## Introduction

Kafka's life story is in great part the key to his work. Born in Prague as the son of well-to-do Jewish parents, he was a pupil at the Gymnasium and thereafter was a student at Prague University, first of chemistry and German language and literature, from which he switched over to law. He made friends with a fellow student, Max Brod, who, after Kafka's early death, published his friend's work. Kafka scratches the surface of everyday existence to reveal a world of absurdity and paradox, of aimlessness and futility, in which man is tormented by an unrevealed and unexplained anxiety. His style is remarkably precise and lucid, despite the grotesque unreality of the occurrences that it is used to describe. His stories, in their combination of clarity and unreality, are masterpieces of dream-fiction.

Kafka was a Jew, and once described himself as "the eternal Jew... wandering senselessly through a senselessly obscene world."[1] His life was indeed a kind of wandering in the wilderness. He was, in his own words, "full of childish hopes (particularly as regards women)"; these hopes, however, are "merely mirages born of despair" especially at those times when he was "the wretchedest of creatures in the desert," and Canaan was his only "Promised Land, for no third place exists for mankind."[2] He also added in his diary, referring to his miserable life, that he was "as lonely as F. Kafka."[3] Kafka is known for the visionary character of his novels, stories, parables, and sketches, all of which center on the problematic existence of modern man, including Kafka himself in the person of Joseph K. in The Castle. It is the purpose of the present paper, after this preliminary observation, to undertake a study of Kafka's famous story, Metamorphosis, in comparison and relation to Ovid's Metamorphoses, Lucius' Golden Ass, Miller's Death of a Salesman, and Tolstoy's The Death of Ivan Ilyich. However, on top of all, it will initiate you into Kafka's biography, and then will start a discussion of Metamorphosis, which is similar in some ways to the works mentioned.

## I. Kafka: A Biography[4]

Our knowledge of Kafka's life comes mostly from Max Brod's Franz Kafka: eine Biographie (1936). His love letters to Milena, a married lady who translated his early work into Czech, are revealing, too; there was love on both sides, but instead of consummation there was that helpless frustration which is one of the key-notes of his work. Dora Dymant has provided information concerning the last years of his life. One of the main facts is that of his relations with his father, who, a successful businessman, had no understanding for the literary vocations of his son. In consequence, there developed the son-father conflict and the persecution-conflict in the son, which is reflected throughout Kafka's work and his letters. The son-father conflict conspicuously stands out in Das Urteil, in which a son drowns himself at his father's bidding, and in Die Verwandlung, later rechristened Die Metamorphose.

Franz Kafka (1883-1924) is an Austrian novelist. He was born and raised in the German-Jewish enclave of Prague, the city where he spent most of his unhappy life.

Kafka was not very well acquainted with the town, even though he was born there. The German language, in which his books are written, separated him from the Czechs. Yet, the servants and employees of his father were self-conscious and aggressive Slavs. On the other hand, his Jewish origins kept him estranged from the Austrian upper class, which more often than not indulged in a covert and inconsistent anti-semitism and administered the city according to the prejudices of the moribund monarchy. As a Jew, he encountered anti-Semitism; as a German-Austrian, the political resentment of the Czech population; and as the son of a well-to-do businessman, the class hatred of the poor.

While he earned a law degree and then for fourteen years as he worked as a bureaucrat in a position he detested, Kafka lived in the house of his father, a robust, domineering man who misunderstood his son. Kafka constantly blamed his father for stripping him of all self-confidence and for developing in him boundless feeling of guilt. His strained family life, as well as his intense personal concern with religious questions, undoubtedly explains his repeated exploration of the utter incomprehensibility of God and the psychological ambivalence of family relationships, particularly between father and son. In his stories such as "Das Urteil ["The Judgement (1913), and The Metamorphosis and in the novels such as Amerika, The Trial, and The Castle, posthumously published, fathers, father-figures, or authorities misunderstand, judge, misjudge, abuse, and even kill the young heroes.

