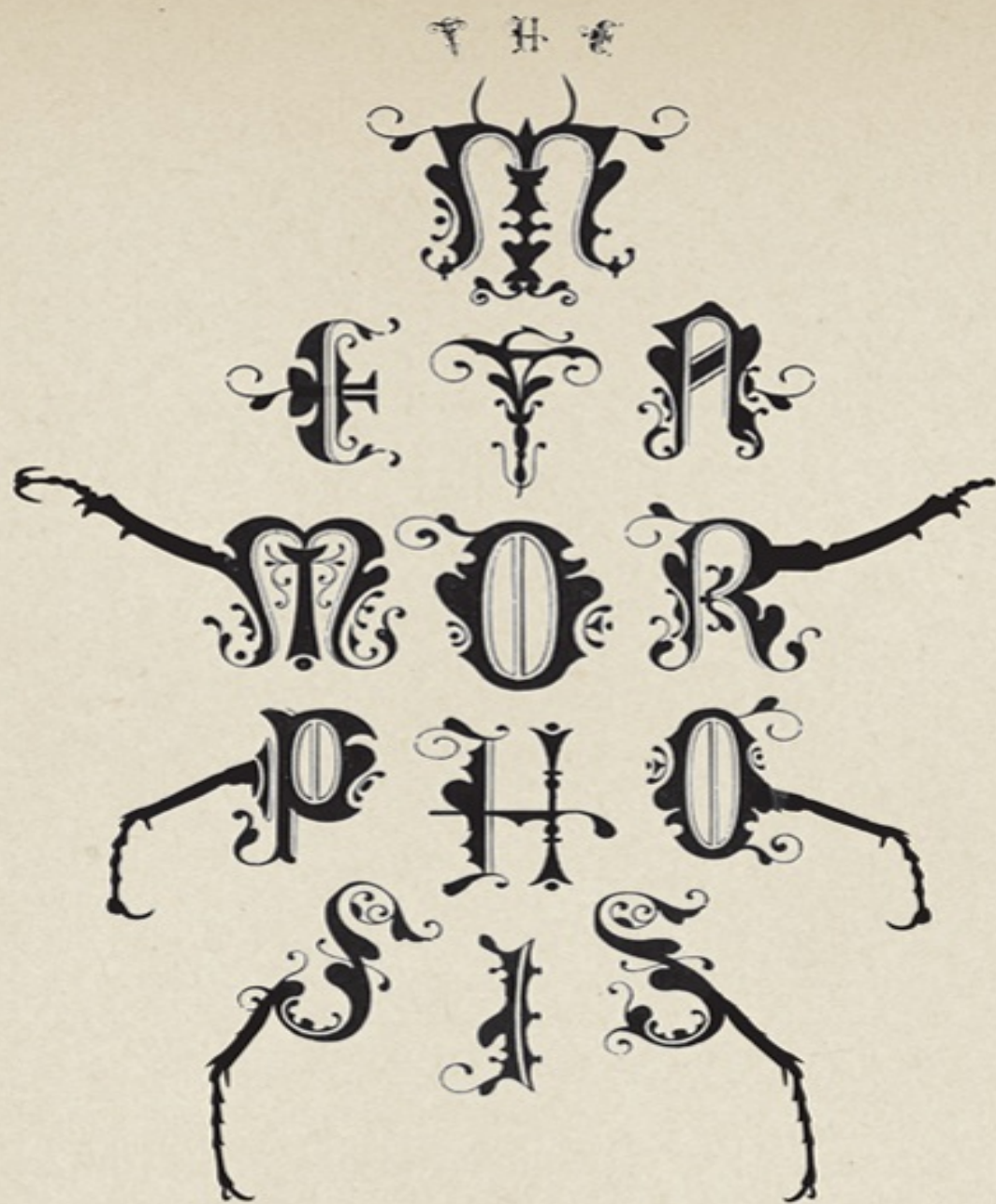




THE METAMORPHOSIS

FRANZ KAFKA

Translated by Susan Bernofsky
Edited by Mark M. Anderson

NORTON
CRITICAL
EDITIONS

The Translator and Editor

SUSAN BERNOFSKY is the acclaimed translator of Hermann Hesse, Robert Walser, and Jenny Erpenbeck and the recipient of many awards, including a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship, the Helen and Kurt Wolff Prize, and the Hermann Hesse Translation Prize. She teaches literary translation at Columbia University.

MARK M. ANDERSON is Professor of Germanic Languages at Columbia University. He is the author of *Kafka's Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg Fin de Siècle* and the editor of *Reading Kafka: Prague, Politics and the Fin de Siècle*. He has written widely on literary modernism and has edited and translated postwar Austrian writers Ingeborg Bachmann and Thomas Bernhard.

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

Franz Kafka
THE METAMORPHOSIS



A NEW TRANSLATION
TEXTS AND CONTEXTS
CRITICISM

Translated by

SUSAN BERNOFSKY

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Edited by

MARK M. ANDERSON

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W • W • NORTON & COMPANY • *New York • London*

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Contents

Cover

The Translator and Editor

Title Page

List of Illustrations

Dedication

Preface

Translator's Note

The Text of The *Metamorphosis*

Texts and Contexts

KAFKA

From Wedding Preparations in the Country

Kafka, Max Brod and Editors on *The Metamorphosis*

KAFKA'S CONTEMPORARIES

Leopold von Sacher-Masoch • *From* Venus in Furs

Friedrich Nietzsche

- *From* On the Use and Abuse of History

- *From* Thus Spoke Zarathustra

Hugo von Hofmannsthal • *From* [The Lord Chandos Letter]

Rainer Maria Rilke

- Der Panther

- The Panther

- Archaïscher Torso Apollos

- Archaic Torso of Apollo

Johannes V. Jensen • The Condignog

Jakob von Uexküll • *From* The Environment and Inner World of Animals

Criticism

GÜNTHER ANDERS • *FROM FRANZ KAFKA*
WALTER H. SOKEL • KAFKA'S "METAMORPHOSIS": REBELLION AND PUNISHMENT
NINA PELIKAN STRAUS • TRANSFORMING FRANZ KAFKA'S "METAMORPHOSIS"
MARK M. ANDERSON • SLIDING DOWN THE EVOLUTIONARY LADDER? AESTHETIC
AUTONOMY IN *THE METAMORPHOSIS*
ELIZABETH BOA • CREEPY-CRAWLIES: *THE METAMORPHOSIS* AND GILMAN'S *THE*
YELLOW WALLPAPER
CAROLIN DUTTLINGER • *FROM PHOTOGRAPHIC METAMORPHOSES*
KÁRI DRISCOLL • (A) IS FOR ANIMAL: SPEECH AND VOICE IN OVID AND KAFKA
DAN MIRON • [A FEW RAISINS AND ALMONDS]

Kafka: A Chronology

Selected Bibliography

Copyright

Norton Critical Editions: Modernist & Contemporary Eras

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Illustrations

Cover of first edition of *Die Verwandlung*

Facsimile image of first page of *Die Verwandlung* manuscript

Alfred Kubin, *The Past Forgotten*

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*For Josephine,
in deepest gratitude*

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Preface

Reader's Letter to Kafka, Berlin-Charlottenburg, April 10, 1917

Dear Sir,

You have made me unhappy.

I bought your "Metamorphosis" as a gift for my cousin. But she is incapable of understanding the story. My cousin gave it to her mother who doesn't understand it either. Her mother gave the book to my other cousin, who also didn't find an explanation. Now they have written to me: They expect me to explain the story to them since I am the Ph.D. in the family. But I am at a loss to explain it.

Sir! I have spent months in the trenches exchanging blows with the Russians without batting an eyelash. But I could not stand losing my good name with my cousins. Only you can help me. You must do it since you are the one who landed me in this mess. So please tell me what my cousin should think about "Metamorphosis."

Most respectfully yours,

Dr. Siegfried Wolff¹

On the evening of November 17, 1912, a young employee of the Workmen's Accident Insurance Agency, in Prague, sat down to work on a "troubling little story" that had occurred to him "in bed" the previous night. After spending the first part of the day in the office, he returned to the apartment he shared with his parents and three sisters, had lunch, napped, took a walk, and then did a series of strengthening and stretching calisthenics. This was his daily ritual before settling in for the evening—and often far into the night—to what he considered his true life, a life dedicated to writing. Then, whether acting on a long-meditated plan or following an obscure, sudden intuition, he set down the words of the first hammerlike sentence of what would become his most famous story and one of the defining works of modern imaginative fiction, *The Metamorphosis*, or more simply, "The Transformation": "When Gregor Samsa woke one morning from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed right there in his bed into some sort of monstrous insect." Ever since, readers have been mesmerized, amused,

puzzled, irritated, and unsettled by Gregor's life-changing transformation.

What does it mean? Where does it come from? How is it possible? The difficulty, if not the impossibility, of answering any of these questions is the key to the story's success. For after this initial statement of narrative "fact," a fact that "is no dream," neither Gregor nor the narrator wastes any time trying to answer these questions. The plot develops in an implacably logical, straightforward fashion; characters are introduced and developed; time and place are otherwise coherent. In short, all the classical rules and conventions of realistic fiction are observed.

And yet there is that inexplicable, genre-defying first sentence. Perhaps the effect of this sentence is what Kafka meant when he wrote, years earlier in a letter to a friend, that we did not need books to confirm what we thought we knew about the world; we needed "books that work like an axe" to chop away at the "frozen sea" inside us. That first sentence is not just a Nietzschean hammer, but an axe, perhaps like the axe that Raskolnikov wields against two defenseless women in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*: a violent instrument used to assault an ossified sense of what is proper and true in literature as well as in life. The sharpness of its blade is directly related to the story's ability to resist interpretation. Kafka never, to my knowledge, explained his story. The only hint we have that Gregor's transformation was not an isolated, unpremeditated act of inspiration comes from an unfinished novel Kafka wrote a few years earlier, in which the protagonist, engaged to be married, sends his "clothed body" out into the world while he remains huddled up in bed "in the form of a large beetle." Gregor Samsa, however, is not a beetle (*Käfer*), but an "insect" or a "vermin" (*Ungeziefer*, a proper German noun that is entomologically unspecific).² Kafka famously forbade the publisher of the first edition of *The Metamorphosis* to represent Gregor in his transformed state in a cover illustration—"the insect itself cannot be drawn"—and to curious friends he allowed only that "strange things" were transpiring in the Kafka apartment or that the story represented an "indiscretion."

This edition of *The Metamorphosis* attempts to make sense of Kafka's story as well as to acknowledge the impossibility of ever completely succeeding. Susan Bernofsky's new translation gives us a more contemporary, American sense of Kafka's text than the version that first brought it to English-speaking readers and remained in copyright for over six decades. Her version, like any translation, is also an interpretation, carried out rigorously through diction, syntax, rhythm, and sound. A selection from one of Kafka's other stories and

excerpts from his and his contemporaries' diary entries and letters provide biographical context for the immediate circumstances of the story's composition and publication. To this context I have added key scientific, cultural, and literary texts within Kafka's orbit—texts that undoubtedly made a deep impression on him as well as ones that he probably didn't know directly but were part of the broad shift in thinking that took place in his time. These texts, well known to specialists of German literature, have not previously been brought into dialogue with Kafka's story for English-language readers. Finally, critical readings document important moments of the story's reception, from Kafka's lifetime until the present day. The volume concludes with a timeline of Kafka's—and his story's—life as well as a brief bibliography.

