The Metamorphosis Essay, Research Paper

Analyzing The Metamorphosis

Upon first reading The Metamorphosis, a person might think the author is a little strange for writing such a story. It seems to defy anything rational, yet it has been regarded as a masterpiece in literature. I, myself, still wonder how Kafka could write such a great story that is, in my opinion, extremely bazaar and, well, weird. And that is putting it lightly.

In the beginning of the story, Kafka abruptly brings us into the sad life of a traveling salesman, named Gregor. When he wakes up in the morning, the first picture that is painted is a round-bellied sort of insect lying on its back with its “numerous legs, which were pitifully thin compared to the rest of his bulk, waved helplessly before his eyes”. This reminds me of my summer excursions out to my back yard, the hot sun beating down on my back while I torment small insects that happen to come my way. After I smash them, their legs wave violently, in the same manner in which Gregor’s legs move. It is only a painful thought to bear.

As the story unfolds, we learn that Gregor is the only income for the family. His mother is old and has asthma, and his dad is getting too weak to take the pressures of working a full-time job. His sister, who is of working age, has no inclination to work though it is obvious that she is a good worker (we see this after Gregor wakes up and is immediately taken care of by his sister, Grete). The reader now begins to wonder if this life as a bug is actually worse than Gregor going on living as a human being. Both are bad, but it becomes apparent that the only thing his family really sees as valuable in him is the money he makes and the comfortable living that it brings. When his family finds out that he has not caught the train, they get worried that he will get fired. In fact, it is almost alluded to in the text that Gregor has obviously not ever been late, and they are so worried that they might not actually have Gregor to support them. I found this dependence frightening and would probably make me want to turn into a bug, too.

Kafka was brilliant in not actually letting his readers know exactly what kind of bug Gregor was. It was obviously intentional. When the book got published, Kafka was actually worried that the publisher would want to illustrate a picture of the bug-like creature. He wrote the publisher explaining that he didn’t want any pictures that depicted what Gregor might have looked like. I like this idea because it really helps the reader of the story use their imagination. One of the worst things in the world is to read a book, get a picture in your head of what characters look and act like, and in the end, flip through pictures generated from another person’s mind. In John Updike’s commentary of Kafka’s The Metamorphosis, he alludes to Gregor maybe being a centipede instead of a beetle or a cockroach. Though Kafka says Gregor has “numerous legs”, I do not necessarily think that means he has to be a centipede. To a human being, numerous legs would be six legs as compared to our normal two legs. Besides, never have I seen a centipede with a “domed-like brown belly”. Also, a cockroach (which would be a fitting choice) does not seem to match the description Kafka gives. I have concluded for myself that the bug that Gregor has sadly turned into is some sort of beetle. The good thing about not knowing Gregor’s true identity as a species is that it will raise levels of imaginations, as well as debates for years to come.

It is very striking how the relationship between Gregor and Grete changes throughout the story. It is inferred that before the metamorphosis, the two were very close. It even says that Gregor had plans to send his beloved sister to the conservatory because she was such a wonderful violinist. The bond they had between the two of them seemed to be enhanced by Gregor’s love for Grete’s music.

Once Gregor has ‘morphed’ into the bug, his sister more than likely out of love and concern, takes care of him. She gives him food and cleans up his room for him. His parents will not go anywhere near him, though I think his mother really wants to. Grete is left to take care of him, and then she gets sick of it by the second chapter. We start to notice that the care for Gregor dwindles to the point that his room is cleaned only about once a month. Annoyance is growing for this ‘thing’ that once was her brother. She even says that if it truly were Gregor, then he would take under consideration his family’s feelings and leave the flat. By the end of the story, Grete is fed up with Gregor and just wants him dead. It is understandable that she would feel this way, but when reading this I find myself getting mad because I picture in my mind the conditions in which Gregor has to live in. Not only has he mysteriously turned into a bug literally overnight, he has been left by himself; secluded from the world to rot in his own excrement. How sad this is. I think if I were his sister, mother, or father, I would have a little more compassion.

This story is one of my favorites because I think that if I were a good writer, I would write something like The Metamorphosis because it is just off the wall, yet at the same time intense and very dramatic. While writing this paper I have come to realize that one could write a fair amount on this brilliant story by Franz Kafka.

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