After taking his degree in 1906, Kafka was for a year a barrister without pay in attendance at the law courts. When, however, his father insisted on his earning money, he worked for a year in the family business, then as an official in a workmen's insurance company. Since he finished work at 2.0 p.m., he had leisure to follow his literary leanings. In World War I he was granted exemption from military service on the grounds of poor psyche annd ill health. By 1917 he was known to be suffering from tuberculosis. He went to Berlin to devote himself to literature; but the post-war privations aggravated his disease and he was removed to a sanatorium near Vienna, where he died in 1924 at the age of forty-one. In the last years of his life he lived happily with Dora Dymant, and wished to marry her, but her father forbade the marriage because Kafka was not Orthodox.

The tradition of his family's religion, the Jewish belief, exerted on Kafka an after-effect still strong enough to suggest to him hidden depths of existence and powers holding sway beyond man's life. His parables are as multilayered as their Biblical models. However, unlike them, they are also multifaceted, ambiguous, and capable of so many interpretations that, in the final analysis, they defy any and all.

F. Kafka's importance derives from the fact that he was probably the first and certainly the most radical writer to pronounce the insoluble paradox of human existence by using this paradox as the message of his parables. Therefore, any interpretation of his work will have return to the text itself. With Brod's help, Kafka's work has been subjected to endless interpretation, which has created considerable critical disagreement as to his place in German or World literature. Central to the disagreement is the

question whether Kafka's obscure, symbolic works were in fact profound existential or religious allegories or, as he expressed it, only about his "own dreamlike inner life."

We have Kierkegaard's *Geisterszene* in the writings of Franz Kafka. Historically speaking, he belongs to Expressionism, but, judged by content, he is close to Sartre and closer still to Kierkegaard, and it is more fitting to classify him as an existentialist. Today Kafka is classed both as a magic realist and as a surrealist; certainly, he is not shy of describing the lowest and even the filthiest aspects of life. However, his realism and obscenities are symbols. He is indeed a surrealist in the sense that his world is *uberwiklich;* yet, this amounts rather to mysticism than to realism. In his division of existence into the sense of worlds of finite reality and metaphysical reality he is likely to have learned something from Dostoyevsky. Kafka's ultimate purpose is to reconcile these two worlds, which is the problem handled in Crime and Punishment.

This reconciling of the two worlds of the sensuous and earthly and the irrational world of spirituality, the finite and the infinite, is the theme to which Kafka restricts his considerable fertility of invention--as it is, too, of Kierkegaard, in whose works Kafka was versed. What distinguishes Kafka from other religious thinkers is that he expresses the infinite in finite terms. In his writings the finiteness of reality does not exist; there are the outward chattels and furniture of reality, but the characters who move about this nominally naturalistic environment and carry the sense of the story are irrational, and ghost-like. What presses in on the reader's consciousness is the sense of what is behind the scenes; what happens in actuality has often the appearance of rank nonsense. Neither is there psychology in the psychologist's sense; the probing into states of mind is religious, not medical. If we attach importance to the framework of the stories we must recognize that for the horrific happenings and the transmutations of animals to beasts, etc., there is pedigree reaching from E. T. A. Hoffmann through Edgar Allan Poe.

Guilt, to Kafka, must be understood within the context of two discernable stages in Kafka's thought: the world breaking in on the self, and the self seeking to answer a call. To say that guilt originates with the world breaking into the self is to say that the world in some sense calls a man to become himself through fulfilling his "calling" that to which he is called, and that it calls him to account when he does not do so. Kafka understands this calling to account, however, in a thoroughly problematic way.

If, in most of Kafka's writings, the world seems given over without recourse to unjust rulers, in "In the Penal Colony" a higher reality enters for once to establish a higher justice. Kafka's world ordinarily resembles that of the Gnostics, who removed God to an unreachable distance and set a demiurge, or evil creator God, in unrestricted dominion over the world. "In the Penal Colony," however, resembles Psalm 82 in which the psalmist calls on God to awaken and judge the judges who do evil in his name. If the result of the Explorer's invention is a seemingly permanent modification of the more inhuman aspects of this tyranny, we are nonetheless left with the fact that the intervention is only temporary, that in the end the world of the colony remains sealed off from the rest of the world, and that this world is a penal colony whose inmates must be punished by one method or another.

