



### Mini Review Paper

## A Study of Kafka's the Metamorphosis in the Light of Freudian Psychological Theory

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### Abstract

*The aim of this manuscript is to consider Kafka's The Metamorphosis in the light of Freudian psychological theories. Specifically, The Metamorphosis will be seen as Kafka's own autobiography. The Metamorphosis is the dramatization of Gregor's inner world, the world which is depicted by Kafka is the world of unconscious. Freud defined the unconscious as a world in which our suppressed wills, feelings, horrors, drives and conflicts are hold. Why Gregor transferred in to a big insect? Why he was killed by his father? Why he knows himself responsible for family financial problem? This paper aims to answer all these questions.*

**Keywords:** Kafka, The Metamorphosis, psychology, Freud, unconscious

### Introduction

The Metamorphosis is one of Kafka's most interesting works which was written in 1912 and published in 1915. It is the story of a salesman, Gregor Samsa, who one morning transferred in to a verminous bug. He was hidden in his room by his family and finally he died due to an apple which was thrown by his father. This story is more than just a transformation of a human being in to a big insect. Vladimir Nabokov, in this case, referred to anyone who reads the metamorphosis beyond just a fantasy as a good reader<sup>1</sup>. The Metamorphosis is a projection of his own life, even when Gregor Samsa transferred into a verminous bug. Kafka's stories present symbolically his inner personality so professionally that understanding his stories is possible just when one has a precise view of his life. His relationship with his tyrannical father, whom the only conclusion of his training was a son with a guilty conscience, full of feeling of terror, anger and lack of self confidence, is depicted throughout his works. As he mentioned in a letter to his father, he has suffered from a sense of guilt, since he was a child, which is the result of his lack of self-confidence and he notes that this is his father who is responsible for these all<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, The Metamorphosis can be analyzed in the light of psychological criticism whose premises and procedures were established by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). In this regard, a literary text, like dream, dramatizes author's inner world, his angst and his repressed desire.

### A Psychological Analysis of Kafka's the Metamorphosis

Gregor Samsa in The Metamorphosis, in fact, represents Kafka himself. It is also interesting to note that the word Samsa is phonetically the same as the word Kafka. Furthermore, in the

word (Kafka) the letters "k" and "a" are repeated two times and in the word (Samsa) the letters "s" and "a" are repeated two times, too. Perhaps, this is another reason which proved that Gregory Samsa represents Franz Kafka himself. Gregory Samsa, like most of Kafka's antihero, live in a situation which is called "Kafkaesque", a nightmarish situation which is full of terror, horror and angst. This situation reminds the reader of the condition that Kafka himself experienced in his whole life.

The Metamorphosis is a symbolic presentation of Gregor's unconscious world. According to Freud, our mind consists of two parts: conscious and unconscious. He demonstrated that our suppressed wills, feelings, horrors, drives, conflicts and even memories are hold in unconscious part of our psyche<sup>3</sup>. The first image which takes us to Gregor's unconscious world is the setting of the story. The story opens with "one morning, as Gregor Samsa was waking up from anxious dreams, he discovered that in the bed he had been changed in to a monstrous verminous bug"<sup>4</sup>. In this image, we have the words "waking", "dream" and "bed", accordingly; it is possible to say that Gregor wakes but by this awaking, in fact; he transfers from the conscious to the unconscious world which is the world of dream. Moreover, in the very opening part of the story, it is mentioned that Gregor's body is cold: "... and wanted to feel the place with aleg. But he retracted it immediately, for the contact felt like a cold shower all over him"<sup>4</sup>. This coldness is an attribute of unconscious world for the images of night and darkness, storm, rainy coldness suggest features of unconscious.

The next image which appears to us from Gregor's unconscious world is the times of the story. Interestingly, the times which are portrayed in The Metamorphosis, throughout most of the story, are mostly night or evening, and if the time is morning, it is

frosty and raining. For instance, the story begins in one morning when Gregor understands he is no longer a human being but a big insect. In the third paragraph, it is mentioned that "Gregor's glance then turned to the window. The dreary weather (the rain drops were falling audibly down on the metal window ledge) made him quite melancholy"<sup>4</sup>.

