

Analysis of the Alienation in *The Metamorphosis*

Xin Chen

Department of Foreign Language, Ningxia University, Ningxia, China 750000

Copyright: © 2023 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract

The Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka is published in 1915, which is a fable novel and combines realism and romanticism. In this essay I will firstly give summary of *The Metamorphosis*, and then analyze the characters and the manifestations of “alienation” in this novel.

Keywords

The Metamorphosis
Franz Kafka
Alienation

1. Introduction

In this part, the brief summary of *The Metamorphosis* will be given. Poor Gregor Samsa wakes up one morning to discover that he’s become a “monstrous vermin”. As he struggles to come to terms with his new body, he realizes that he’s late for his job as a traveling salesman. First his mother, then his father and sister, knock on his bedroom door trying to get him out of bed. His supervisor, the office manager, arrives to inquire about his absence. With his parents pleading with the office manager outside his bedroom door and his sister sobbing in another room—they’re upset because they think he’s sick or shirking his responsibilities—Gregor manages to crawl to his bedroom door, open it, and reveal to everyone his shocking new buggy form.

His mother collapses, and the office manager runs out of the apartment in horror. His father grabs a newspaper and the office manager’s cane and chases Gregor around the living room. Gregor finally manages to crawl back to his bedroom door... but he gets stuck.

His father firmly shoves him into the room and closes the door behind him.

Perplexed and horrified by Gregor’s new body, both Gregor and the family settle into a routine in the following weeks and months. While Gregor gets to know the capabilities of his new body—and his new taste for rotten foods—Grete, his sister, becomes his primary caretaker, feeding him twice a day and cleaning his room.

One day, Grete discovers that Gregor enjoys crawling all around the room, including over the walls and the ceilings. Grete and the mother proceed to move the furniture out of Gregor’s room to give him more space to roam. At this point Gregor has hidden himself whenever anyone walks into the room, he plants himself on top of a picture on the wall in an effort to express his wish that the furniture remain in his room.

When the women return to the room, the mother sees Gregor and faints. Grete runs into the living room to get the mother some spirits, and Gregor follows.

When Grete turns, she is startled by Gregor and runs back into Gregor's room. Flustered, Gregor scurries around the living room until he plops onto the table in the middle of the living room, exhausted.

After a brief while, the father returns home. Grete explains what has happened. The father, infuriated, chases Gregor around the living room and throws apples at him. One apple lodges into Gregor's back, paralyzing him. Suddenly, the mother runs from the room and begs the father to spare Gregor.

It takes a month for Gregor to heal from his wound. The door to Gregor's room is left open in the early evenings so that he can witness the family's nightly routine. While the father dozes in his bank messenger's uniform in a chair, the mother sews lingerie and Grete studies shorthand and French. The family hires a new cleaning woman, an old widow, who regularly chats with Gregor, much to Gregor's dismay. The family also takes in three boarders to make ends meet.

One night, the boarders invite Grete to play violin for them in the main room. Gregor is enthralled with Grete's playing, and creeps out into the middle of the room, in full view of all the spectators. At first amused, then horrified, the boarders declare that they intend to move out the next day without paying any rent. After the boarders retreat, the family confers. Grete insists that Gregor must be gotten rid of at all costs. Gregor, who is at this point still lying in the middle of the room, makes his way back into his room. Famished, exhausted, and depressed, Gregor dies early the next morning.

A few hours later, the cleaning woman discovers Gregor's corpse and announces his death to the family. After kicking out the boarders, the family decides to take a day off and take the trolley out into the country.

2. Analysis of the characters in *The Metamorphosis*

In this part I will analyze the main characters in *The Metamorphosis*.

2.1 Gregor Samsa

Gregor is the major character of *The Metamorphosis*. He is the main source of income of the Samsa family. He feels responsible for the whole family and earns his wages by working as a traveling salesman in a company. However, his transformation into a bug cripples him. Not only has he lost the ability to earn, but he also has lost his importance in the family as well as the company. Shortly after the transformation, he doesn't come out of the room and slowly responds to the calling of his mother and sister.

Meanwhile, when the manager comes and threatens him, he does not budge either. Finally, his sister succeeds after coaxing him to open the door. She feels shocked at his transformation but doesn't express it. She controls herself and informs other family members. Eventually, they get accustomed to him and plan to come out of the financial difficulties. His sister starts working, while the family rents out the small apartment to lodgers to earn and save money. Soon he loses his significance and dies in the end.

2.2 Grete Samsa

Grete is the young sister of Gregor Samsa. I think she is perhaps the only person who has a little understanding when Gregor transforms into a bug. She perhaps understands from the start how her brother has transformed. Her brother's transformation changes her and her entire family. She takes the responsibility of taking care of Gregor, by understanding his food habits and makes space for him in the room (Kafka, 1915). She also immediately transforms herself to take up the responsibility of the family by caring for her parents and helping them financially. She understands that Gregor is a burden on the family. Out of frustration and pain, she expresses that they must get rid of him to secure the future of the family.