The period in which Kafka conceived and wrote *The Metamorphosis*—roughly the decade before World War I—was turbulent and fertile for European science, philosophy, art, and literature. In particular, Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud had profoundly altered the ways of thinking about the relations between humans and animals. In literature and art, iconoclastic modernist writers and artists sought to break with the norms of nineteenth-century realism. It is the period of the French Fauvists and Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*; of Adolf Loos's polemic for an architecture without ornament; of the atonal musical works of Webern and Schoenberg; of Kandinsky's manifesto for abstract or “spiritual” art; of Georg Heym's Expressionist city poetry and Frank Wedekind's sexually scandalous, gender-bending “Lulu” plays. It was also a time of extraordinary social ferment and conflict—of Otto Weininger's widely publicized redefinition of both male and female sexuality; of Oscar Wilde's trial and imprisonment as a homosexual; and of Alfred Dreyfuss's trial and imprisonment as a Jewish traitor to France—all widely reported in the German-speaking press and of great interest to Kafka. Thomas Mann's own great literary “indiscretion,” *Death in Venice*, is of the same year as Kafka's story, as is Proust's *Swann's Way*. Kafka's fraught Jewish identity—he never kept kosher or regularly attended synagogue, but frequented almost exclusively Jewish-German circles—was constantly tested and strengthened in an age of rabid nationalism, Jewish “self-hatred,” and anti-Semitism.

In the panorama of modern European literature there is nothing quite like Gregor Samsa's grotesque, bizarre, disgusting, yet profoundly human shape. But during Kafka's time, both scientists and writers had published work on animals and insects that bear an interesting relation to *The Metamorphosis*. Common to all was the desire to contest the traditional anthropomorphic understanding of the

relation between animals and humans. The Baltic-German biologist Jakob von Uexküll caused quite a stir in 1909 with his call for science to give up a human-centered perspective for “the standpoint of the animal, which must take absolute precedence”; his work attempted to explore the “inner world of animals,” especially the “lower,” simpler life-forms—such as the tick or the jellyfish. Uexküll also wrote for a nonspecialist audience and corresponded with writers such as Rainer Maria Rilke, whose animal poems had already effected just such a reversal. Rilke’s well-known poem “The Panther” begins with the zoo animal’s perspective of his immediate caged environment, not ours, which hardly enters its consciousness. The eerie, fantastic drawings of Kafka’s Prague contemporary Alfred Kubin also draw on insect and animal amalgamations suggesting a horrifying proximity to human beings. Kafka knew Kubin personally and once confided his admiration for Kubin’s artwork and perhaps his 1909 novel *The Other Side*. Most pertinently for the young Kafka, the wunderkind poet and dramatist Hugo von Hofmannsthal wrote a fictional letter describing the language crisis of a Lord Chandos, whose silence coincides with an uncanny ability to flow into everyday objects and animals—the harrow in a field, a dog, a beetle swimming on the surface of water in a bucket. He even puts himself mentally and emotionally into the perspective of the rats in his cellar attempting to escape the poison he has set out for them. When Kafka was beginning to write, he virtually worshipped Hofmannsthal. The “Letter of Lord Chandos” is not so much a source as a springboard for Kafka’s writing, which, starting with Gregor Samsa’s transformation, again and again probes the question of what is human by way of animal figures.

Though they cannot claim to fully represent the now vast secondary literature on Kafka’s masterpiece, the critical essays in this volume embody key moments in the one-hundred-year history of its interpretation. When Kafka died, in 1924, his work was virtually unknown; it might have disappeared forever if key interpreters including Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt, and Theodor Adorno had not rescued it from the grip of the Nazis by making it known to French- and English-speaking audiences in the 1930s while in exile. The Jewish-German philosopher Günther Anders—who, like his then wife, Hannah Arendt, had fled to France in 1933—delivered a series of lectures on Kafka that he published as a small book after the war; the excerpts published here constitute one of the most penetrating analyses of Kafka’s use of language and “literalization” of metaphor. Walter Sokel—like Anders, a German-speaking Jew forced to emigrate during the Nazi period—taught German at Columbia University and became one of the

earliest and most authoritative academic experts on Kafka. Written in the then current mode of New Criticism, which avoided overt historical and social analysis, his essay provides a close reading of the story's psychology that shows the benefits of Gregor's metamorphosis in the power struggle with his family. Nina Pelikan Straus's essay is one of the earliest feminist readings of an author and a text that, as she notes, had been almost exclusively interpreted from a male point of view. She shifts attention away from Gregor to his sister, Grete, the "healthy" counterpart to her brother's monstrosity, while also suggesting that the story embodies Kafka's "fantasy of a gender role change." My own essay situates Kafka's story in the aestheticizing context of *l'art pour l'art* or *Jugendstil*, and argues that Gregor Samsa becomes a kind of modernist work of art, "abstract" and ultimately indecipherable. Elizabeth Boa takes Straus's feminist reading further by focusing on gender and power relations; she also highlights the importance of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's scandalous depiction of sadomasochism in his novel *Venus in Furs*. The essay by Carolin Duttlinger comes from her book on photography and Kafka, which establishes a dialogue with the fields of visual and media studies; it also underscores the important connection between the story and Kafka's correspondence with his fiancée, Felice Bauer. Kári Driscoll's "(A) Is for Animals" represents the new work being done in animal studies, as well as helping us understand the story's relation to Ovid's tales of metamorphosis. Finally, Dan Miron is one of the world's foremost experts on Yiddish and Hebrew literature; his remarks on Kafka's relation to the Yiddish theater and to traditions of Hebrew as well as Yiddish literature are profound and fresh, and they extend earlier work on Kafka's Jewish identity.

I hope that the materials from Kafka's biographical and historical context as well as the later critical readings will prove stimulating for a new generation of readers of this "little story." Their insights should offer consolation for any interpretation's inability to fully explain the origin or the meaning of that hammerlike first sentence, announcing Gregor Samsa's new identity.

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1. Translated by the editor of this Norton Critical Edition from *Oxfordor Quartheft* 17 (*Die Verwandlung*), ed. Roland Reuss and Peter Staengle (Frankfurt: Stroemfeld, 2003).
 2. See translator's fuller description of this term on p. xvi.

Translator's Note

Kafka's celebrated novella *The Metamorphosis* (*Die Verwandlung*) was written a century ago, in late 1912, during a period in which he was having difficulty making progress on his first novel. On November 17, 1912, Kafka wrote to his fiancée, Felice Bauer, that he was working on a story that "came to me in my misery lying in bed" and now was haunting him. He hoped to get it written down quickly—he hadn't yet realized how long it would be—as he felt it would turn out best if he could write it in just one or two long sittings. But there were many interruptions, and he complained to Felice several times that the delays were damaging the story. Three weeks later it was finished, on December 7, though it would be another three years before the story saw print.

As we know from Max Brod's diary, Kafka read his "bug piece" (*Wanzensache*) aloud to friends on November 24, 1912 (the first section), and again on December 15. People started talking about it, and Kafka received a query from publisher Kurt Wolff in March 1913 on the recommendation of Kafka's friend Franz Werfel. Franz Blei, the literary editor of the new avant-garde journal *Die weißen Blätter*, expressed interest, and Robert Musil wrote as well, soliciting the novella for the more established *Die neue Rundschau*, though it was technically too long for the magazine's format. But months passed before Kafka had a clean manuscript ready for submission, and then World War I intervened, causing further delays (Musil was called up to serve, and because of the war Blei decided to stop printing literary texts). In the spring of 1915, René Schickele took over as editor-in-chief of *Die weißen Blätter*, and with Max Brod's help, Kafka placed the story there. It came out in October 1915, and then appeared in December 1915 (though dated 1916) as a slender volume published by Kurt Wolff Verlag in Leipzig.

The story's protagonist, Gregor Samsa, is the quintessential Kafka anti-hero. He has worked himself to the point of utter exhaustion to pay off his parents' debts, and his grotesque metamorphosis is the physical manifestation of his

abasement. What exactly is he transformed into? In Kafka's correspondence with his publisher, he was adamant that the "insect" (*Insekt*) not be depicted on the jacket of the book. And although he and his friends used the word "bug" (*Wanze*) when referring casually to the story, the language that appears in the novella itself is carefully chosen to avoid specificity.

The epithet *ungeheueres Ungeziefer* in the opening sentence poses one of the greatest challenges to the translator. Both the adjective *ungeheuer* (meaning "monstrous" or "huge") and the noun *Ungeziefer* are negations—virtual nonentities—prefixed by *un*. *Ungeziefer* comes from the Middle High German *ungezibere*, a negation of the Old High German *zebar* (related to the Old English *tiber*), meaning "sacrifice" or "sacrificial animal." An *ungezibere*, then, is an unclean animal unfit for sacrifice, and *Ungeziefer* describes the class of nasty creepy-crawly things. The word in German suggests primarily six-legged critters, though it otherwise resembles the English word "vermin" (which refers primarily to rodents). *Ungeziefer* is also used informally as the equivalent of "bug," though the connotation is "dirty, nasty bug"—you wouldn't apply the word to cute, helpful creatures like ladybugs. In my translation, Gregor is transformed into "some sort of monstrous insect" with "some sort of" added to blur the borders of the somewhat too specific "insect"; I think Kafka wanted us to see Gregor's new body and condition with the same hazy focus with which Gregor himself discovers them.

That same blurred focus applies to other aspects of the story. Although Vladimir Nabokov—with his penchant for exactitude—has mapped out the Samsa flat in some detail, I am far from certain that Kafka himself—with his penchant for the blurred perceptions of bewilderment—was much concerned with the apartment's precise geography. How many rooms does this apartment have? Many, too many; just as Gregor, lying on his back in the story's opening sentences, discovers he has "these many little legs" waving in the air above him. Both are physical correlatives of a life that has gotten out of hand. Kafka is not even particularly attentive to the continuity of his cast of characters. Early on in the story we see the maid give notice and flee, only to find her still working in the household several pages later and in fact doing all the cooking, since now it is the cook who quit. Except for the charwoman who plays a starring role in the penultimate scenes, the household help is just part of the furniture of the story, like the cabinet that gets shifted to another room.

Even the main characters tend to appear categorically, named only by their functions: "father," "mother," "sister." Only one of them gets a name, Grete

(rhymes with *beta*), but even she is usually referred to only as “sister” throughout, until the decisive moment near the end when she becomes instead a “daughter.” By defining all these characters through their relationship to Gregor, Kafka slyly allows Gregor’s point of view to dominate the story even when he is not actually present in the scene being described.

One leitmotif I was unable to preserve in translation is the theme of *ruhig/unruhig*. *Ruhig* denotes “calm,” “peaceful,” “quiet,” “tranquil,” “at ease,” and *unruhig* its opposite. Starting with the *unruhigen Träumen* (“troubled dreams”) in the first sentence, the narrative oscillates between untroubled and troubled, tranquil and harried, peaceful and unsettled. Since no one word in English fits well enough in all the contexts Kafka presents, I decided to translate the word in many different ways; but note when you are reading all these synonyms that you are watching a motif unfold.

The post-metamorphosis activity that gives Gregor the greatest sense of freedom appears in my translation as “crawling”: he enjoys crawling around the walls and ceiling of his room. Ironically, the German verb *kriechen* (which also translates as “to creep”) has the additional meaning of “to cower.” To *kriechen* before someone is to act sycophantically toward him. In this sense, too, Gregor’s new physical state appears as a representation of his long-standing spiritual abjectness.

