

The Metamorphosis

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Introduction

Kafka's novella highlights the plight of Gregor, a traveling salesman who wakes up and finds himself metamorphized into gigantic insect or vermin. Although Gregor's body has changed, his concerns remained the same—he is focused on pragmatic everyday issues such as finances and his responsibilities to his family. The intrusion of his new body on his thoughts about his early human life shows that the mind and the body are not separate but closely linked, with the latter influencing the mind. Although Gregor's family initially shows loyalty to him [Gregor], their subsequent actions after the metamorphosis lead to his death. Gregor feels neglected as he imagines how his family came to take him for granted before his metamorphosis. This paper explores who is the most culpable for the traveling salesman's death. Kafka's short story highlights the severe effects of debilitating depression, the suffocating nature of family and social norms, and disgust with one's body.

Who is Responsible?

Grete, “the father”, and Gregor are somehow responsible for protagonist’s situation and death. Starting with Grete, she is the only character who initially showed empathy for Gregor, apparently due to the great affection the two shared before the transformation. She became Gregor's main caretaker—she cleaned his room, brought him food, placed his chair strategically so that he could have a clear view of the street, and came with the idea to provide Gregor adequate space by removing his furniture (Kafka, 2013, Section I). She acts as Gregor's emotional advocate in the family.

However, Grete undergoes metamorphosis than all other characters in the text—she morphs from a girl to a woman. As she changes, her pity for Gregor dwindles. While her care for Gregor was initially from a brotherly perspective, she eventually regards it a duty. She hardly

enjoys helping Gregor but does it to confirm her role in the family. Additionally, she stopped being possessive of Gregor as she did initially. As Grete developed into early adulthood, she took on additional responsibilities such as playing the violin to borders to help her family make ends meet as highlighted in section III of the novella: "Gregor could not remember having heard the violin being played, but this evening it began to be heard from the kitchen." Consequently, her commitment to his brother fades.

Grete explicitly gives up on Gregor after the disrupted violin session. She asserts that the insect is no longer Gregor and suggests its riddance as shown here: "We have to try and get rid of it..." (Kafka, 2013, Section III). Also, she states that Gregor is no longer her responsibility. Her assertion that Gregor should disappear to help the family by removing the burden he had imposed on them led to Gregor's death. Apparently, he died to relieve his family from the burden of keeping up with the insect, as suggested by Grete.

Similarly, Gregor's father is also responsible for Gregor's situation and death. Kafka portrays the father from Gregor's point of view, and for the better part, he is an unkind and hopeless man. He is primarily concerned with money rather than his son. Since the failure of his business, he became discouraged and stopped working. This act piled pressure on Gregor as he was forced to work extra hard to provide for his family and settle the family's debts, as shown in section I: "...once I've got the money together to pay off my parents' debt to him—another five or six years I suppose—that's definitely what I'll do". Despite Gregor's efforts, the father does not show sympathy for his son after the metamorphose.

On the day of metamorphosis, the father was only concerned with the family's finances. Besides, he attacked Gregor in two instances. First, he beat his son back into his room. Second, he threw a fruit (which got stuck on his back) at Gregor after the attempt to stomp on him

[Gregor] failed as the narrator outlines in section II: "...Another one, however, immediately following it, hit squarely and lodged in his back". These acts show an estrangement relationship between the two.

Although Gregor does not openly show resentment for his father, it is evident that he felt trapped by his father's failures that forced him to work as a traveling salesman. What's more, he never displayed affection for his father as he did, albeit rarely, toward Grete and his mother. Another evidence of the estrangement is the way the narrator refers to the father in the story. At no point is he addressed as Mr. Samsa. He was only considered as "the father." Unarguably, Gregor's relationship with the father contributed to his depression and inferiority complex, leading to his situation and death.

Finally, Gregor also contributed to his situation and death. His hyper-responsibility disorder and disgust with his new body drove him into a depression. As an illustration, Gregor accepted responsibility for the family after the failure of his father's business. It is evident that he disliked his job as a traveling salesman job judging from his complaint "Oh, God," he thought, "what a strenuous career it is that I've chosen! Travelling day in and day out" (Kafka, 2013, Section I). Also, he attempted to rectify his situation to take care of his family as usual. The failure to meet his family's responsibilities and expectations drove him into depression and ultimately contributes to his death.

Who Is the Best, Who is the Worst?

Gregor's mother is the best character in the short story. She is portrayed as a distressed and frail mother torn between her horror at her son's new state and her undying love for him. At first, she is concerned about her son being late for work and even defends him in front of the chief clerk, as shown by this statement: "He isn't well...he isn't well, please believe me" (Kafka,

2013, section I). Also, Mrs. Samsa protects Gregor from the wrath of "the father" when he started throwing apples at his [Gregor]. "...stumbling over the skirts she pushed herself to his father, her arms around him, uniting herself with him totally—now Gregor lost his ability to see anything—her hands behind his father's head begging him to spare Gregor's life" (Kafka, 2013, Section II). She also fainted on seeing her son in a helpless condition. Generally, Mrs. Samsa was the most compassionate, loving, and sympathetic character in Kafka's short story.

Contrarily, 'the father' was the worst character. Foremost, he placed all the family responsibility on his son despite the pressure and stress associated with the reverse of roles (where the son parents the parents). His return to work at the bank after Gregor's metamorphosis shows that he was capable of working but preferred depending on his son to take care of the family and pay his debts. Of note, "the father" donning his uniform initiated a shift in Gregor's feelings of pity and respect for him. Generally, parentification significantly impacts the child's mental wellbeing.

Additionally, "the father" is an ungrateful and cruel character. After all the good that Gregor had done to him and the family, he was never sympathetic or compassionate to the helpless son. Instead, he viewed him as a burden and outcast who should be hidden from the public/borders. For instance, when Gregor stepped out, he tried to stomp on him. Subsequently, he started throwing apples at Gregor, where one apple lodged in his [Gregor] back, inflicting unbearable pain (Kafka, 2013, Section II).

Conclusion

In a nutshell, "the father" is primarily culpable for Gregor's situation, whereas Grete is most responsible for the events leading to his death. The father's irresponsibility created a role reversal that stressed Gregor since he had to work as a traveling salesman, which he disliked, just

to take care of the family and service his father's debt. On the other hand, Grete's explicit assertion that Gregor should do the family a favor and disappear led to his death. Unlike the cruel and ungrateful father, Mrs. Samsa is the best character; she is loving and caring. The metamorphosis of the Samsa Family—from a static and hopeless family to a financially independent one—and Gregor's metamorphosis into an insect highlight the severe effects of debilitating depression, suffocating nature of family and social norms and disgust with one's body.

Reference

Kafka, F. (2013). *The metamorphosis*. Modern Library Classics.

