

*Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka*

Professor Caroline S. Brooks

English 1101

# Why a bug?

- “The insect itself cannot be depicted. It cannot even be shown from a distance.”
- “he must go”
- “Human beings can’t live with such a creature,”
- He wants us to live in the gutter
- True self/artist- rejected and alienated?  
Self vs. official self? Distorted self.
- By accepting death-kills official self.

# Gregor as animal

- Obsessed with work/family/official
- In animal form, the self is superior over physical existence
- Ignores true self and “unsettling dreams” which represent the conflict between the two selves
- Alienation of true self

# Kafka=Samsa

- “Samsja”-Being alone
- Kafka was afraid of his father (see “Letter to his father”)
- Kafka’s writing is a bridge between 19th century realism and 20th century existentialism- “Kafkaesque”
- Kafka captures the absurd view of life and ontology

# Kafkaesque

- “A predicament that is at once hopeless, cruel, and absurd, imposed from above by some remote, unassailable authority that acts with a pretense of unquestionable rationality...with depictions of a world where bureaucracy has gone mad, turning the average person into the victim of anonymous forces which cannot be identified, much less defeated.”

# Themes in *Metamorphosis*

- Alienation
- Communication
- Quest for understanding
- Examination of being
- Quest for escape
- Absurdity of human life
- Conflict between body and spirit
- problem of the artist in society

# Imagery and Symbolism

- Weakness/illness-hospital, asthma, arthritis
- death/birth images
- food/hunger
- imprisonment-keys, locks, cages
- music and distortion of time
- #3 and clothing
- weapons-newspaper/apples

# Structure

- I. Bug-MAN-Gregor's relationship to profession-TIME/SLAVE/PRISON
- II. BUG-man- relationship to family-COFINEMENT and DISEASE/  
CIRCULAR IMAGES
- III. BUG-MAN-relationship to self/  
death-LOSS OF EXISTENCE/  
APPEARANCE

- Words are no longer spoken to Gregor because nothing human is perceived to exist in him
- “The metamorphosis into an insect is an awakening in a special sense; from an incessant round of work and pressing worries, Gregor awakes to a new awareness of his existence.”

- “With the loss of his world and of his position as a bread-winner, ... brings with it both a deep feeling of anxiety and a bad conscience: the being that has lost its foundation sees itself as ‘verminous’: the terrifying outward appearance is in itself the result of an unconscious self punishment.”

- “The metamorphosis is a heavy burden; but in that it raises him out of the compelling necessity of his business life, about which he bitterly complains from the very start, and leads him to an awareness of his deeper needs, it is also a liberation.-a secret fatal wishful image against the vacuity of everyday life.”

# The Reaction of Others

- Clerk- self importance
- 3 lodgers- amused, self importance
- mother- helpless, in denial, too weak to make her love effective- “temporary sickness”
- sister- closest in age and could be best understood by him-concerned with herself
- maid- a curious pet

- father-sees him as an insect, egocentric, blames Gregor, sees the bug as Gregor's malice, -punishment
- he is angry at Gregor and frightened of the change-he has to go back to work-G is a beast of burden
- approaches him with grim face like Kafka's own tyrannical father

# The Metamorphosis of Gregor

- More animal, less clean, tries to cling to his human side with picture and furniture but gives up. The more comfortable as an insect-the more miserable as a human. The animal perishes because the human dies of neglect. Music? Love should transform the object of disgust, but the family fails.

# Gregor before and after

- Before Gregor was the provider and a source of income. After the family tries to understand but eventually rejects him and works.
- Gregor was surprised at the sum of money in his father's bank account. His father never helped but stayed in bed, enjoyed leisurely breakfasts and afternoon naps.

# Gregor as the Kafka Archetype

- He is reluctant to act, fearful of possible mishaps, rather prone to exaggerated contemplation, and given to juvenile, surrogate dealings with sex-magazine clipping. He is a procrastinator-job, music conservatory. He is guilty of failing to act which makes him lonely.

# The Metamorphosis of the Family

- Father
- Mother
- Sister
- From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

- At first the family is desperate and helpless but each finds a way of coping. The sister makes her caring for Gregor a ritual; the mother ignores him; the father is an adversary. In the end, the family has escaped the cocoon of their apartment and are free of their crippling dependency. The daughter is the new focus.

- The picture of the woman with the muff.- only link to human world he once was a part of.
- Hospital-illness and death; dark grey and regular row of windows
- Apple-edén? Life giving fruit brings death and sickness much like his father who forced Gregor into being the family savior and caused his metamorphosis.

# Symbols

- Breakfast- symbolize how hard Gregor works compared to father and other businessmen
- Music- lack of love and nourishment as the artist and affection as the son
- Metamorphosis- isolation or exclusion from participation in society. Is the father society's means of control?

## 2 Choices in Life

### INDIVIDUAL vs. SOCIETY

- if a person chooses self, he will lose support of society
- if a person chooses society, he lose individuality
- One must be productive in order to be valuable, and one must have leisure in order to be valuable to himself
- what is Gregor? when? you?