In other words, if we put too much emphasis either on the abolition of the Horrow or on the intervention of the Explorer, we lose sight of the basic fact that dominates the story from the beginning to the end, namely that human existence is seen as essentially that of a penal colony from which there is no possibility of escape: "Have mercy on me," writes Kafka, "I am sinful in every nook and cranny of my being. But my gifts were not entirley contemptible; I had some small talents, squandered them, unadvised creature that I was, am now near my end just at a time when outwardly everything might at last turn out well for me. Don't thrust me in among the lost.... If I am condemned, then I am not only condemned to die, but also condemned to struggle till I die " (Diaries, 1914-1923 161).

What is at stake is the question of the image of modern in Kafka: man is nothing less than the very meaning of human existence face to face with the absurd. Kafka is, therefore, essentially a philosophical anthropologist, if we extend this term to include those whose main interest is the problem of man. Again, if concern for human existence in its concrete reality makes one an "existentialist," then Kafka is more of an existentialist than most of those who today are called by this name. What a cruel God, he thought, "it is who makes it possible for his creatures not to recognize him. After all, a father always makes himself known to his children, when they cannot think or speak properly."[5]

Kafka's world is not a transparent one, through which we can glimpse some other, more familiar reality. It is just what it is in its irreducable opaqueness and absurdity. The key to Kafka, perhaps, is that sense of caricature which is born in on us again and again. If one feels that one recognizes reality in Kafka, one always feels at the same time that it is a reality that is somehow caricatured. Though this caricature is of the nature of an abstraction from concrete reality, it does not point outward to some still more abstract concept, but back to an altogether concrete way of seeing--a perception of reality that again and again lays bare the absurdity inherent in Kafka's particular relationship to it, if not in reality itself. Thus comes his desire to die to escape reality: "This life seems unendurable, any other unattainable. One is no longer ashamed of whishing to die: one prays to be conducted from the old cell that one hated into a new one that one has yet to hate. There is in this a vestige of faith that during the change the Master may chance to walk along the corridor, contemplate the prisoner, and say: 'You must not lock up this one again.' He is to come to me."[6]

Kafka's writings are highly personalized documents whose significance is more autobiographical than it is human or even modern. Kafka saw himself as by his "essential nature, a reserved, silent, unsocial dissatisfied person," lacking "all aptitude for family life except, at best, as an observer." He was, in his words, divided from all things by a hollow space and I don't even push myself to the limits of it."[7] Kafka knew that the balance between the "inner" time of man and the "outer" time of the universe was seriously disturbed. The gravest symptom of the disorder disrupting Kafka's world that he can no longer distinguish between the social and the metaphysical authorities who govern it. Since he was a border case in the literal meaning of the word, given to analytical thinking as well as to vision, a psychologist as well as a mystic,

ambiguity became the very essence of his language. With the help of his imagery he was able to straddle the two realms of his experience: the pseudomythical underworld of his childhood, where the father held sway, and the cryptoreligious universe of his poetic vision, where God reigned in perfect inaccessibility.

Kafka died in 1924. The generations that followed have frequently recognized their own destiny in the seemingly unreal fate of his heroes. In his fantastic visions he anticipated The Waste Land as the landscape of modern man. There he lives unsheltered and totally exposed to a regimenfraught with horror and imbued with nonsense.

Although Kafka's literature was nourished by his powerful inner fantasy of life, it was not identical with it. On the contrary, it was, in a very special sense, a world of literary communion and dialogue which projected him as much from the insanity that threatened him from within as from the alien social world that threatened him from without. He, too, is suspended between hope and despair, indignation and expectation; and the silence in the end is so multilayered that we are unable to state with any degree of assurance whether it indicates his end and not, perhaps, a new beginning. Completely absorbed in his meeting with powers which seem to draw him back to his childhood and, further still, to the unfathomable recesses of the memories of his race.

## II. Metamormophosis[8]: Sources

Metamorphosis (1915) is often regarded as Kafka's most perfectly finished work. The story begins as its [anti-]hero, Gregor Samsa, awakens one morning to find himself changed into a huge insect. Then, it proceeds to develop the effects of this change upon Samsa's business and family life and ends with his death. The story has been read as everything from a religious allegory to a psychoanalytic case history; it is notable for its clarity of depiction and attention to significant detail, which give its completely fantastic occurrences an aura of indisputable truth, so that no allegorical interpretation is necessary to demonstrate its greatness.