Finally Gregor has only himself to blame for the wretchedness of his situation, since he has willingly accepted wretchedness as it was thrust upon him. Like other of Kafka’s doomed protagonists, he errs by failing to act, instead allowing himself to be acted upon. Gregor Samsa, giant bug, is a cartoon of the subaltern, a human being turned inside out. He has traded in his spine for an exoskeleton, but even this armorlike shell (“carapace” and “armor” are the same word in German, *Panzer*) is no defense once his suddenly powerful father starts pelting him with apples—an ironically biblical choice of weapon.

Gregor is a salesman, but what he’s sold is himself: his own agency and dignity, making him a sellout through and through. For this reason I occasionally use the word “drummer” (commercial traveler) to describe his profession, referring back to another of his ilk, “a hardworking drummer who landed in the ash can like all the rest of them.” That’s Willy Loman as described by Arthur Miller in *Death of a Salesman* (1949). *The Metamorphosis* is Kafka’s own *Death of a Salesman*, with all the sad, grubby tragedy, all the squalor. Like Willy Loman, Gregor is a suicide, though of a different sort: he dies a hunger artist, perishing of starvation because nothing tastes good to him anymore. And like

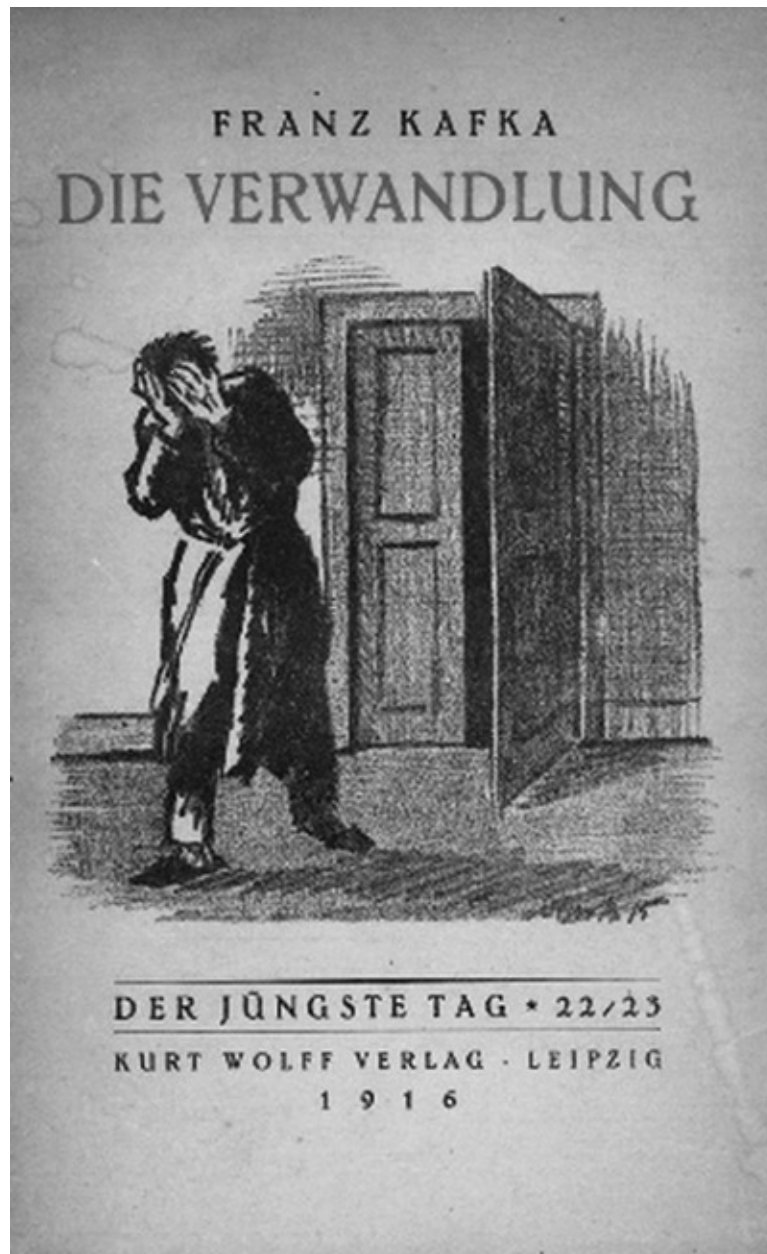
Willy's, Gregor's death is the final service he performs for the benefit of his family.

At the same time Kafka's tragicomic tale—unlike Miller's—is very often hilariously funny. I imagine Kafka laughing uproariously when reading the story to his friends. Gregor's naïveté (one might also call it gullibility) combined with his earnestness and his tendency to sound somewhat overwrought in his assertions is perfectly risible. To bring out this side of the story, I've emphasized the slight tone of hysteria in Gregor's voice wherever it seemed justified.

The story is brutally comic in parts, and never more so than at the moment when it is revealed that—despite the fact that Gregor has been living more or less as an indentured servant to pay off his parents' ancient debts—in fact the family has plenty of money; not enough to allow them to stop working altogether, but a proper little nest egg. And although they are described as poor, they are never too hard up not to retain the services of at least one domestic servant.

One last translation problem in the story is the title itself. Unlike the English “metamorphosis,” the German word *Verwandlung* does not suggest a natural change of state associated with the animal kingdom such as the change from caterpillar to butterfly. Instead it is a word from fairy tales used to describe the transformation, say, of a girl's seven brothers into swans. But the word “metamorphosis” refers to this, too; its first definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is “The action or process of changing in form, shape, or substance; esp. transformation by supernatural means.” This is the sense in which it's used, for instance, in translations of Ovid. As a title for this rich, complex story, it strikes me as the most luminous, suggestive choice.

Susan Bernofsky
August 2013



Cover of first edition of *Die Verwandlung*. Courtesy of the Western Americana Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

[Editor's Note: The following offers a scrupulously literal translation of the beginning of Kafka's story, keeping virtually all punctuation, syntax, mistakes, and deletions as they appear on the first page of the hand-written, German manuscript, which has been reproduced on the facing page. (The only exceptions concern minor spelling changes or corrections that would not make sense in English.) Although this seems to be a first draft, the text flows with a remarkable fluidity, with only one word change until the mention of the picture of the woman in fur; there Kafka hesitates, makes several changes to the appearance of both the frame and the woman, and then continues for several pages with virtually no stop. The relative lack of punctuation in the German original strengthens this impression of unimpeded narrative flow. Square brackets denote Kafka's changes or deletions.]

When Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from [f~~r~~] uneasy dreams, he found himself in his bed transformed into a monstrous insect. He lay on his hard, carapace-like back and saw when he lifted his head a little, his arched brown stiffly segmented stomach, on top of which the bedcover could barely keep itself from completely sliding down. His many [pitifully] unusually thin legs in comparison with the rest of his body flickered helplessly before his eyes.

"What has happened to me"—he thought. It was no dream, his room, a proper, merely somewhat too small human room lay calmly between the four quite familiar walls, above the table, on which an unpacked collection of fabric samples was spread out—[f~~or~~] Samsa was a traveling salesman—hung [a] the picture that he [had] cut out [f~~or himself~~] a short while ago from an illustrated magazine and [f~~or which he had created~~] which he had put in an attractive [golden] gilt frame. It showed a [well-maintained] lady who sat upright decorated with a fur hat and a fur b[a]oa and raised a heavy fur muff into which her entire lower arm had disappeared toward the spectator.

Gregor's gaze directed itself then to the window and the dreary [win] weather—one heard raindrops beating on the lead sill—made him completely melancholy. "How would it be if I just slept a little more...."



Alfred Kubin, *The Past Forgotten* (1901, pen and ink). Image courtesy of the Leopold Museum. © 2015 Eberhard Spangenberg / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

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The Text of THE METAMORPHOSIS



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When Gregor Samsa woke one morning from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed right there in his bed into some sort of monstrous insect.² He was lying on his back—which was hard, like a carapace—and when he raised his head a little he saw his curved brown belly segmented by rigid arches atop which the blanket, already slipping, was just barely managing to cling. His many legs, pitifully thin compared to the rest of him, waved helplessly before his eyes.

“What in the world has happened to me?” he thought. It was no dream.³ His room, a proper human room,⁴ if admittedly rather too small, lay peacefully between the four familiar walls. Above the table, where an unpacked collection of cloth samples was arranged (Samsa was a traveling salesman), hung the picture he had recently clipped from a glossy magazine and placed in an attractive gilt frame. This picture showed a lady in a fur hat and fur boa who sat erect, holding out to the viewer a heavy fur muff in which her entire forearm had vanished.⁵

Gregor’s gaze then shifted to the window, where the bleak weather—raindrops could be heard striking the metal sill—made him feel quite melancholy. “What if I just go back to sleep for a little while and forget all this foolishness,” he thought, but this proved utterly impossible, for it was his habit to sleep on his right side, and in his present state he was unable to assume this position. No matter how forcefully he thrust himself onto his side, he kept rolling back. Perhaps a hundred times he attempted it, closing his eyes so as not to have to see those struggling legs, and relented only when he began to feel a faint dull ache in his side, unlike anything he’d ever felt before.

“Good Lord,” he thought, “what an exhausting profession I’ve chosen. Day in and day out on the road. Work like this is far more unsettling than business conducted at home, and then I have the agony of traveling itself to contend with: worrying about train connections, the irregular, unpalatable meals, and human intercourse⁶ that is constantly changing, never developing the least constancy or warmth. Devil take it all!” He felt a faint itch high up on his belly; still on his back, he laboriously edged himself over to the bedpost so he could raise his head more easily; identified the site of the itch: a cluster of tiny white dots he was unable to judge; and wanted to probe the spot with a leg, but drew it back again

at once, for the touch sent cold shivers⁷ rippling through him.

He slid back into his earlier position. “All this early rising,” he thought, “it’s enough to make one soft in the head. Human beings need their sleep. Other traveling salesmen live like harem girls. When I go back to the boardinghouse, for example, to copy out the morning’s commissions: why, these gentlemen may still be sitting at breakfast. I’d like to see my boss’s face if I tried that some time; he’d can me on the spot. Although who knows, maybe that would be the best thing for me. If I didn’t have to hold back for my parents’ sake, I’d have given notice long ago—I’d have marched right up to him and given him a piece of my mind. He’d have fallen right off his desk! And what an odd custom that is: perching high up atop one’s elevated desk and from this considerable height addressing one’s employee down below, especially as the latter is obliged to stand quite close because his boss is hard of hearing. Well, all hope is not yet lost; as soon as I’ve saved up enough money to pay back what my parents owe him⁸—another five or six years ought to be enough—I’ll most definitely do just that. This will be the great parting of ways. For the time being, though, I’ve got to get up, my train leaves at five.”