Or in another part, the writer depicted Gregor who gazed at the window. It was foggy, so that, it seemed to him that it was seven o'clock<sup>4</sup>. This depiction reminds us of the unconscious world. Frosty, dark, cloudy weather are all attributes of the unconscious world of the protagonist and even of the writer himself.

The next image by which we take to Gregor's unconscious mind is the moment of his death. At the time of his death, when injured Gregor stands by the window and looks out, it is on 3 o'clock in the morning, at dawn: "he remained in this state of empty and peaceful reflection until the tower struck 3 o'clock in the morning. From the window he witnessed the beginning of the general dawning outside. Then without willing it, his head sank all the way down, and from his nostrils flowed out weakly out his last breath".

This occurrence shows that Gregor Samsa is removing from the unconscious world in to the conscious one. So, Kafka attempts to portrait the unconscious world which is inaccessible to any one except in the dream. This tragic death of Gregor is, in fact, the death of unconscious and metaphorically the death of his desires by his father.

### **Trace of Oedipus Complex and Castration in Kafka's Metamorphosis**

Interpreting The Metamorphosis as a day dream, Gregor's transferring into his unconscious world in which all repressed desires and longings are collected; one can assume that Gregor regresses into the phallic stage of development which is a stage of Oedipus complex. Gregor transferred into a big insect with thin and weak legs. This image of his legs is repeated several times during the story as when the writer depicted Gregor's legs as thin and little in comparison to other parts of his body<sup>4</sup>, "On the contrary, it struck as unnatural that he had really been able up to this point to move around with these thin little legs"<sup>4</sup>.

Following Freud's premise in interpretation of dream, it is suggested that all images whose length exceeds their diameter are considered as male or phallic symbols. By this description, Gregor's legs are symbol of phallus. In Freudian psychology, also; phallus is the symbol of power. But here, there is the image of weak legs which suggests Gregor's weakness and vulnerability in comparison to his father who has the phallus, the symbol of authority, and the very thing Gregor needs to win his mother's heart.

Gregor's attempt to have his mother's affection is looked upon threatening by his father, the owner of the phallus and therefore

authority. According to Freud, it is the fear of being castrated by father which keeps the boys from having the desire for sexual relationship with his mother<sup>3</sup>. In The Metamorphosis, the traces of castration are perceived and they can be clear when in the first part of the story Gregor's father injured his leg for Gregor scares his mother. When in the evening, Gregor awakes, he knew that "one small leg had been seriously wounded in the course the morning incident (it was almost a miracle that only one had been hurt) and dragged lifelessly behind"<sup>4</sup> which symbolically represent Gregor's castration by his father.

The other evidence of this castration is in the last part of the story when his father was out and Gret asks her mother to help her to clean Gregor's room, following this incident, Gregor come out of his room. His mother "walked to the side, caught sight of the enormous brown splotch on the flowered wallpaper, and, before she became truly aware that was she was looking at was Gregor, screamed out... and fell with outstretched arms"<sup>4</sup>. At the same time father comes in. "it was clear to Gregor that his father had badly misunderstood Gret's short message and was assuming that Gregor had committed some violent crime or other"<sup>4</sup>. This violent crime, symbolically; refers to Gregor's desire of having a sexual relationship with his mother. So, "Gregor stood still in the fright. Further flight was useless, for his father had decided to bombard him. From the fruit bowl on the sideboard his father has filled his pocket, and no, without for moment taking accurate aim, was throwing apple after apples. These small red apples rolled as if electrified around on the floor and collided with each other. A weakly thrown apple grazed Gregor 's back but skidded off harmlessly"<sup>4</sup>.

This attack is, in fact; Gregor's castration, which is characterized by Oedipus complex. A writer wrote in this context: as to the relationship between father and son, the father, through two distinct act of aggression toward the son, fulfills the fantasy that is another part of Freud's phallic stage<sup>5</sup>. He noted in his essay "Kafka's fantasy of punishment" that these aggressive acts can only be perceived as "acts of castration"<sup>5</sup>.