In Die Verwandlung Gregor Samsa has been working as a commercial traveller before he changes into an insect. Now an insect, he crawls about the room and hangs down, feet upwards, from the ceiling. When his father, mother, and sister find him thus transmogrified, he understands what they say to him, but he cannot speak. To them, he is an animal. He eats anything rotten, but turns away in disgust from anything fresh. At the same time, this species of bug thinks himself entitled to be treated with all human consideration, and his faculty of thinking is unimpaired; he turns back in his mind to his old business life and the wretchedness of it and the abject subjection to tyranny that it was, especially since at home he was the victim of his family, who were unable to understand his yearning for higher things and creative activity.

Gregor's sister, at first, shows pity, then gives him up. The furniture is removed; he covers with his slimy body the picture of a lady robed in furs; he still longs for the beautiful. In measure as his family's loathing for him grows, so does his feeling of isolation, until he dies of starvation. His family celebrates the occasion by going on a

picnic. Clear, too, is the reaction to Darwinism: not Ubermenshentum, but Ubertier, Kreaturlichkeit.

According to Bithell, transmutations of human to beast and vice versa were elements of the neo-romantic *Marchen*; and in form Die Verwandlung has something of the Marchen; but, he thinks, these transmutations in the true Marchen are not symbols of intellectual processes. One might, therefore, Bithell goes on to add, class Die Verwandlung as, since it is the contrary of a Marchen proper, an anti-Marchen. However, though his statements have a share of truth, Bithell forgets to mention the prototype of literary works that pointed to transformation millenia ago: Ovid's Metamorphoses.[9]

In the episodic stories of Ovid's work, human beings are tranformed into animals or plants etc., either as a punishment or, sometimes, as a reward. Book I, for instance, starts with the primordial chaos being transformed into the ordered universe. In Book II, the story of Phaethon is related; his sisters are transformed into poplars, and Cygnus into a swan. Then, there is the story of Jupiter and Callisto, and Callisto's transformation into a bear --she and her son become stars. Battus betrays Mercury, and is turned into stone. Aglauros is changed into marble.

In Book III, similar transformations take place; the story of the Lydian sailors transformed by Bacchus is related. In Book IV, are the tales told by the daughters of Minyas--Pyramus and Thisbe. The sisters themselves are transformed into bats, their tapestries into vines; Ino and her son become gods of the sea, her attendants are turned into stone, or become birds. Cadmus and his wife are turned into serpents, and Atlas into a mountain. The wedding of Andromeda takes place in Book V.: Phineus fights for his lost bride; he and his followers are turned into stone.

Thus, Ovid's story present the reader with a lot of transformations usually imposed by the gods upon human beings. The Golden Ass by L. Apuleius is, too, another story of transformation, a rich repository of gusty, fantastic anecdotes like Metamorphoses. In tone it is bawdy and realistic; in approach it is a mixture of fancy and shrewd observation. An allegory runs through the story, the maturing of man, but the symbolizm is dim and inconclusive. Two notable themes distinguish Apuleius' work: the metamorphosis of the hero into an ass, which is a reworking of an earlier Greek tale, and a lengthy retelling of the story of Cupid and Psyche.

The episode in which metamorphosis takes place is quite interesting. One night Fotis lets Lusius look through the keyhole of Pamphile's bedroom. To his amazement, Lucius sees the witch smear herself with oinment and turn into an eagle that flies away in majestic flight. Filled with envy, Lucius demands of Fotis that she smear him with ointment and turn him into an eagle; Fotis consents but with reluctance. At a propitious time Fotis steals a box of ointment and smears Lucius, who, to his surprize, turns into an ass instead of an eagle. He looks around at the mocking Fotis, who professes to have made a mistake and promises to get him some roses in the morning, which, when he eats them, would turn him back into his former self. This does not materialize for a long time due to several reasons. Towards the end of the book, however, Lucius escapes and seeks the aid of Queen Isis. Taking pity on Lucius, she causes a priest to carry a garland

of roses in a parade. The priest offers the flowers to Lucius, who eats them eagerly, and becomes a man once again.[10]