And he glanced over at the alarm clock ticking away atop the wardrobe. “Heavenly Father!”⁹ he thought. It was half past six, and the clock’s hands kept shifting calmly forward, in fact the half-hour had already passed, it was getting on toward six forty-five. Could the alarm have failed to ring? Even from the bed one could see it was properly set for four o’clock; it must have rung. Yes, but was it possible to sleep tranquilly through this furniture-shaking racket? Well, his sleep hadn’t been exactly tranquil, but no doubt that’s why it had been so sound. But what should he do now? The next train was at seven o’clock; to catch it, he would have to rush like a madman, and his sample case wasn’t even packed yet, and he himself felt far from agile or alert. And even if he managed to catch this train, his boss was certain to unleash a thunderstorm of invective upon his head, for the clerk who met the five o’clock train had no doubt long since reported Gregor’s absence. This clerk was the boss’s underling, a creature devoid of backbone and wit. What if he called in sick? But that would be mortifying and also suspicious, since Gregor had never once been ill in all his five years of service. No doubt his boss would come calling with the company doctor, would reproach Gregor’s parents for their son’s laziness, silencing all objections by referring them to this doctor, in whose opinion there existed only healthy individuals unwilling to work. And would the doctor be so terribly wrong in this instance? Aside from a mild drowsiness that was certainly superfluous after so

many hours of sleep, Gregor felt perfectly fine; in fact, he was ravenous.

While he was considering these matters with the greatest possible speed, yet still without managing to make up his mind to leave the bed (the clock was just striking a quarter to seven), a timid knock came at the door at the head of his bed. “Gregor,” the voice called—it was his mother—“it’s a quarter to seven. Didn’t you want to catch your train?” That gentle voice! Gregor flinched when he heard his own in response: it was unmistakably his old voice, but now it had been infiltrated as if from below by a tortured peeping sound¹⁰ that was impossible to suppress—leaving each word intact, comprehensible, but only for an instant before so completely annihilating it as it continued to reverberate that a person could not tell for sure whether his ears were deceiving him. Gregor had meant to give a proper response explaining everything, but under the circumstances he limited himself to saying, “Yes, thank you, Mother, I’m just getting up.” Because of the wooden door, the change in Gregor’s voice appeared not to be noticeable from the other side, for his mother was reassured by his response and shuffled off. But their brief conversation had alerted the other family members that Gregor was unexpectedly still at home, and already his father was knocking at one of the room’s side doors, softly, but with his fist: “Gregor, Gregor,” he called. “What’s the problem?” And after a short while he repeated his question in a deeper register: “Gregor! Gregor!” Meanwhile, at the other side door came his sister’s faint lament: “Gregor? Are you unwell? Do you need anything?” “Just a second,” Gregor answered in both directions at once, making an effort, by enunciating as clearly as possible and inserting long pauses between the individual words, to remove anything conspicuous from his voice. And in fact his father returned to his breakfast, but his sister whispered: “Gregor, open the door, I implore you.” But Gregor had no intention of opening the door; he praised the cautious habit he had acquired while traveling of locking all his doors at night, even at home.

First he would get up calmly and undisturbed, he would get dressed and above all have breakfast, and only then would he consider his next steps, for all these supine contemplations, he suddenly realized, would yield no useful results. He recalled often having felt mild aches and pains in bed, caused perhaps by lying in an awkward position, and this pain had then proven to be a figment of his imagination the moment he got up; he was curious to see how this morning’s imaginings would gradually fade. The change in his voice was nothing more than the harbinger of a proper head cold, an occupational hazard among traveling salesmen; this he doubted not in the least.

It was simple enough to rid himself of the blanket; he needed only puff himself up a bit, and it fell right off. But the rest proved difficult, not least because he was so exceedingly wide. He would have needed arms and hands to prop himself up; but instead all he had were these many little legs, variously in motion, that he was unable to control. If he tried to bend one leg, it would be the first to straighten; and when he finally succeeded in getting one leg to do his bidding, all the others went flailing about in an unnerving frenzy. “Enough of this lying about uselessly in bed,” Gregor said to himself.

At first he tried to maneuver the lower part of his body out of the bed, but this lower part—which, by the way, he had not yet seen and couldn’t properly imagine—proved too unwieldy; it all went so slowly; and when at last, half-mad with impatience, he thrust himself recklessly forward with all his strength, it was in the wrong direction, and he slammed against the lower bedpost; the throbbing pain he felt instructed him that for now at least the lower part of his body was perhaps the most sensitive.

So he decided to try leading instead with his upper body and carefully twisted his head toward the edge of the bed. This was easily accomplished, and in the end, despite his width and weight, the mass of his body slowly followed the turning of his head. But once his head was dangling in midair outside the bed, he was afraid to keep shifting forward like this, since if eventually he had to let himself fall in this position, it would be practically a miracle if his head escaped injury. And right now he had to keep his wits about him at all costs, even if it meant staying where he was.

But when, sighing after redoubled efforts, he found himself lying there as before, watching his little legs engaged in their struggles, perhaps more flailingly now, and seeing no possible way to bring calm or order to this chaos, he told himself once more that he could not possibly remain lying here any longer and that the most sensible thing would be to sacrifice anything and everything as long as there remained even the slightest hope of liberating himself from the bed. Simultaneously, though, he continued to remind himself that calm consideration—indeed, the calmest consideration—was far preferable to resolutions seized on in despair. At such moments he fixed his eyes as sharply as possible on the window, but regrettably the view of the morning fog, which veiled even the far side of the narrow street, offered little by way of optimism and good spirits. “Seven o’clock already,” he said to himself as the clock struck once more, “already seven and still such dense fog.” And for a little while he lay there quietly, his breathing shallow, in the expectation, perhaps, that this perfect

silence might possibly restore the real and ordinary state of things.

Then he said to himself: "Before it strikes a quarter past seven, I must absolutely have gotten myself completely out of bed. Besides, by then someone will have come from the office to inquire after me, as the office opens before seven." And he now set himself to rocking his body out of the bed as evenly as possible along his entire length. If he allowed himself to fall from the bed like this, his head—which he intended to lift up cleanly as he fell—would in all likelihood remain unharmed. His back seemed to be hard; surely it would sustain no damage as he fell to the rug. His greatest concern was what to do about the loud crash that would clearly result, no doubt calling forth not terror perhaps but certainly alarm behind each door. Nonetheless it would have to be ventured.

By the time Gregor was already protruding halfway out of bed—this new method was more a game than a struggle,¹¹ all he had to do was keep rocking sideways a little at a time—it occurred to him how simple things would be if only someone came to his aid. Two strong individuals—he was thinking of his father and the maidservant—would suffice; all they'd have to do was slip their arms beneath his curved back to scoop him out of bed, then crouch down with their burden and wait patiently for him to flip himself over onto the floor, where he hoped those tiny legs of his would take on some meaning. But even aside from the fact that the doors were locked, should he really call for help? Despite his distress, he couldn't help smiling at the thought.

Already he'd reached the point where the vigorous rocking motion was making it almost impossible for him to keep his balance, and soon he would have to make up his mind and take the plunge, for a quarter after seven was only five minutes away—when the front doorbell rang. "It's someone from the office," he said to himself and nearly froze while his little legs went on scrabbling¹² all the more frenetically. For a moment all was still. "They won't answer," Gregor said to himself, caught up in some deluded hope. But then of course, as always, the maid strode resolutely to the door and opened it.

Gregor needed only hear the visitor's first words of greeting to know who it was: the general manager¹³ himself. Why oh why was Gregor condemned to serve in a firm where even the most negligible falling short was enough to arouse the greatest possible suspicion? Was every last one of the firm's employees a scoundrel, was there not a single loyal, devoted soul among them who would be driven mad by pangs of conscience should he fail to make the best possible use of even just a few morning hours for his employer's benefit, such that his guilt would render him virtually incapable of rising from his bed? Would

it really not have sufficed to send an apprentice to inquire—if indeed such inquiries were necessary at all—did the general manager have to come in person, and was it necessary to demonstrate to the entire innocent family that the investigation of this suspicious matter could be entrusted only to the general manager's sharp intellect? And more because of the agitation aroused in Gregor by this train of thought than because of some proper resolution on his part, he swung himself out of bed with all his might. There was a loud thud, you couldn't really call it a crash. The rug cushioned the impact a little, and since his back was more elastic than he'd thought, the resulting sound was muffled and not so obvious. But he hadn't managed to hold his head up carefully enough and had bumped it; he turned it this way and that, pressing it against the rug in his vexation and pain.

"Something just fell in there," the general manager now said in the room on the left. Gregor tried to imagine whether anything like what he was now experiencing could ever befall the general manager; the possibility must certainly be admitted. But as if brusquely dismissing the question, the manager now took a few purposeful steps in the next room, making his patent leather boots creak. From the room on the right came the whisper of Gregor's sister informing him: "Gregor, the general manager is here." "I know," Gregor murmured; but he didn't dare raise his voice high enough for his sister to hear.

"Gregor," his father now said from the room on the left, "the general manager has come to inquire why you failed to depart by the early train. We don't know what to tell him. Besides, he'd like to have a word with you in person. So please open the door. I'm sure he'll be kind enough not to take offense at the untidiness of your room." "Good morning, Herr Samsa," the general manager now cried out in a friendly tone. "He isn't well," Gregor's mother said to the general manager while his father was still having his say beside the door, "not well at all, take my word for it, sir. Why else would Gregor miss his train! The office is the only thing that boy ever thinks of. It really bothers me that he never goes out in the evening; he's been back in the city an entire week now, but he's spent every last evening at home. He just sits at the table with us, quietly reading the newspaper, or else studies the timetables. Even just doing woodworking projects seems to entertain him. He carved a little picture frame, for example, did it in two or three evenings with his fretsaw; you'll be amazed how pretty it is; it's hanging there in his room; you'll see it in a minute when Gregor opens the door. Oh, and I'm so glad you paid us a visit, sir; on our own we'd never have managed to persuade Gregor to open up; he's so stubborn; and surely he isn't

well, even though he denied it this morning.” “Be ... right ... there,” Gregor said, not moving, so as not to miss a single word of their conversation. “No other explanation, madam, is conceivable to me,” the general manager said. “Let us hope it is nothing grave. Though on the other hand I would note that, as businessmen—fortunately or unfortunately, as one will—we are very often obliged to suppress indispositions out of consideration for the firm.” “So are you ready to let the general manager in?” Gregor’s impatient father asked, knocking again at the door. “No,” Gregor responded. In the left-hand room horrified silence, while in the room on the right Gregor’s sister began to sob.

Why didn’t his sister go to join the others? She must have just gotten out of bed and not yet begun to dress. And why was she crying? Because he wasn’t getting up and opening his door to the general manager, because he was in danger of losing his position, and because his boss would then start hounding his parents once more over their ancient debt? For the time being, all such worries were assuredly unnecessary. Gregor was still here, and abandoning his family was the farthest thing from his thoughts. At the moment, to be sure, he was lying on the rug, and no one familiar with his current state would seriously expect him to let the general manager in. But surely he wouldn’t be sent packing just like that because of so trivial an act of discourtesy, for which it would be simple enough to find an appropriate excuse later on. And it seemed to Gregor it would be far more sensible to just leave him in peace rather than disturbing him with all this weeping and cajoling. But the others were distressed by the uncertainty of it all; their behavior was understandable.