The Metamorphosis is, in fact; a projection of Kafka's own life. Kafka's inadequacy about his sexuality is represented in Gregor's personality. Gregor didn't marry and in the story there is nothing about his relationship with any woman. Here, just we see an image of a picture of a woman and his honor for it: "...the picture of the woman dressed in nothing but fur. He quickly scurried up over it and pressed himself against the glass that held it in place and maid his hot abdomen feel good"<sup>4</sup>.

Kafka's father was tyrannical, his mother, however dominated by her husband, loved her children passionately. The good relationship between Kafka and his mother is looked upon jealously by his powerful father. So, he had always showed his power to him and frightened him with his tyrannical authority which symbolically represents the threat of castration. Kafka, in this case, in the letter to his father addressed him and while referring to the differences between them noted that we were too

dangerous to each other. I was a child who grew up slowly and you were a man. Then, he begged his father to stop considering him as a malignant for he was succumbed in this struggle<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, Kafka, in comparison to his father, felt weak which results from his father's repression, so; he believed that marriage is just for his father and is dominated by him. That's why Kafka felt marriage is forbidden for him<sup>2</sup>.

### The Image of Father as God

Kafka considers his tyrannical father, who knows himself as a presentation of josh society, a symbol of God and rule. He found God in the light of his father, so; maybe for him, God represents his father. Kafka's God, as he dramatically showed in most of his works, is dangerous and threatening and shows himself in form of rules and his task is to punish and torment without any mercy<sup>6</sup>.

This identification of father with God, as Freud referred to in his theories, is symbolically repeated during The Metamorphosis. In this sense, then, Gregor's tragic death by his father in the last part reminds us of expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise. Because of eating apple, Adam and Eve were descended from heaven by God as a punishment. Gregor's death was, also; a result of the apple which was thrown by his father as a punishment. Therefore, Kafka in The Metamorphosis, portrays a picture of father who, like his God, punish and don't know mercy.

### The Sense of Guilt in Freud's Psychology

In his model of human psyche, Freud, "divided the psyche into three parts: the id, ego and superego"<sup>3</sup>. According to him, superego is "the moral censoring agency, the repository of conscience and pride" and "representation of all moral restrictions, the advocate of impulse toward perfection"<sup>7</sup>.

Kafka's father, in this sense, symbolically presents the super ego that repressed Kafka's derives. Freud suggested that the super ego is revealed through punishment. Being so active, it can create a sense of guilt in the individual. This sense of guilt is clear in Kafka's own life. He has been suffering from a sense of guilt, since he was a child, which is the result of his lack of self-confidence and he noted that this is his father who is responsible for these all<sup>2</sup>. As he wrote to his father: Something else, too, grew out of these many occasions where, in your clearly expressed opinion, I deserved a thrashing but was spared by your mercy- again, intense feelings of guilt. From every side, I was in your debt<sup>2</sup>.

Gregor, in the metamorphosis, transferred in to a big insect and symbolically enters into his unconscious world where the repressed desires and thoughts and images were hold.

Metaphorically, this big insect is considered to as Gregor's repressed desires which are showed in disguised form. In this sense, Gregor's transferring into an insect and therefore his entering in to an unconscious world is an escape of oppressive tyranny and cruel restraints of the father, superego. As a result, he is guilty in his father's eye and should be punished. So, in the last part of the story, father throws an apple toward him as a punishment which causes his death and symbolically his entering into conscious world.

### Conclusion

In general, the article attempted to analyze the Metamorphosis in the light of Freudian psychological theories. Kafka was in fact a follower of Freudian psychology. In his letter to his father which is consider as his autobiography, one can recognize depiction of some Freudian theories such as Oedipus complex. A writer wrote in this context that Kafka represented in fictional terms the image of man as conceived by Freud. As a whole, in The Metamorphosis like most of his works, Kafka depicts his major idea that there is only one illness in man and it is his own existence and the only cure for it is death. So, we see in The Metamorphosis, after his terrible metamorphosis, Gregor wish his death.

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