## III. Analysis: Thematics and Characterization

Now that we have mentioned the possible "sources" of Kafka's Metamorphosis, it is time to analyze the story itself. As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect" (Norton 271). That is how the tragic story of Gregor begins. The reader, together with Gregor himself, thinks that it is one of those stories that someone tells as if it were real and that he, the teller, soon explains, to the surprize of his listeners, actually have occurred in his dreams. The story, in this respect, resembles fables or mythological tales. However, it is set in a modern atmosphere and modern place; and Gregor immediately has to come to terms with the reality that it is no dream at all. He was, when he went to bed, a human being, and still thinks he is human; but he has awakened to find himself transformed. He both believes and does not believe he is an insect. His mind is still functioning as human mind and his feeling are human. He even thinks of "sleeping a little longer and forgetting all this nonsense," but the idea does not work.

Gregor, like Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman,[11] is a commercial traveler, and feels pretty responsible for his job to his boss, worries about catching his train. Interwoven with these half-awake thoughts are Gregor's attempts to roll over, to get out of bed, to control his voice, which is becoming a kind of "twittering squeak" and less and less comprehensible to others. So mixed are the human and realistic with the inhuman and fantastic that most readers find themselves fully engaged with Gregor Samsa's consciousness, his worries, likes, and dislikes, despite his new, distasteful form.

The events in the story are seen through the consciousness, and from the view-point of Gregor, which necessarily makes the reader sympathetic to him, though, because of the manner in which the human and insect concerns are mixed or juxtaposed, the story sometimes seems funny. There is something ludicrous about the infiltrating of the real and the fantastic, the fantastic and the real in Kafka's depiction of Gregor, who even sees something comic in the situation himself. When he cannot get out of the bed, for example, he thinks, "Well, ignoring the fact that the doors were all locked, ought he really to call for help? In spite of his misery he could not suppress a smile at the very idea of it." Later he tries to stand up and open the door; there is a kind of Hitchcock suspense and absurdity in the posture and possibility: the door seems to separate the worlds of fantasy and reality, and their imminence seems frightening and funny at the same time.

At times, too, the confusion of those outside the room seems comic--their failure to understand his increasingly insect-like speech, for example. This is, of course, another means by which the reader is engaged with Gregor: we begin to feel impatient with the chief clerk and the members of the family because they do not understand that behind that door is not an obstinate, rebellious Gregor Sams, but a giant struggling to move, to speak, to come to terms with his metamorphosis. The "outsiders," those outside the room, here seem as lacking in understanding and sympathy as Ivan Ilyich circle of

friends when they hear of his death. And just as Ivan's widow seeks out his friends when they hear of his death. And just as Ivan's widow seeks out his friend not for consolation but to discover if she can get more from the government than a widow's pension, so Gregor's sister is concerned for Gregor because she fears he will lose his job and the family will be dunned for debts; and so, too, Gregor's boss suspects that Gregor's absence has something to do with his having some of the customers' cash in his hads.

When Gregor manages to open the door there is another splastic scene as the horrified witnesses fall all over each other. The comedy is reinforced by Gregor's trying to speak to the terrified chief clerk, to get him to speak up for Gregor in the firm, not for his having been transformed into a repulsive insect, but because "travelers are not popular there, I know." When the chief clerk tries to rush out of the house,Gregor, Gregor's father is upset, and the tone begins to change. His father tries to drive him back into his room, and when Gregor gets stuck in the doorway, pushes him violently from behind, a "push which was literally a deliverence and he flew far into the room bleeding freely." It is still ludicrous but doesn't seem quite so funny any more; it is a little frightening.

So end the first chapter. We are more than likely not so concerned any longer about whether this story is fantasy or reality as we are about whether it is comic or tragic, whether Gregor will successfully reassume his human shape. Escape from all other possibilities seem rather dreadful. Our sympathies for Gregor are further reinforced by the evidence in the second chapter of his sweetness of temper--or is it his naivete or passivity? When it is disclosed that his father has been holding out from his some money he has salvaged from the ruin of his business, money that could have shortened Gregor's virtual indentured servitude had it been paid to the chief. Though we learn of this with Gregor and through his consciousness, we see more in it than he does, understand the calousness of his father and indeed of the family, and how they all have taken advantage of him. His father has not worked for five years and has grown fat; his mother complains of asthma; his sister is only seventeen. The whole burden for supporting the family has been on Gregor's shoulders, and to make matters even worse--though Gregor does not think so-- his father has actually been saving money from the sums Gregor had given him for support.

