell, and capable of flight. Nabokov left a sketch annotated "just over three feet long" on the opening page of his English teaching copy. In his accompanying lecture notes, he discusses the type of insect Gregor has been transformed into. Noting that the cleaning lady addressed Gregor as "dung beetle" (*Mistkäfer*), e.g., 'Come here for a bit, old dung beetle!' or 'Hey, look at the old dung beetle!'", Nabokov remarks that this was just her way of friendly addressing and that Gregor "is not, technically, a dung beetle. He is merely a big beetle."^[24]

One morning, when GregorSamsa woke from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a horrible vermin.' Thus begins *The Metamorphosis*, cited as one of the seminal works of fiction of the twentieth century. A story of GregorSamsa, a travelling salesman, who wakes up one day to discover that he has metamorphosed into a bug, *The Metamorphosis* is a book that concerns itself with the themes of alienation, disillusionment and existentialism. As Samsa struggles to reconcile his humanity with his transformation, Kafka, very deftly, weaves his readers into a web that deals with the absurdity of existence, the alienating experience of modern life and the cruelty and incomprehensibility of authoritarian power, leaving them at once stunned and impressed.²⁴

III.RESULTS

GregorSamsa, a traveling salesman, wakes up in his bed to find himself transformed into a large insect. He looks around his room, which appears normal, and decides to go back to sleep to forget about what has happened. He attempts to roll over, only to discover that he cannot due to his new body—he is stuck on his hard, convex back. He tries to scratch an itch on his stomach, but when he touches himself with one of his many new legs, he is disgusted. He reflects on how dreary life as a traveling salesman is and how he would quit if his parents and sister did not depend so much on his income. He turns to the clock and sees that he has overslept and missed his train to work.

Gregor's mother knocks on the door, and when he answers her, Gregor finds that his voice has changed. His family suspects that he may be ill, so they ask him to open the door, which he keeps locked out of habit. He tries to get out of bed, but he cannot maneuver his transformed body. While struggling to move, he hears his office manager come into the family's apartment to find out why Gregor has not shown up to work. He eventually rocks himself to the floor and calls out that he will open the door momentarily.²²

Through the door, the office manager warns Gregor of the consequences of missing work and hints that Gregor's recent work has not been satisfactory. Gregor protests and tells the office manager that he will be there shortly. Neither his family nor the office manager can understand what Gregor says, and they suspect that something may be seriously wrong with him. Gregor manages to unlock and open the door with his mouth, since he has no hands. He begs the office manager's forgiveness for his late start. Horrified by Gregor's appearance, the office manager bolts from the apartment. Gregor tries to catch up with the fleeing office manager, but his father drives him back into the bedroom with a cane and a rolled newspaper. Gregor injures himself squeezing back through the doorway, and his father slams the door shut. Gregor, exhausted, falls asleep.

Gregor wakes and sees that someone has put milk and bread in his room. Initially excited, he quickly discovers that he has no taste for milk, once one of his favorite foods. He settles himself under a couch and listens to the quiet apartment. The next morning, his sister Grete comes in, sees that he has not touched the milk, and replaces it with rotting food scraps, which Gregor happily eats. This begins a routine in which his sister feeds him and cleans up while he hides under the couch, afraid that his appearance will frighten her. Gregor spends his time listening through the wall to his family members talking. They often discuss the difficult financial situation they find themselves in now that Gregor can't provide for them. Gregor also learns that his mother wants to visit him, but his sister and father will not let her.²⁰

Gregor grows more comfortable with his changed body. He begins climbing the walls and ceiling for amusement. Discovering Gregor's new pastime, Grete decides to remove some of the furniture to give Gregor more space. She and her mother begin taking furniture away, but Gregor finds their actions deeply distressing. He tries to save a picture on the wall of a woman wearing a fur hat, fur scarf, and a fur muff. Gregor's mother sees him hanging on the wall and passes out. Grete calls out to Gregor—the first time anyone has spoken directly to him since his transformation. Gregor runs out of the room and into the kitchen. His father returns from his new job, and misunderstanding the situation, believes Gregor has tried to attack the mother. The father throws apples at Gregor, and one sinks into his back and remains lodged there. Gregor manages to get back into his bedroom but is severely injured.



Gregor's family begins leaving the bedroom door open for a few hours each evening so he can watch them. He sees his family wearing down as a result of his transformation and their new poverty. Even Grete seems to resent Gregor now, feeding him and cleaning up with a minimum of effort. The family replaces their maid with a cheap cleaning lady who tolerates Gregor's appearance and speaks to him occasionally. They also take on three boarders, requiring them to move excess furniture into Gregor's room, which distresses Gregor. Gregor has also lost his taste for the food Grete brings and he almost entirely ceases eating.

One evening, the cleaning lady leaves Gregor's door open while the boarders lounge about the living room. Grete has been asked to play the violin for them, and Gregor creeps out of his bedroom to listen. The boarders, who initially seemed interested in Grete, grow bored with her performance, but Gregor is transfixed by it. One of the boarders spots Gregor and they become alarmed. Gregor's father tries to shove the boarders back into their rooms, but the three men protest and announce that they will move out immediately without paying rent because of the disgusting conditions in the apartment.²²

Grete tells her parents that they must get rid of Gregor or they will all be ruined. Her father agrees, wishing Gregor could understand them and would leave of his own accord. Gregor does in fact understand and slowly moves back to the bedroom. There, determined to rid his family of his presence, Gregor dies.

