

The transformation, or metamorphosis, represents Gregor's personal alienation and the effect of his deadening job.

- Gregor's metamorphosis symbolizes problems in his family and how the demands placed on him have worn him down.

- Gregor's metamorphosis poignantly illustrates the power struggle within this family and shows how Gregor's transformation alters the family's dynamics.

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Other metamorphoses also occur in the story. Gregor's family see his predicament as an affront to them (after all, they expect Gregor to support the family). They withdraw from him, try to contain the damage, but in the process begin to change their own life stories as well--Gregor's father, who had been disabled, mobilizes and goes back to work; he changes from being an "old man" to a bank official "holding himself very erect." Gregor's sister also gets a job and seems on the verge of a new life.

"The Metamorphosis" can also be seen as a reaction against bourgeois society and its demands. Gregor's manifest physical separation may represent his alienation and inarticulate yearnings. He had been a "vermin," crushed and circumscribed by authority and routine. He had been imprisoned by social and economic demands: "Just don't stay in bed being useless"

In a psychoanalytic interpretation, The Metamorphosis prevents the imminent rebellion of the son against the father. Gregor had become strong as a result of his father's failure. He crippled his father's self-esteem and took over the father's position in the family. After the catastrophe, the same sequence takes place in reverse: son becomes weak, and father kills him.

<<http://endeavor.med.nyu.edu/lit-med/lit-med-db/webdocs/webdescrips/kafka98-des-.html>>

1.) Some critics view this rather strange novella as an exploration of the father/son conflict, with the son attempting to please the father. What in the novella supports this view?

2.) Some critics interpret the novella as an exploration of a male's attempt to come to terms with human (not roach) sexuality. Their primary interest is the scene in which Gregor "covers" the pin-up (p. 26). What else in the novella supports this view?

3.) Is it possible to view this novella as a fractured (and perhaps inverted) version of the story of the Garden of Eden? Gregor is wounded by an apple, thrown by his "father." What other elements of the novella might fit (or at least parallel) the story of the Garden of Eden?

<http://nweb.pct.edu/homepage/staff/evavra/Enl121/Novels/N_Metamorphosis.htm>

The whole story is about Gregor's struggle between remaining a human in spite of changed appearance, and temptations to identify with this new body.

The first sign of doubt regarding his humanity comes from outside, from one of Gregor's employers. That did not disturb Gregor initially, because doubt came from outside, from an official figure, and was counterbalanced by the care, support and emotions expressed initially by the family members.

At this point it seems to be very important to mention, that Kafka's "Metamorphosis" is not only the story about an individual, but it is also the story about his family trying to cope with the tragedy.²

We learn from "Metamorphosis" that gradually both, Gregor and his family, change their habits, ways of communicating and interacting with each other.

The most painful moment in the whole story is when Gregor hears his sister, Greta, playing the violin. He wonders, whether it were ever possible for him to be a "vermin" if music had such strong effect on him.

I believe that this particular event, verbalization of his [self-doubt](#), should be understood as the expression of Gregor's [identity crisis](#) and perceived as a [turning point](#) in the whole story.

As long, as Gregor had the slightest hope for returning to the human community he kept on living. But when the whole family, including his sister, agreed that he was "a vermin" and nothing else, the creature died.

The negative resolution of his self-doubt, when imposed on Gregor by the most important people in his life, took away all his motivation and desire to struggle any longer.³ Self-doubt through, first self-deception, and then self-denial, led to self-destruction.

Notes

1. This paper has been first presented by the author at the PhD Postgraduate Students Workshop in Warwick, UK, in November 1990. The full version has been published in 1996 as *The Case of Gregor Samsa as the Example of Estrangement from Humanity* in the *Conference Proceedings* of ISSEI

2. From which one may infer that crises of that nature have an impact not only on a particular individual, but also on his/her social environment.

3. That example seems to suggest that one's abilities to cope with self-doubt can be, to some degree, conditional on so-called "significant people".

<<http://www.crisis.info/article9.html>>

Topics for ACE students' response:

1. Devise a chart to track who takes care of Gregor and to what degree.

2. Describe the relationship between Gregor and his father; between Gregor and his sister; between Gregor and his mother.
3. How does the novella define “power”?
4. Trace any issues of power within the family: who has it, when, under what circumstances?
5. What economic issues arise during the novella?
6. What can you tell us about Gregor’s life and its quality prior to the metamorphosis? Afterward?
7. Is Gregor the only character who undergoes a metamorphosis?
8. What Oedipal issues and relationships may underlie the events of the story?
9. Why does Gregor attempt to cover up a picture of a lady muffled in fur?
10. It’s been suggested that this story fractures or inverts the story of the Garden of Eden. How might that work?