Despite the decline in his condition, then, we are led to expect that he might indeed regain his former identity. Nonetheless, toward the end of the chapter, after his resistance to Grete, things take a serious turn for the worse and a less happy eventuality seems the more likely. Another metamorphosis has taken place: his father, now a bank guard, has flourished and become more authoritative. He tries to force Gregor back into his room and throws apples at him; one sticks in Gregor's insect back. If his mother had not intervened, Gregor might well have been killed right then and there.

There is still one more up and a final down in Gregor's fortunes and our hopes before what we must have known all along was the inevitable end. Rather surprisingly, Grete, the one who from the beginning seemed to understand him best, is the one who turns against him or as she says, "it." There is even a final indignity: after Gregor's death,

the new charwoman is eager, but enable to tell the family and us how "it" was disposed of. It is astonishing how, through the repellent and the comic, our sympathies have been on the side of Gregor, and how moving and pathetic the end of his story is.

On the other hand, that is not the end of The Metapmorphosis, Gregor's consiousness and plight removed, we see the family better off than they were-- not just better off than when the insect loomed in the innerroom, but better off than when Gregor, working as a salesman, supported them. They are all in reasonable good jobs, and hopeful of improvement in the future. Grete has grown up to be a pretty young lady during the ordeal; her parents plan to find a husband for her. The story ends, " And it was like a confirmation of their new dreams and excellent intentions that at the end of their journey their daughter sprang to her feet first and stretched her young body." Have they forgotten? a tribute to his"sacrifice"? a cynical view of human selfishness and separateness? The ambivalence or mixture of mode and tone continues right to the end. We are not even absolutely certain which"metamorphosis" the title is referring to.

When we close the book and think about what we have read and how we have responded to what we have read, we know that it is no dream, no comedy. It is a delicate operation at best. On the one hand, you probably need to bring it into "ordinary" terms: Gregor is not really turned into a bug-cockroach, bedbug, dung beetle, whatever- but falls ill or falls in love or he just wakes up one morning and says to hell with it all and decides not to go to work (even though he's frightened not to), or in some other way separates himself from his family and his job, his role as provider, and he becomes repulsive, or unnecessary. He is rejected, and the family, which seemed dependent on him, survives and even flourishes. Or can it be Gregor's repulsion at himself and the role forced upon him by the family, the feeling that they are exploiting him and will exploit him until he dies, but that they can, if they want, get along very well without him and without exploiting him? Some such reductive "realistic" or psychological reading is possible and in a sense perhaps necessary so that we can connect the story to our own lives or world.

The preservation of the narrative surface is not just homage to some icon sacred to art or literature, but necessary to preserve the emotional and imaginative impact of the story the feelings-repulsion, frustration, horror, contempt, pity, impatience, humor- all mixed and separate, simultaneous and alternating which define the experience more accurately than the reductive realistic or psychological interpretation can. As Tolstoy might have it, art is a more effective form of transmission of perception through feeling than is any argument or statement into which we can translate (or metamorphose) it. Gregor Samsa is a traveling salesman who supports his family, and an insect, a mutant of the imagination essential for understanding the world of human experience.

The insect's inglorious end, and the final relief of the humans are facilitated by the narrator, who continually shuttles back and forth between the world of the transformed and that of the ordinary figures, between suprarealism. Moreover, if he was intended to serve as an allegory of Kafka's insistence, this intention is continuously disturbed by Kafka's insistence on the insect's being Gregor in addition to

representing him. Even in the beginning the shock of the metamorphosis is increased by Gregor's rational reaction to it.

The story has been clearly divided into three parts. The first part shows Gregor in his relation to his profession, he second to his family, and the third to himself. This rather schematic structure is not aesthetically disturbing. The first part is as strictly limited in time as it is in space (Gregor's room). The alarm clock ticking on his bureau symbolizes the infinite and irrevocable circle of Gregor's professional life as a traveling salesman, to which he has sold himself.