Upon discovering that Gregor is dead, the family feels a great sense of relief. The father kicks out the boarders and decides to fire the cleaning lady, who has disposed of Gregor's body. The family takes a trolley ride out to the countryside, during which they consider their finances. Months of spare living as a result of Gregor's condition have left them with substantial savings. They decide to move to a better apartment. Grete appears to have her strength and beauty back, which leads her parents to think about finding her a husband.

Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* explores the degradation and transformative power of alienation. As its protagonist, Gregor Samsa, experiences personal alienation from the people he has cared for and served, he is transformed, losing himself altogether. Simultaneously, in ironic contrast to his experience, his transformation enables those around him to grow. Their lives are renewed at the cost of his own.

In the novella's inciting incident, Gregor, a traveling salesman, wakes to find himself transformed into an insect. The narrator recounts this bizarre change in a straightforward manner, at once setting the story's absurdist tone and suggesting a universe that lacks order and justice. Gregor's imprisoning transformation, symbolic of the conditions of his existence, separates him physically and emotionally from his family, his coworkers, and humanity in general. This theme concerning the effects of alienation is prevalent: Gregor's metamorphosis into an insect reflects the alienation he experienced in life. Even before his transformation, he had disliked his job and office manager, had few friends, spent evenings alone reading the paper or train schedules, and supported his family in an emotionally detached way.²³

Gregor struggles to reconcile his growing awareness of his condition with what he had believed his condition to be, forming his internal conflict and the central conflict of the story. Despite his hideous appearance, Gregor retains his inner life and strives to reconcile his humanity with the reality symbolized by his physical state. He does not appear to be fazed by his newfound body; that which is essential about him remains unchanged. Instead, he focuses on day-to-day concerns that define him. He worries about losing his job and about his family's financial situation. His income supports his parents and sister, Grete, and he works to pay off his unmotivated father's debts. His father remains unnamed throughout the story, underscoring his estrangement from Gregor, a biographical echo of Kafka's relationship with his own father.

Events in the rising action emphasize Gregor's tragic awareness of his alienation, yet they also reveal that his family has begun its own transformation, gaining independence to grow. Once Gregor manages to open the door to his bedroom, his family and the office manager are horrified by his appearance, foreshadowing the fact that Gregor's isolation will become even more pronounced. However, Grete—the only other named character in the story—engages with him, discovering that he prefers to eat moldy scraps since he has lost his taste for milk.

As events unfold, Kafka emphasizes the growth of the family as Gregor declines. Gregor spends most of his time listening to his family, separated by the door, and discovers that he enjoys climbing around his room. His mother and sister, in response, remove the furniture so he has more physical space, although he remains emotionally disturbed. In a pivotal scene, Gregor clings to a picture of a woman in furs hanging on the wall—he does not want this association with the human world and his past to be removed. Gregor's mother, seeing him on the wall, faints, and his father, newly clean



and healthy since becoming a bank attendant, misunderstands. He acts, throwing fruit at Gregor, treating him like a wild animal, and the apple that lodges in Gregor's back eventually ends his life. Even Grete's initial concerns and gestures toward Gregor sour throughout the rising action as he becomes burdensome, suggesting her own growing independence.²⁴

At the story's climax, Gregor's struggle ends, concluding his tragic life. The life of his family, however, is on its way to renewal. Gregor has become further isolated. His sister's sympathy for him has waned; she has delegated responsibility for his care to the cleaning lady. The family has relegated Gregor to his cluttered room; for extra money, they have taken in three boarders who value order and cleanliness. Then, in a desperate act to retain his humanity, Gregor creeps out to hear his sister playing the violin. He is spotted by one of the boarders, and they declare that they will move out and refuse to pay rent. Gregor, it is clear, has become a liability. Grete tells her parents that they must stop thinking of the insect as Gregor and find a way to get rid of it. Gregor, his alienation complete, retreats to his room, accepts his condition, metaphorically having disappeared altogether, and dies that night.

Although Gregor's death represents a tragic failure to end his own alienation, the falling action suggests that the death is transformative and positive. In a set of surreally hopeful events, the family travels into the "warm sunshine" of the countryside, a stark contrast to their cramped apartment. Each member reflects on their respective job prospects, envisioning the move on to better things in a new, smaller, and more affordable home. Their feeling of relief is palpable.

The story concludes with yet another metamorphosis. Grete has transformed into a woman in her parents' eyes. They ponder finding a husband for her, pointing to the next chapter of her life. In the final scene, she stretches her arms wide, suggesting her emergence from her youthful cocoon.²¹

IV. CONCLUSION

German literature, German literature comprises the written works of the German-speaking peoples of central Europe. It has shared the fate of German politics and history: fragmentation and discontinuity. Germany did not become a modern nation-state until 1871, and the prior history of the various German states is marked by warfare, religious turmoil, and periods of economic decline. This fragmented development sets German literature apart from the national literatures of France and England, for instance, which enjoyed uninterrupted brilliance from the Middle Ages to the modern era. Nevertheless, German literature has experienced three periods of established greatness: the high Middle Ages (c. 1160–c. 1230), the turn of the 18th to the 19th century (the "age of Goethe"), and the turn of the 19th to the 20th. The Metamorphosis, symbolic story by Austrian writer Franz Kafka, published in German as *Die Verwandlung* in 1915.

The opening sentence of *The Metamorphosis* has become one of the most famous in Western literature: "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect." (Although Samsa has sometimes been described as a cockroach, the German word *Ungeziefer* does not refer to a particular bug.) His tyrannical father forces him to hide in his bedroom, and, after his father throws an apple at him, Gregor slowly dies from both his family's neglect and his own guilty despair.²⁴

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