“Herr Samsa,” the general manager now called out, raising his voice. “What has come over you? You barricade yourself in your room, you reply to queries only with yes and no, you cause your parents onerous, unnecessary worries, and you are neglecting—let me permit myself to note—your professional responsibilities in a truly unprecedented manner. I speak here in the name of your parents as well as your employer and in all seriousness must ask you for a clear and immediate explanation. I am astonished, utterly astonished. I have always known you as a calm, sensible person, and now it seems you’ve begun to permit yourself the most whimsical extravagances. To be sure, the boss did suggest one possible explanation for your absence this morning—it concerns the cash payments recently entrusted to your care—and truthfully, I all but gave him my word of honor that this explanation could not be correct. But confronted here with your incomprehensible obstinacy, I find myself losing any desire I might have had to come to your defense. And your position is anything but secure. It

was originally my intention to discuss all this with you in a private conversation, but since you compel me to waste my time here, I do not know why your esteemed parents should not hear of it as well. In short: your productivity of late has been highly unsatisfactory; admittedly this is not the best season for drumming up business, we do acknowledge this; but a season in which no business at all is drummed up is something that does not, and indeed may not exist, Herr Samsa.”

“But sir,” Gregor cried out, beside himself and forgetting all else in his agitation, “I shall open the door at once, this very instant. A slight indisposition, a fit of dizziness¹⁴ kept me from getting up. Even now I’m still in bed. But already I am feeling very much refreshed. Here, I’m getting up. Just a moment’s patience! It’s a bit more difficult than I thought. But already I’m feeling quite fine. How odd, the way such a thing can suddenly come over one.¹⁵ Yesterday evening I felt perfectly all right, my parents can attest to this, or rather: I did in fact feel a mild foreboding yesterday evening already. Surely it was noticeable to anyone looking at me. Why didn’t I send word to the office? But we always just assume we’ll be able to overcome these illnesses without staying home. Sir! Do be gentle with my parents. The allegations you make are unfounded, and no one has ever mentioned anything of the sort to me. Perhaps you haven’t yet looked over the most recent commissions I sent in. In any case, I’ll be back on the road in time for the eight o’clock train; these additional hours of rest have fortified me. Please do not allow me to detain you any longer, sir; I shall be at the office myself in no time; do be so good as to say I’m on my way and give my regards to the boss.”

And while Gregor was hastily blurting out all of this, scarcely knowing what he said, he edged closer to the wardrobe with minimal effort, no doubt thanks to the practice he had already acquired while still in bed, and now he did his best to haul himself upright. Indeed, he really did want to open the door, to show himself and speak with the general manager; he was eager to learn what the others, who were so anxious to see him, would say when they finally laid eyes on him. If they recoiled in horror, Gregor could surrender all responsibility and rest easy. But if they accepted it all calmly, that meant he too had no reason to get himself worked up, and if he hurried, he could still make it to the station by eight. At first he couldn’t get a grip on the wardrobe’s smooth surface, but finally he gave a great heave and found himself standing upright; he no longer paid any heed to the pain in his lower body, aches as it might. Now he let himself drop against the back of a nearby chair, clinging to its edges with his little legs.

And having thus attained control over himself, he fell silent, for now he could listen to the general manager.

“Did you understand a single word?” the manager was asking Gregor’s parents. “Surely he isn’t trying to make fools of us?” “For heaven’s sake,” Gregor’s mother cried, already weeping, “he might be gravely ill, and here we are tormenting him. Grete! Grete!” she cried out. “Mother?” Gregor’s sister called from the other side. They were communicating through Gregor’s room. “You must go for the doctor at once. Gregor is ill. Quick, fetch the doctor. Did you hear him speaking just now?” “That was an animal’s voice,” the general manager said, speaking in noticeably subdued tones compared to the cries of Gregor’s mother. “Anna! Anna!” the father shouted into the kitchen through the vestibule, clapping his hands. “Run and fetch a locksmith, hurry!” And already the two girls were racing through the vestibule, their skirts rustling (how had Gregor’s sister possibly gotten dressed so quickly?), and flung open the front door. There was no sound of the door closing again; no doubt they had left it standing open, as one sees with apartments in which a great calamity¹⁶ has occurred.

But Gregor was far less troubled now. Even though the others were no longer able to understand his words—though they had seemed to him clear enough, clearer than in the past, perhaps because his ear had grown accustomed to their sound—they were now convinced that things were not right with him and were prepared to offer help. The confidence and conviction with which these first arrangements had been made comforted him. He felt drawn once more into the circle of humankind and was expecting both the doctor and the locksmith—without properly differentiating between the two—to perform magnificent, astounding feats. So as to have as intelligible a voice as possible for the crucial discussions that lay ahead, he cleared his throat a little, making an effort to do this as discreetly as possible, since even this sound might differ from human throat-clearing, which he no longer trusted himself to judge. In the next room, meanwhile, all was quiet. Perhaps his parents sat whispering at the table with the general manager, or perhaps all of them were leaning against the door, listening.

Gregor slowly pushed himself over to the door using the armchair, then let go and allowed himself to fall against the door, propping himself upright—the pads of his little legs turned out to be slightly sticky—and there he rested briefly from his exertions. Then he set about turning the key in the lock using his mouth. Unfortunately it seemed he had no real teeth—so how was he supposed to grasp the key?—but his jaws turned out to be surprisingly strong; and with their help

he actually succeeded in causing the key to move, paying no heed to the fact that he was no doubt injuring himself in the process, for a brown fluid ran out of his mouth and down the key, dripping onto the floor. “Listen to that,” the general manager said in the next room, “he’s turning the key in the lock.” Gregor found these words most encouraging; but all of them should have been cheering him on, including his father and mother: “Come on, Gregor!” they should have shouted, “just keep at it, keep working on that lock!” And now, imagining all of them following his efforts with great suspense, he bit down on the key uncomprehendingly, with all the force he could muster. With each revolution of the key, he danced about the lock, holding himself upright using only his mouth and, as needed, either clinging to the key or using the entire weight of his body to press it down. The brighter sound of the lock finally springing open positively revived him. Sighing in relief, he said to himself: “I guess I didn’t need the locksmith after all,” and he laid his head upon the handle of the door to press it open.

But he remained hidden from view as the door swung toward him, even after it was wide open. To be seen, he had to work his way slowly around one of the wings of the double door, a delicate operation if he wanted to avoid plopping down awkwardly on his back before he’d even entered the room. He was still occupied with this difficult maneuver and had no leisure to attend to anything else when he heard the general manager utter a loud “Oh!”—it sounded like wind howling—and now he saw him too, saw how the general manager, who was standing closest to the door, pressed his hand to his open mouth, slowly retreating, as though being driven back by an invisible, steady force. Gregor’s mother—who despite the general manager’s presence stood with her hair still undone from the night, wildly bristling—first looked over at his father, her hands clasped, then took two steps in Gregor’s direction before falling down in the midst of all her billowing skirts, her face vanishing completely where it sank to her bosom. Gregor’s father clenched his fist with a hostile grimace, as if he intended to thrust Gregor back into his room, then glanced uncertainly about the living room, shaded his eyes with his hands, and wept until his mighty chest shook.¹⁷

Gregor made no move to enter the room, instead he leaned from the inside against the wing of the door that was bolted fast, so that only half his body and the head inclined sideways above it could be seen as he peered across at the others. Meanwhile it had grown much lighter out; on the far side of the street, a section of the infinitely long, dark gray building opposite—a hospital—came

into view with its regular windows punched into the facade;¹⁸ rain was still falling, but only in large drops that were separately visible and seemed to have been hurled one by one to the ground. An inordinate number of breakfast dishes crowded the table, for Gregor's father considered breakfast the most important meal of the day and would drag it out for hours reading various newspapers. Straight ahead, on the opposite wall, hung a photograph of Gregor from his time in the military, showing him as a second lieutenant whose carefree smile as he rested his hand on his dagger commanded respect for his bearing and his uniform. The door to the vestibule was open, and since the front door was open as well, one could see all the way out to the landing and the head of the stairs leading down.

"Well," Gregor said, quite conscious of the fact that he was the only one who had retained his composure, "I shall get dressed at once, pack up my samples and be on my way. As for the rest of you, are you prepared to let me do so? You can see, sir"—he said, addressing the general manager—"I am not obstinate, nor a shirker; traveling is burdensome, but without it I could not live. Where are you going now, sir? To the office? Yes? Will you report all these things truthfully? A person can be incapable of working at the moment, but this is precisely the right time to recall his earlier accomplishments and consider that he will later, once the hindrance has been overcome, work all the more industriously and with greater focus. I am so dreadfully indebted to the boss, surely you're aware of this. On the other hand, I have my parents and sister to think of. Truly I'm in a bind, but I shall work my way out of it. Don't make things more difficult for me than they already are. Take my side at the office! No one loves us drummers, I know. Everyone thinks the salesmen rake in a king's ransom while enjoying life's pleasures. And there's never any particular cause to reconsider this prejudice. But you, sir, have a far better grasp of the general circumstances than the rest of the staff, better even—if I may speak confidentially—than the boss himself, who in his role as businessman can easily err in his opinion to an employee's disadvantage. And you no doubt know quite well that a drummer, who spends almost the entire year away from the office, can easily become the victim of gossip, happenstance and groundless complaints against which he cannot possibly defend himself, as he usually never even learns of them, or only when he has completed one of his journeys, exhausted, and then back at home is forced to observe the dire physical effects of causes that can no longer be identified. Please, sir, do not leave without saying something to show you agree with me at least to some small extent!"

But the general manager had already turned away as soon as Gregor began to speak, and merely glanced back at him over a hunched shoulder, his mouth contorted. And during Gregor's speech he did not stand still for a moment but instead continued to retreat—not letting Gregor out of his sight—in the direction of the door, but only gradually, as though it were secretly prohibited to exit this room. Already he was in the vestibule, and to judge by the abrupt motion with which he withdrew his foot from the living room for the last time, one might have supposed he'd just burned it. Having reached the vestibule, however, he stretched out his right hand, gesturing broadly in the direction of the stairs, as if some all but supernatural salvation awaited him there.

Gregor realized he could not possibly allow the general manager to depart in his present frame of mind if his own position at the firm was not to be put in the gravest jeopardy. His parents didn't fully comprehend his situation: over these long years they had formed the conviction that Gregor was provided for in this office for life, and besides they were so preoccupied with their present worries that they were bereft of all foresight. But Gregor had this foresight. The general manager would have to be detained, reasoned with, convinced and finally won over; after all, Gregor's future and that of his family depended on it. If only his sister were here! She was clever; she had already begun to weep while Gregor was still lying quietly on his back. And surely the general manager, ever the ladies' man, would have let himself be assuaged by her; she would have closed the front door of the apartment and talked him out of his fear in the vestibule. But his sister was not there, so Gregor himself would have to act. And without stopping to consider that he was not yet familiar with his current abilities with respect to locomotion, nor even taking into account the fact that this last speech of his had quite possibly—indeed probably—eluded comprehension, he let go of the door; forced his way through the opening; meant to walk over to where the general manager, already out on the landing, was foolishly clutching at the banister with both hands; but right away, groping in vain for something to catch hold of, he fell with a faint shriek upon his many little legs. No sooner had this occurred than he felt—for the first time all morning—a sense of physical well-being; his legs had solid ground beneath them; they obeyed his will perfectly, as he noted to his delight; they even strove to bear him wherever he wished; and already it seemed to him he would soon be delivered from all his sufferings. But as he lay there on the floor directly in front of his mother and not far from her, swaying with mobility held in check, she suddenly leapt up—rapt as she had appeared within her own contemplations—leapt high up into the air, her arms

thrust wide, fingers spread, crying out: "Help me, for God's sake, help!" her head cocked at an angle, as if to see Gregor better, but then, contradicting this, she senselessly retreated; but she had forgotten the table set for breakfast just behind her; sat down hurriedly upon it as soon as she reached it, as if absentmindedly; and didn't seem to notice that the big overturned coffeepot beside her was pouring a thick stream of coffee on the rug.