However, Gregor is more than a cog in a capitalistic machine. There is a very human side to his relationship with the firm. His parents once borrowed money from the boss and staked Gregor's services as a guarantee for the sum advanced to them.

Gregor suffers from the uniformity of life inherent in the organization methods of later capitalism. The employer is both close to the employee and far removed from capitalism. The employer is both close to the employee and far removed from him. He is no longer offering any merchandise, but himself, and begs to be kept on in a profession which he has just been cursing.

In this tirade he speaks not only for himself, but for the whole tribe of traveling salesmen. If Kafka had been solely concerned with Gregor's incapability of breaking away from the law that determines his life, that is, his flight from day to dream, he would have interrupted himself here. It would have been superflous and even detrimental to the poignancy of the story to continue the description of Gregor's meanderings. No better image could be found to portray man's inability to escape himself than the insect pleading to be retained as a traveling salesman. Yet Gregor goes on circling around a dead center, first in full view of the family on top of the staircase, then, having been steered back by the indignant father, within the four walls of his room. The circle of time, described by the hands of the alarm clock, is repeated in space by the insect's desperate actions. The second part is characterized by a gradual dissolution of time. His very life is now undergoing a metamorphosis: the distinct rhythm imposed on it by his professional activities has given way to a shapeless vagueness, such as is experienced by prisoners, the sick-and Kafka's bachelor.

At the beginning of the story the individual members of the Samsa household are introduced by the insect's reactions to their voices heard from behind his locked door. The mother's voice used to be "soft," the sister's low and plaintive," but the father accompanied his summons by knocking with his fist against the door. The mother's softness is Gregor's comfort and the insect's despair. She is the first to catch sight of him after the metamorphosis, and she collapses. Here Kafka has recaptured his own mother's selflessness and the superficiality of her understanding of him. However, above all, he seems to have suffered from the idea that his mother had surrendered to the father all her love.

The most complex and decisive character in the Samsa household is the sister, Grete. The assonance between her name and Gregor's indicative of a deep-rooted familiarity between them. While he was a human, she was the only member of the family with whom he had entertained human relations worthy of the name. After the

metamorphosis, she is at first the only one to interpret it as Gregor's, and not the family's, misfortune and the first to master her horror and enter the insect's room. Thus she serves as a provider to the animal in addition to being his nurse, messenger, interpreter, and an expert in all his dealing with the family.

This has given her an undisputed authority in all matters concerning the welfare of her brother and determines her behavior in the first open family crisis. However, so great is Gregor's submissiveness and belief in Grete's wisdom that he soon comes to prefer her council to his own predilections and interests. Yet it is his very identity that he endangers by accomodating himself to Grete's design. Soon it turns out that even the mother wants to keep the room in its present state.

As images the apples in the story are also related to the Tree in the Garden of Eden, Paradise Lost, love, cognition, and sin. The use Kafka makes of these innuendoes in this story is no more than a literary olay with the religious connotation of his images, but it suffices to render the scene transparent and its meaning of the scene, but forces us to accept it as inevitable without even asking why. The same is true when he beckons us to turn away from religion and look in the direction of psychoanalysis. The second part is concluded with the "complete union" of the parents.

The death blow gregor received during this battle is accompanied by another, more subtle, wound. Grete has become a turcoat. From a Good Samaritan, a " sister" in the Christian sense of the word, she has changed into the father's daughter. By taking over his gestures and glances, she has visibly joined forces with him. "You, Gregor!" she cries at the sight of the insect squatting on the picture, and Kafka adds, "This was the first time she had directly addressed him since his metamorphosis." She still acknowledges his identity; moreover, she uses it to burden him with the full responsibility for his fate in this catastrophic scene. His advocate becomes his chief prosecutor, and in the end almost his executioner.

The title of the story might apply to Grete with greater justification than to Gregor, for it is her metamorphosis which is developed in the course of the narrative, whereas we have to accept Gregor's as an accomplished fact. More and more she plays herself into the detriment of the story. Again Kafka seems to have allowed some biographical material to interfere with his literary purpose. There is some evidence of his having been haunted by ideas of incestuous love. Deserted by his sister, realised from the very last social contacts, he has now the chance to turn inward. Yet he misses even this last opportunity. Whatever attempt at introspection he might have undertaken is thoroughly blocked by his resentment of the others. Lacking in appetite, he is nevertheless obsessed by the idea of food. His fight against the family has been reduced to a struggle for nourishment- a losing battle, for even the choicest food of the humans cannot have his nourishment any longer.

