

The Metamorphosis Thematic Essay

The Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka is a novel about the fictional character Gregor Samsa's transformation from a traveling businessman into an insect. He wakes up one day to find himself a giant bug in his bed. He goes from the main breadwinner of the family to being treated and cared for almost like a pet. His family members now need to take up the slack he left behind. This, among many other events that happen in the story, entirely changes the structure of his family and how it operates. This then alludes to the theme of the story; abrupt change can cause family dynamics to rearrange.

Soon after Gregor gets transformed into an insect, his sister establishes herself as the one in his family who would take care of him. In order for her to see what he likes, she sets up multiple different foods for him to try, she takes note of it and then cleans up after him. These are all things that he previously would've been able to do himself. According to the story, "He watched with bulging eyes as his sister unselfconsciously took a broom and swept up the left-overs," (pg. 28). The author is trying to show that despite his sister being disgusted by him, she did all she could in order to make Gregor feel cared for by giving him different foods to try, and then cleaning up after him. Gregor used to be the main breadwinner of the family, going out to make money; the way in which he now needs to be fed and taken care of like a pet shows how a change in the ability of a family member could entirely flip the dynamics of a family, advancing this theme of the story.

Gregor's sister notices that Gregor will climb about his room so she thinks it would be a good idea to move the furniture in order to make it easier for him to do so. She and her mother get together to move the furniture together as it would be easier for the two of them than if it was just his sister. According to the story, "The old chest of drawers was too heavy for a pair of feeble women to be heaving about, but Gregor listened as they pushed it from its place," (pg. 38). The author shows that the task of moving heavy furniture which would normally, at the time, be done by a man, had to instead be done by two women. The term used by the author "feeble" helps to advance the theme as well as it shows how people in the family, a younger girl and an asthmatic older woman, who probably shouldn't be doing physically demanding tasks, are. Furthermore, Gregor and his father wouldn't be able to do it now, as Gregor is an insect and his father is preoccupied with work. This further shows how Gregor's transformation changed the structure of the family.

When Gregor got shut out of his room while his mother and sister were rearranging his furniture, his father came home and Gregor got to see him for the first time since just after his transformation. What he saw was a man unlike the father that he knew. He was now a hard worker who stood as tall as he could despite his older age. "Was that really his father?... He was standing up straight enough now; dressed in a smart blue uniform with gold buttons" (pg. 44). The author is trying to show that the unfortunate change of Gregor made Mr. Samsa, his father, into the new breadwinner of the family. His father has a change in attitude, from someone who used to be very sedentary to someone who works very regularly. This helps to highlight the theme within the text because his father working regularly and Gregor not anymore entirely changed the way in which the family is organized.

Gregor unfortunately meets a very sad ending. In the weeks after he gets chased into his room again after the last incident where he got out when his furniture was being moved, he ate

less and less and was neglected more and more. His room came to be used as storage and he would often be pestered by the house cleaner. He left his room one last time as he heard his sister playing the violin, scaring everyone. He would then be found dead by the cleaner the next morning. Throughout this story, his family went from depending on him before his transformation, to caring for him after he transformed, before growing to resent him before his untimely passing. Perhaps the dynamics of the family wasn't the only thing that changed because of Gregor's transformation; the responsibilities of each other family member also increased. There are many changes in the roles and interactions of Gregor's family members because of his abrupt transformation, as there would be in any family with any sort of abrupt change. The story of Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* is one that reflects many of the feelings of Kafka about his own family, but it is also a story full of feelings that everyone has felt at some point in their lives, such as humility, fear, isolation, and uncertainty.