"Mother, Mother," Gregor said softly, gazing up at her. For a moment he had forgotten all about the general manager; on the other hand, he could not restrain himself, when he beheld this flowing coffee, from snapping his jaws several times. At this, the mother gave another shriek and fled from the table into the arms of Gregor's father as he rushed to her aid. But Gregor had no time for his parents now; the general manager was already on the stairs; his chin propped on the banister, he looked back on the scene one last time. Gregor was just preparing to dash after him to be sure of catching up with him; but the manager must have sensed something, for he leapt down several steps at once and vanished; and the cry of horror he gave as he fled resounded through the stairwell. Unfortunately the manager's flight now appeared to utterly discombobulate Gregor's father, who up till then had been relatively composed, for instead of running after the manager himself or at least not hindering Gregor in his own pursuit, he seized the manager's walking stick in one hand—it had been left lying on an armchair along with his overcoat and hat—with the other took up a large newspaper from the table, and set about driving Gregor back into his room with a great stamping of feet, brandishing both newspaper and stick. All Gregor's entreaties were in vain, nor were they even understood, for as submissively as he might swivel his head, his father only stamped his feet all the more ferociously. Across the room, his mother had flung open a window despite the chilly weather, and, leaning out, she pressed her face into her hands far outside the window frame. Between street and stairwell, a powerful draft arose, the window curtains flew into the air, the newspapers on the table rustled, and a few pages scudded across the floor. Inexorably Gregor's father drove him backward, uttering hissing sounds like a wild man. But Gregor had no practice at all in reverse locomotion, and his progress was very slow. If only he'd been permitted to turn around, he'd have been back in his room at once, but he was afraid of provoking his father's fury with this time-consuming maneuver, and at any moment a fatal blow from the stick in his father's hand might come crashing down on his back or head. In the end, though, he had no alternative: horrified, he realized he was incapable of controlling his direction; and so he began, with

constant anxious glances back at his father, to turn around as quickly as he could, which in fact was rather slowly. Perhaps his father discerned his good intentions, for he did not hinder him in this operation but instead even guided his rotation here and there from a distance, using the tip of his stick. If only his father were not making that unbearable hissing noise! It made Gregor lose his head completely. He had already turned almost all the way around when—still with this hissing in his ear—he became confused and started turning back in the wrong direction. But when finally he succeeded in positioning his head in front of the doorway, it turned out that his body was too wide to fit through the opening. And of course in his father's current state it could not possibly have occurred to him to open the door's other wing to create an adequate passage. He was fixated on the notion that Gregor must disappear into his room as quickly as possible. Never would he have tolerated the complicated preparations necessary for Gregor to prop himself up so as possibly to pass through the door in an upright position. Instead, as though there were no obstacle at all, he now drove Gregor before him, raising a great din: what Gregor heard at his back no longer resembled the voice of merely a single father; it was do or die, and Gregor thrust himself—come what would—into the doorway. One side of his body tilted up, rising at an angle as he pressed forward, scraping his one flank raw and leaving ugly stains behind on the white door, and soon he was wedged tight, unable to move on his own; on one side, his little legs dangled trembling in midair, while on the other they were crushed painfully beneath him—then his father administered a powerful shove from behind, a genuinely liberating thrust that sent him flying, bleeding profusely, into the far reaches of his room. The door was banged shut with the stick, and then at last all was still.

II

Only as dusk was falling did Gregor wake from his heavy, faintlike sleep. He probably wouldn't have slept much longer even without a disturbance, for he felt sufficiently rested and restored, but it seemed to him he had been woken by a fleeting step and the careful shutting of the door to the vestibule. The pallid gleam of the electric streetlamps touched the ceiling here and there and the upper edges of the furniture, but down where Gregor lay, all was dark. Slowly, groping awkwardly with his feelers, which he was only now learning to appreciate, he

dragged himself toward the door, wanting to see what had happened. His left side felt like one long unpleasantly contracting scar, and he was forced to limp outright on his two rows of legs. One of these diminutive legs, incidentally, had suffered grievous injuries in the course of the morning's events—it was almost miraculous only one had been injured—and now trailed lifelessly behind him.

Not until he reached the door did he realize what in fact had lured him there: it was the smell of something edible. There stood a bowl filled with sweet milk in which little pieces of white bread were floating. He almost laughed with delight, for his hunger was now even more powerful than in the morning, and right away he dunked his head in the milk almost up to his eyes. But he quickly drew it out again in disappointment; it wasn't just that eating was difficult thanks to his tender left side—and he couldn't eat at all without his entire body becoming gaspingly involved—but beyond that: even though milk had always been his favorite drink, which is no doubt why his sister had brought him some, now it didn't taste good to him at all, indeed it was almost with revulsion that he turned away from the bowl and crept back to the center of the room.

In the living room, as Gregor saw through the crack, the gas had been lit, but while usually at this hour his father liked to read aloud from the afternoon paper to Gregor's mother and sometimes his sister as well in a dramatic voice, now there was not a sound to be heard. Well, perhaps this customary reading aloud that his sister had often told and written him about had recently fallen out of practice. But even in the other rooms everything was so still, even though the apartment was surely not empty. "What a quiet life my family has been leading," Gregor said to himself, and as he gazed fixedly into the darkness before him, he felt great pride at having been able to give his parents and sister a life like this in such a beautiful apartment. But what if all this tranquility, all this prosperity and contentment were now coming to a horrific end? So as not to get lost in such contemplations, Gregor set himself in motion, crawling back and forth across the room.

Once in the course of this long evening one of the side doors was opened a tiny crack and then quickly shut again, and once the other one; someone must have felt an urge to enter and then been overcome by misgivings. Gregor now stationed himself just in front of the living room door, determined to somehow coax the hesitant visitor inside or at least find out who it was; but the door did not open again, and Gregor waited in vain. Before, when all the doors were locked, everyone kept trying to come in, and now that he had opened the one door and the others had apparently been opened during the day, no one came,

and the keys were sticking in their locks from the outside.

It was late at night by the time the light in the living room went out, and now it was easy to ascertain that Gregor's parents and sister had remained awake all this time, for all three of them could clearly be heard departing on tiptoe. Now it was unlikely anyone would come into Gregor's room before morning; so he had plenty of time to ponder how best to reorder his life. But this high open room in which he was forced to lie flat on the floor distressed him, without his being able to determine the cause—after all, it was his room, which he had been living in for five years now¹⁹—and with a half-unconscious motion, and not without a twinge of shame, he scurried beneath the settee, where even though his back was a bit cramped and he could no longer raise his head, he at once felt right at home, his only regret being that his body was too wide across to be accommodated entirely beneath this piece of furniture.

Here he remained the entire night, which he spent by turns dozing—though he was woken again and again by his hunger—and mulling over his worries and indistinct hopes, which however all led to the conclusion that, for the time being, he should behave calmly and, by employing patience and the utmost consideration, assist his family in enduring the inconveniences his current state inevitably forced him to impose on them.

Early the next morning already, so early it was almost still night, Gregor had the opportunity to test the strength of these resolutions he had made, for from the vestibule his sister, almost completely clothed, opened his door and cast an anxious glance into the room. She didn't immediately spot him, but when she noticed him beneath the settee—well, goodness, he had to be somewhere, it's not as if he might have flown away—the sight so alarmed her that, unable to control herself, she slammed the door from the outside. But as if regretting this conduct, she opened it again at once and came in, walking on tiptoe as though she were entering the room of a gravely ill patient or even a stranger. Gregor, having slid his head to just beneath the edge of the settee, observed her. Would she see that he had left the milk standing, and not because of a lack of hunger, and would she bring him some other food more to his liking? If she failed to do so of her own accord, he would sooner starve than call this to her attention, though in fact he felt a nearly monstrous urge to scoot out from beneath the settee, throw himself at his sister's feet, and beg her for something good to eat. But his sister immediately remarked with surprise that the bowl was still full, with just a little of its milk spilled on the floor around it, and she picked it up right away—not with her bare hands, to be sure, but with a rag—and carried it out of the room.

Gregor was exceptionally curious to see what she would bring in its stead and mulled over various possibilities. But never would he have been able to predict what his sister in her kindness proceeded to do. To gauge his tastes, she brought him an entire assortment of foodstuffs, all spread out on an old newspaper. There were old, half-rotten vegetables; bones from the family supper the night before caked in a congealed white sauce; a few raisins and almonds; a piece of cheese Gregor had declared inedible two days before; a dry piece of bread; a slice of buttered bread; and a slice of bread with butter and salt. In addition, she placed beside this feast the bowl that apparently had been reserved for Gregor once and for all; it was now filled with water. And out of delicacy, since she knew Gregor would not eat in front of her, she quickly withdrew and even turned the key in the lock so that Gregor would understand he could make himself at home. Gregor's little legs whirled as he now went to take his meal. His wounds, incidentally, seemed to have healed entirely in the meantime, for he no longer felt the least impairment; this was astonishing, for more than a month ago he had cut his finger just a tiny bit with a knife, and this wound had still been painful enough just the day before yesterday. "Might I be less fastidious than before?" he thought, already sucking greedily at the cheese, to which he'd found himself immediately, inexorably drawn, more than to any of the other items. Quickly, his eyes shedding tears of gratification, he devoured in swift succession: the cheese, the vegetables, and the sauce; the fresh food, by contrast, did not taste good to him, in fact he could not even stand the smell of it and so dragged the things he wished to eat a little to one side.²⁰ He had long since finished everything and was just lying indolently where he was when his sister slowly turned the key in the lock as a signal for him to withdraw. At once he gave a start, though he'd been on the point of nodding off, and he hurried back under the settee. But it cost him a great deal of willpower to remain there even for the short period of time his sister spent in the room, for the hearty meal he'd enjoyed had caused his abdomen to swell, and he could scarcely breathe in his confinement. In between little attacks of suffocation, he peered out with slightly bulging eyes as his sister, oblivious, used a broom to sweep up not only the remains of his meal but also the food he hadn't even touched, as if these items too were no longer fit for consumption, then she hastily dumped everything in a bucket that she covered with a wooden lid before carrying it all out of the room again. She had scarcely turned her back when Gregor hauled himself out from under the settee, stretching and puffing up his body.

This was how Gregor now received his food each day, once in the morning,

when his parents and the maid were still asleep, and the second time after everyone had eaten lunch, for his parents would always nap a little afterward, and his sister would send the maid out on some errand or other. Surely they didn't want Gregor to starve either, but perhaps it would have been too much for them to experience his meals through more than hearsay, or perhaps his sister wanted to spare them even this modest sorrow, for Lord knows they were suffering enough.

Gregor never learned on what pretext the doctor and locksmith had been sent away that first morning, for since he himself could not be understood, it occurred to no one, not even his sister, that he could understand the others,²¹ so when his sister came to his room, he had to be content merely with hearing the sighs she heaved now and then and her words of supplication addressed to the saints. Only later, when she had started to grow accustomed to all of this—though of course it was impossible to become fully accustomed to circumstances like these—would Gregor sometimes catch a remark that was meant in a friendly way or could be interpreted as such. “He tucked right in today,” she would say when Gregor had found the food she left him particularly tasty, while in the opposite case, which gradually began to occur more and more often, she was in the habit of saying almost mournfully: “This time he didn't touch a thing.”