The space of the scene has shrunk even further laten on: the insect's room is now serving as a receptacle of many odd things. All of them find their way into Gregor's room the ash can likewise and the kitchen garbage can" . The reason for this additional inequity is the appearance in the Samsa apartment of three roomers. Serious, silent, and nameless, they dominate with their fullblack beards all the space that was previously at

the family's disposal. The family itself has been crammed into the kitchen. This new development seems also to be a consequence of Gregor's transformation.

When Gregor decides to intrude upon the privacy of his sister's concert and to expose himself to the unsuspecting roomers, his first impulse is a feeling of utter spite. He is going to take his revenge on the family for the ash can and the garbage can. His next emotion is one of disgust with the serious gentlemen. They obviously come from the same providence of business for business's sake that was also the territory of Gregor, the traveling salesman. Their behavior is typical: first, they allow the music to tittilate their nerves: soon, however, they get bored with it. They
display signs of earnest practicality, and are disturbed by useless and unprofitable art.

Consequently, there are three senses in which one may speak of The Metamorphosis as the world breaking in on the self. The first is that of "judgment": the routine and inauthentic existence of Gregor Samsa leads, in some way incomprehensible to us, to the quasi-existence of the gigantic insect and from there to nonexistence. This is the "judgment" that his own existence makes on itself without being aware of it, he finds the life that he has taken on too much for him and retires into the shape of an insect or his existence has imperceptibly loses its humanity so that he wakes up one morning to find himself an insect. The second sense in which the world breaks in on the self is the experience of something entirely unexpected coming along and tearing the self out of the social role and the accustomed routine that it has built up for itself. The third, and the most important sense, however, is the loss of all confirmation from others as soon as Gregor ceases to play the role of breadwinner. This third sense grows out of the second, in so far as Gregor's loss of his social role results in the loss of his family's confirmation. Yet if Gregor's family had really loved him, it might have continued to confirm him even after he had no longer supported them, just as it might have continued to hold on to the fact that this was Gregor even after he had suffered his monstrous metamorphosis.

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Notes

1. See Max Brod, ed., Dearest Father: Stories and Other Writings, trans. Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins (New York: Schocken Books, 1954) 97.

2. Max Brod, ed., The Diaries of Franz Kafka: 1914-1923, trans. M. Greenberg and Hanna Arendt ( New York: Shocken Books, 1949) 77.

3. 12. Diaries, 1914-1923 213.

4. For biographic information on Kafka, I am greatly indebted to the following: Benet's Reader's Encyclopedia (1948, Cambridge and London: Harper & Row, 1987) 518-9: Maurice Friedman, The Problematic Rebel: Melville, Dostoievsy, Kafka, Camus (1963, Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1970) 285-400: Jethro Bithell, Modern German Literature: 1880-1950 (1939, London: Methuen & Co., 1959) 72, 226, 402-3, 462, 484, 494, 504.

5. Janouch, op.cit., p. 70. [p 300]

6. F. Kafka, The Great Wall of China: Stories and Reflections, trans. W. and E. Muir (New York: Shocken Books, 1946) 256.

7 Diaries, 1910-13 180;

For the text of Metamorphosis, I have referred to Jerome Beaty, The Norton Introduction to the Short Novel (New York and London: Norton & Co., 1987).

7. Bithell 454.

8. See Ovid's Metamorphoses, trans. Mary M. Innes (1961, Harmondworth: Penguin, 1986).

9. For the entire text, see Lucius Apuleius, The Golden Ass, trans. Jack Lindsay (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1960).

10. For information on the drama and the dramatist, see A. S. Downer, Fifty Years of American Drama (Chicago: Gateway, 1966) 64, 73-5, 141-5, 147; W. J. Meserve, An Outline History of American Drama (Totowa, New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1970) 333-5. For the text of Death of a Salesman , I have referred to Masterpiecs of the Drama, eds. A. W. Allison, A. J. Carr and A. M. Eastman (1957, New York: Macmillan, 1986) 815-67.