2.3 Mr. Samsa

Mr. Samsa is the father of Gregor Samsa and Grete

Samsa and husband of Mrs. Samsa. As the head of the family, he faces financial strain and has fear of his old age. He is entirely dependent on his son who used to support them by working as a salesman. When he sees that his son has transformed into a bizarre bug, he starts working because he has no choice. Feeling estranged, he misbehaves and throws apples and kicks his son Gregor out of frustration. He thanks God when he hears that Gregor has died, knowing that he has lately become a burden for them. He knows that after the marriage of his daughter, he could live happily with his wife.

2.4 Mrs. Samsa

I think Mrs. Samsa typically performs her motherly role. She stays in the background but expresses her emotions when she comes to know about her son's transformation. Although she loves her son, she does not visit his room. She hopes that this sudden transformation may someday reverse. However, as a mother, she has expressed her worry over this sudden transformation of her son. She becomes pliable when she comes to know that the situation has changed, and her son is no more there. She adapts herself to the new circumstances and sees that Grete and her marriage would solve the family problem.

3. Manifestations of “alienation” in *The Metamorphosis*

The original meaning of the term “alienation” is “distance, transfer” (Zhu Chuanhu, 2021). This novel deeply and vividly reveals the indifference of the relationship between people and portrays the phenomenon of “alienation” in the capitalist society (Wang Jinming, 2013). I think there are mainly two kinds of “alienation” in *The Metamorphosis*.

3.1 Self-alienation

At the beginning of the novel, it was written that when Gregor woke up, he found himself transformed into a giant bug. I think this is the most intuitive manifestation of alienation, that is, the alienation of appearance. At

first, the change in appearance did not change Gregor's mentality too much. He did not show strong fear and loss because of this, and he has always had the consciousness of being a human in his heart. Although Gregor still cared about his family, the attitude of his family changed after several panics caused by Gregor, which made Gregor doubt his own existence, and his mentality has eventually changed.

3.2 “Alienation” in relationships

The first “alienation” in relationships I think manifests in the relationship between Gregor and the company he works for. Although Gregor has transformed into a bug, the leaders of the profit-oriented company only care about why employees do not go to work on time and why they do not meet the corresponding workload. The interpersonal relationship in the workplace is maintained by money, and the trust between people disappears, resulting in increasingly indifferent workplace relationships, and interpersonal relationships are therefore “alienated.”

The most influential and most deadly impact on Gregor is the “alienation” in family relationships. When the economic crisis came, Gregor actively devoted himself to work. The money he earned was enough to cover the expenses of the family. The family members were also used to getting living expenses from Gregor. Gregor became the backbone of the family's economy. But the warmth the family gave Gregor when he got the cash back for the first time disappeared because of its transformation to a bug. After the transformation, with Gregor's several panic attacks, his family's attitude towards him gradually changed. At first the family respected Gregor, the mother said softly whispering, the stern father would scream for warmth, and his sister was very close to him. When the family began to work hard to make a living, Gregor, who had lost his labor force, became a burden for his family. His huge bug body was scary and frightening. He became disgusted to the family. Every time Gregor caused a panic, he was beaten by his father, and his family began to neglect

him. Until the end, the father and sister were left with indifference and disgust towards Gregor, and even the mother, who had always worried about her son, began to treat him coldly. The family's indifference made Gregor recognize his situation, and he himself couldn't wait to get rid of this predicament. In Gregor's family, money became a family harmony. Money is an important factor to his family and a series of contradictions surrounding money have become the key to breaking the harmony, and the relationship between family members has therefore been "alienated."

4. Conclusion

Kafka is a representative of the expressionism, and

his works naturally reveal the characteristics of the expressionism—requiring to express the essence of the existence of things, to break through the description of human behavior and the environment of human life and reveal the humanity (Wu Shuangyu, 2020). *The Metamorphosis* combines absurdity and reality to fully express the theme of the novel. It includes not only the plot of the event, the image of the characters, and the absurdity of various relationships, but also its the reality of society, the true feelings of the author's heart. This harmonious unity of both absurdity and authenticity also makes this novel of Kafka more attractive and thought provoking.

About the author: Xin Chen (1994-) female, post graduate of Ningxia university, engaged in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics in Foreign Languages.

References

- [1] Jingming Wang. "Alienation": Comment on Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. *Short story (original edition)*, 2013 (36): 75-76
- [2] Wu Shuangyu. The absurdity and truth of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. *Journal of Heihe College*, 2020 (03): 123-125 + 134
- [3] Zhu Wanhong, Fang Xiucui. The connotation of "alienation" in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. *Journal of Baicheng Normal University*, 2021 (04): 64-69
- [4] Franz Kafka. *The Metamorphosis*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014.

Publisher's note

Art & Technology Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.