But while no news reached Gregor directly, he sometimes was able to overhear this and that from the rooms to either side of his, and whenever he heard voices, he would immediately run over to the door in question and press his entire body against it. Especially in the early days there was rarely a conversation that did not somehow, if only indirectly, refer to him. For two days, every mealtime was spent deliberating how the family should now comport itself; but even between meals this same discussion continued, for at least two members of the household were present at all times, since apparently no one wanted to remain at home alone, and of course leaving the apartment unattended was out of the question. What's more, the maid had fallen on her knees before Gregor's mother that very first day—it was not entirely clear what and how much she knew of what had occurred—begging to be released from the family's service, and when she took her leave a quarter of an hour later, she tearfully thanked them for dismissing her, as though this were the greatest benefaction she had experienced at their hands, and without anyone asking this of her, she swore a solemn oath never to reveal anything at all to anyone.

Now Gregor's sister was forced to do the cooking in concert with his mother; to be sure, not much effort was involved, as no one did much eating. Again and

again Gregor would hear one of them pressing the others to eat—always in vain, and never with any other response than “Thank you, I’ve had all I want,” or similar words. Perhaps they didn’t drink anything either. Often Gregor’s sister would ask her father if he wouldn’t like a beer, affectionately offering to fetch it herself, and when he did not respond, she would say, wishing to relieve him of all scruples, that she could send the porter’s wife²² for it as well, but then the father would utter a great “No,” and no one spoke of it any longer.

Already in the course of the first day, Gregor’s father explained the family’s finances and prospects not only to Gregor’s mother but to his sister as well. Now and then he would get up from the table and, from his small Wertheim safe, which he had salvaged when his business collapsed five years²³ before, extract some receipt or memorandum book. One could hear him opening the complicated lock and then bolting it shut again after removing the desired item. These explanations on his father’s part included the first bits of heartening news Gregor had heard since his captivity began. He had been under the impression that his father had retained nothing at all of his former firm’s holdings, or at least his father had never said anything to the contrary, and admittedly Gregor himself had never asked him about this. At the time, his only concern had been to do everything in his power to let the family forget, as quickly as possible, the mercantile catastrophe that had plunged all of them into a state of utter hopelessness. And so he had set to work with particular zeal and risen almost overnight from petty clerk to salesman, in which capacity of course he had a quite different earning potential, and his professional accomplishments, in the form of commissions, were immediately transformed into cash that could be plunked down on the table at home, before the eyes of his astonished, delighted family. Those had been lovely times, and never since had they been repeated, at least not with such glory, although Gregor later earned so much money that he was in a position to cover the expenses for the entire family, which he then did. All had grown accustomed to this arrangement, not just the family but Gregor as well: they gratefully accepted the money, and he was happy to provide it, but the exchange no longer felt particularly warm. Only Gregor’s sister had remained close to him all this time, and it was his secret plan to send her off to study at the Conservatory next year (unlike Gregor, she dearly loved music and could play the violin quite movingly), despite the considerable costs this would no doubt entail, money that could surely be brought in by other means. Often during the brief periods of time Gregor spent in town, the Conservatory would come up in his conversations with his sister, but only ever as a lovely dream whose

realization was unthinkable, and their parents did not like to hear it mentioned even in this innocuous way; but Gregor was thinking the matter over with great determination and intended to make a formal announcement on Christmas Eve.

Thoughts like these, utterly futile in his current state, passed through his head as he stood pressed against the door, eavesdropping. Sometimes general exhaustion made it impossible for him to go on listening, and he would carelessly let his head bump against the door, but then he would immediately hold his head still again, for even the faint sound this produced had been heard in the next room, causing everyone to fall silent. “I wonder what he’s getting up to now,” his father would say after a while, apparently facing the door, and only then would the interrupted conversation resume.

Gregor now learned, and learned quite well (his father tended to repeat himself in his explanations, in part because it had been so long since he’d last concerned himself with such matters, in part because Gregor’s mother did not always understand everything the first time), that despite all their misfortunes, a small nest egg—really only a tiny one—still remained to them from before, and had even grown a little thanks to the untouched interest that had accumulated meanwhile. In addition, the money Gregor had brought home each month—he only ever kept a few gulden for himself—had not yet been entirely used up and had grown into a small capital. Behind his door, Gregor nodded eagerly, delighted at this unexpected prudence and thrift. To be sure, he might have used this surplus to pay off more of his father’s debts with his boss, and the day on which he would have been able to divest himself of his post would no longer have been nearly so far off, but as things stood, his father’s arrangements were no doubt for the best.

Now this money was by no means sufficient to allow the family to live off the interest or anything of that sort; it might possibly have been enough to sustain the family for a year, two at most, but that’s all there was. So in fact it was the kind of sum one really shouldn’t touch, one to be set aside in case of emergency; the money to live on would have to be earned. Gregor’s father was admittedly in good health, but he was old and hadn’t worked in a full five years, and in any case he was supposed to avoid overtaxing himself; in those five years—the first holiday in his strenuous and yet unsuccessful life—he had put on a lot of weight and now lumbered as he walked. And was Gregor’s old mother now supposed to hold down a job, despite her asthma and the fact that it was already an exertion for her to cross from one end of the apartment to the other, for which reason she spent every second day gasping for breath on the sofa beside the open window?

And was his sister to go out working, this child of seventeen whose lifestyle no one would begrudge her: dressing nicely, sleeping late, helping out around the house, taking part in a few modest entertainments, and above all, playing the violin? Whenever the family came to speak of the necessity of someone earning money, Gregor would let go of the door and throw himself down upon the cool leather sofa beside it, burning with shame and sorrow.

Often he would lie there the entire long night, not sleeping for a moment, just scrabbling for hours against the leather. Or, not shunning the great effort it cost him to push an armchair over to the window, he would climb up the sill and, propped in the armchair, lean against the window, apparently lost in some sort of reverie of how liberating he'd always found it to gaze outside. For in truth he saw even the objects that were quite near at hand less and less clearly as the days progressed; the hospital across the way whose all too constant sight he had earlier reviled was now no longer even visible to him, and if he had not known perfectly well that he was a resident of Charlottenstrasse,²⁴ a quiet but perfectly urban street, he might have imagined he was gazing out his window onto a desert in which the gray sky and the gray earth were indistinguishably conjoined. His attentive sister only had to see the armchair standing beside the window twice before she started pushing it back to its place there each time she tidied his room; indeed she even began leaving the window's inner sash open.

If only Gregor had been able to speak to his sister and thank her for all she was compelled to do for him, he would have found her ministrations easier to bear; as it was, he suffered beneath them. His sister, to be sure, did all she could to obscure the awkwardness of the situation, and the more time passed, the better she succeeded, of course, but Gregor came to see it all more and more clearly. Even the way she made her entrance jangled his nerves. The moment she came in, without even pausing to shut the door—although she always took such pains to shield the others from the sight of Gregor's room—she would race straightaway to the window and fling it open with hasty hands as though she were on the point of suffocating, then remain standing there, however cold it might be, gulping in the air. All this racing and racket was inflicted on Gregor twice a day; he would be trembling beneath the settee, painfully aware that she would no doubt have willingly spared him this disruption if it were possible for her to endure being in the same room as Gregor with the window closed.

Once—it must have been a month since Gregor's metamorphosis, so there was no particular call for his sister to be startled by his appearance—she came into his room a little earlier than usual and discovered him, motionless and

propped upright as if for horrific effect, gazing out the window. Gregor would not have found it surprising if she had chosen not to enter, since his position prevented her from opening the window right away, but she didn't just not enter: she started in alarm and shut the door; a stranger might have thought Gregor had been lying in wait, meaning to bite her. Gregor naturally went and hid himself away beneath the settee, but he had to wait there until noon before his sister returned, and she seemed far more agitated than usual. From this he understood that his appearance was still unbearable to her and would remain so, and that she no doubt had to struggle to force herself not to run away at the sight of even the small part of his body that protruded from beneath the settee. In order to spare her even this sight, one day he carried the bedsheet over to the settee on his back—this labor cost him four hours—and arranged it in such a way that he was now completely covered, so that his sister would not be able to see him even if she bent down. If she considered the sheet unnecessary, she could have removed it, since it was clear enough that it could not possibly be considered a pleasure for Gregor to shut himself off so completely, but she left the sheet where it was, and Gregor even thought he glimpsed a grateful look when at one point he carefully lifted the sheet just a little with his head to see how his sister liked the new arrangement.

During the first fortnight, Gregor's parents could not bring themselves to enter his room, and often he heard them expressing their heartfelt appreciation of his sister's labors, whereas earlier they had often been annoyed with her, since she had seemed to them a rather useless girl. But now both of them, father and mother alike, would often be waiting just outside Gregor's door while his sister tidied up his room, and as soon as she emerged, she had to give a full report on what things looked like in the room, what Gregor had eaten, how he had behaved this time, and whether perhaps any modest improvement could be seen. His mother, incidentally, had wanted to visit him relatively soon, but his father and sister held her back, appealing at first to her sense of reason as Gregor listened attentively, wholeheartedly approving. Later, though, she had to be held back by force, and when she then cried out: "Let me go to Gregor, he is my unhappy son! Can't you understand that I must go to him?" then Gregor thought it would perhaps be good for his mother to visit him, not every day of course, but perhaps once a week; after all, she had a far better grasp of things than his sister, who despite her courage was still a child and, when it came right down to it, had perhaps only taken on this difficult task out of childish frivolity.

Gregor's wish to see his mother was soon fulfilled. During the day, Gregor

avoided showing himself at the window, if only out of consideration for his parents, but there wasn't much crawling he could do in the few square meters of space the floor provided, lying still was already difficult for him to endure during the night, eating had soon ceased to give him even the slightest pleasure, and so to divert himself he took up the habit of crawling back and forth across the walls and ceiling. He particularly liked hanging from the ceiling high above the room; it was completely different from lying on the floor; one could breathe more freely there; a gentle swaying motion rocked the body; and in the almost happy absentmindedness Gregor experienced, it might happen, to his own astonishment, that he would let go and crash to the floor. But now, of course, he had his body far better under control than before, and even as great a fall as this did him no harm. His sister immediately noticed the new entertainment Gregor had devised for himself—his peregrinations left behind sticky trails here and there—and she got it into her head to make it possible for Gregor to range as widely as possible by removing the furniture that impeded his movement, above all the wardrobe and desk. But she wasn't able to do so on her own; she didn't dare ask her father for help; the maid most certainly would not have helped her, for this girl of sixteen or so, though she had courageously remained in the household after the departure of the former cook, had at the same time requested the privilege of keeping the kitchen locked at all times and only opening the door upon particular request; and so the sister had no choice but to summon her mother one day when her father was out. The mother arrived with exclamations of feverish joy but fell silent at the door to Gregor's room. At first, of course, Gregor's sister checked to confirm that all in the room was as it should be; only then did she allow her mother to enter. With the utmost haste, Gregor had tugged the sheet down lower and in looser folds so that it really did look as if a bedsheet just happened to have been tossed over the settee. He also refrained from peering out from beneath the sheet this time; for the moment, he would resign himself to not seeing his mother and just be glad she had come. "It's all right, come in, you won't see him," Gregor's sister said, apparently leading her mother by the hand. Gregor now heard the sounds of these two weak women grappling with this in fact quite heavy old wardrobe, with his sister laying claim to the bulk of the work, not listening to the admonitions of her mother, who was afraid she would overtax herself. It took a very long time. After perhaps a quarter of an hour's labor, Gregor's mother said they should leave the wardrobe where it was after all; in the first place, it was too heavy—they would not finish before Gregor's father came home, and by leaving the wardrobe in the middle of the room, they

would prevent Gregor from moving around at all—and secondly, it wasn't even clear they were doing him a favor by taking away the furniture. To her, it seemed the opposite was true: the sight of the empty wall positively oppressed her heart; and why should Gregor not experience this same sentiment, since after all he was long accustomed to having this furniture around him—wouldn't he feel abandoned in an emptied-out room? "And is it not as if," his mother concluded in a low voice—in fact, she had been whispering all along, as though she wished to avoid letting Gregor, whose exact whereabouts she did not know, hear so much as the sound of her voice, for she was convinced he could not understand her words—"and is it not as if by removing the furniture we would be showing that we are giving up all hope of a cure and are ruthlessly abandoning him to his own devices? I think it would be best if we try to keep the room in precisely the same state it was in before, so that when Gregor returns to us he will find everything unchanged, which will make it that much easier for him to forget all that has happened in the meantime."

Hearing his mother's words, Gregor realized that the absence of all direct human address, combined with the monotony of life in his family's midst, must have muddled his understanding over the course of these two months, for he could not otherwise explain to himself how he could seriously have wished to have his room emptied out. Did he really want to have this warm room, comfortably furnished with family heirlooms, transformed into a cave or den—in which, to be sure, he would be able to crawl about unhindered in every direction, but at the price of simultaneously swiftly and completely forgetting his human past? He was already on the verge of forgetting, and only his mother's voice, which he had gone so long now without hearing, had shaken him awake. Nothing should be removed; everything must remain; he was unwilling to forego the good influence this furniture had on his condition; and if the furniture got in the way of his practicing this mindless crawling about, this was by no means to his detriment, in fact, it was a great advantage.

Unfortunately his sister was of a different opinion; she had developed the habit—not entirely without cause, to be sure—of presenting herself as the holder of particular expertise when discussing Gregor with her parents, and so now too her mother's counsel was reason enough for her to insist on the removal not only of the wardrobe and desk, as she had originally been intending, but of every last bit of the room's furnishings, with the exception of the indispensable settee. Naturally, it was not simply childish defiance and the hard-won self-assurance she had so unexpectedly acquired in recent weeks that dictated this demand; she

had, in fact, observed that Gregor needed a great deal of space to crawl around in, while as far as anyone could see, he made no use whatever of the furniture. But perhaps the fanciful imagination of a girl of her age played a role as well, a sensibility always seeking its own gratification, and one which Grete now allowed to persuade her to render Gregor's situation even more horrific than before, so as to be able to do even more for him than she had hitherto. For a room in which Gregor held sole dominion over empty walls was a place where no one other than Grete would ever dare to set foot.

And so she held fast to her resolve despite the protests of her mother, who appeared troubled to the point of indecision even by the room in its present state; she soon fell silent and helped Gregor's sister remove the wardrobe as best she could. Well, the wardrobe was something Gregor could do without if need be, but the desk would certainly have to stay. And no sooner had the women left the room with the cabinet, groaning as they pressed against its weight, than Gregor poked out his head from beneath the settee to see how he might, cautiously and as considerately as possible, intervene. But unfortunately his mother was the first to return while Grete was still in the next room, clasping the wardrobe in her arms and tipping it back and forth on her own—without, of course, moving it from the spot. But Gregor's mother was unaccustomed to his appearance, it might have made her ill to catch a glimpse of him, and so Gregor in alarm withdrew as fast as he could to the far end of the settee, but it was too late to prevent the front edge of the bedsheet from stirring a little. This was enough to attract his mother's notice. Startled, she froze for a moment, then went back to where Grete was.

Although Gregor kept telling himself that nothing extraordinary was happening, just a few sticks of furniture being shifted about, he was soon forced to admit that all this coming and going on the part of the women, their little exclamations, the furniture scraping against the floor, had the combined effect of a tumultuous hubbub intensifying all around him, and no matter how tightly he drew his head and legs in and pressed his body against the floor, he soon was forced to consider that he would not be able to endure this much longer. They were clearing out his room; taking from him all that was dear to him; they had already borne away the cabinet in which lay his fretsaw and other tools; and now they were prying loose the desk that had dug itself firmly into the floorboards, this desk at which he had written his homework assignments as a student at the commercial academy, and as a secondary and even primary school pupil—truly there was no time left to explore the good intentions of these two women, whose

existence, by the way, he had almost forgotten, for their exhaustion was now making them labor in silence, and one heard only their heavy footsteps.

And so he burst out of hiding—the women in the next room were just leaning on the desk to catch their breath—changing direction four times as he raced about, for he really didn't know what to save first, but then his eyes lit on the picture of the lady clad all in furs, conspicuous now on the otherwise empty wall, and quickly he made his way up to it and pressed himself against the glass, which adhered to him, pleasantly cool against his hot belly.²⁵ At least this picture, which Gregor's body now covered up completely, was absolutely certain not to be taken away from him. He swiveled his head toward the living room door to observe the women as they returned.

They hadn't permitted themselves much rest at all and were already on their way back; Grete had slung one arm about her mother and was nearly carrying her. "So what should we take next?" Grete said, looking around. Then her eyes met those of Gregor where he clung to the wall. It was no doubt only because of her mother's presence that she kept her composure; bowing her face toward her mother to prevent her from glancing about, she said—hastily and trembling, to be sure—"Let's go back to the living room for a moment, shall we?" Grete's intentions were perfectly clear to Gregor: she meant to bring their mother to safety and then chase him from the wall. Well, let her try! He sat there on his picture and would not give it up. He'd sooner leap right in her face.

But Grete's words succeeded in unsettling her mother even more: taking one step to the side, she saw the huge brown blotch on the flowered wallpaper, and before she was even able to realize that what she saw there was Gregor, she cried out in a hoarse, shrieking voice, "Oh God, oh God!" and fell back upon the settee, her arms spread wide as though she were giving up everything, and lay there without moving. "Gregor!" his sister shouted, raising her fist with a threatening glower. It was the first time she had addressed him directly since his metamorphosis. She ran into the next room to fetch some sort of essence that could be used to awaken her mother from her faint; Gregor wanted to help as well—there would be time enough to save the picture later—but he stuck fast to the glass and had to tear himself away by force; he too then ran into the next room as if he might offer his sister advice of some sort, like in the old days; but then could only stand idly behind her as she rummaged among various little bottles, and scared her out of her wits when she turned around; one bottle flew to the floor and shattered; a shard of glass scratched Gregor's face, and some sort of corrosive medicine engulfed him; without further delay, Grete took up as

many bottles as she could hold and ran with them to her mother, slamming the door behind her with her foot. Gregor was now cut off from his mother, who was possibly on the brink of death, for which he himself was to blame; he could not open the door if he didn't want to drive away his sister, who had to stay there with his mother; there was nothing for him to do but wait; and tormented by his worries and self-reproach, he began to crawl about, crawling over everything, walls, furniture, the ceiling, and finally in his despair, as the entire room began to spin around him, he fell smack in the middle of the big table.

A short while passed. Gregor lay there, spent, and around him all was still, possibly a good sign. Then the bell rang. The maid was naturally locked up in her kitchen and so Grete had to open the door. Their father was back. "What happened?" were his first words; the look on Grete's face had no doubt revealed all. Grete's voice as she responded was muffled, apparently she was pressing her face against his chest: "Mother fainted, but she's better already. Gregor has broken out." "That's just what I expected," the father said. "I kept telling you, but you women refused to listen." To Gregor it was clear his father had misinterpreted Grete's all too brief pronouncement to assume him guilty of some act of violence. So it behooved Gregor to try to pacify his father, as he was lacking both the time and means to enlighten him. With this in mind, he fled to the door of his room and pressed himself against it, so that the moment his father came into the living room from the vestibule he would see that Gregor had every intention of returning at once to his room, that it was unnecessary to drive him back inside, and that one had merely to open the door, and he would disappear at once.

But his father was in no mood to take note of subtleties. "Ah!" he exclaimed upon entering, in a tone of voice suggesting he was at once furious and glad. Gregor pulled his head back from the door and turned it toward his father. He had truly not expected to see his father looking as he looked now standing before him; though to be sure the novelty of crawling about had distracted him recently from paying as much attention as before to the goings-on in the rest of the apartment, and really he ought to have been prepared to find a changed set of circumstances. Even so, even so: was this still his father? The same man who used to lie wearily entombed in his bed when Gregor set off on a business trip; who would greet him on the evening of his return sitting in an armchair in his nightshirt; who, incapable of rising, would merely raise his arms to signify his delight, and on the rare walks they still shared, a few Sundays each year and on major holidays, would trudge between Gregor and his mother, who themselves

were already walking rather slowly, moving even a bit slower than they, bundled up in his old overcoat, always with his gingerly advancing cane and almost invariably coming to a halt and collecting his companions around him whenever he had something to say? Now he was standing properly erect; dressed in a smart blue uniform with gold buttons of the sort worn by porters in banking establishments; above the jacket's tall, stiff collar his powerful double chin unfurled; beneath bushy eyebrows, his black eyes peered out acutely and attentively; his once disheveled white hair had been painstakingly combed and parted until it gleamed. He tossed his cap, to which a gold monogram was affixed, probably that of a bank, across the entire room in a wide arc to land on the settee, then advanced grim-faced upon Gregor with the tips of his long uniform jacket flung back and his hands in his trouser pockets. He himself probably had no idea what he intended to do; at any rate, he raised up each foot unusually high, and Gregor marveled at the gigantic dimensions of his boot-soles. But he did not lose any time over them, having learned on the very first day of his new life that his father considered only the utmost severity appropriate for him. And so he fled from his father, hesitating whenever his father stopped short, and then rushing forward again as soon as he stirred. They circled the room several times in this manner without anything decisive occurring, and indeed, given the slow speed at which this interaction was taking place, without its even having the appearance of a chase. For this reason Gregor remained at floor level for the time being, especially as he feared his father might consider it particular wickedness on his part if he were to take refuge on the walls or ceiling. To be sure, he was forced to realize he would not be able to keep up even this pace for long, since each time his father took a step, he himself had to execute any number of motions. A shortness of breath began to set in—even in his earlier life his lungs had been none too reliable. As he now lurched along, reserving all his strength for this continued flight, his eyes barely open (and not thinking, in his stupefaction, that there might be other ways of saving himself than running across the floor, indeed he had almost forgotten he also had the walls at his disposal, though here, to be sure, they were obstructed by delicately carved furniture full of jagged, pointy edges), all at once something flew to the rug beside him, casually flung, and rolled across his path. It was an apple;²⁶ and already a second one came flying after it; in horror, Gregor stopped in his tracks; there was no point continuing to run now that his father had decided to bombard him. He had filled his pockets from the fruit bowl on the sideboard and now was tossing apple after apple in Gregor's direction, for the moment not even

bothering to take particular aim. The petite red apples rolled around the floor as if electrified, knocking into each other. One lightly lobbed apple grazed Gregor's back and slid off again harmlessly. But it was immediately followed by another that embedded itself in his back. Gregor tried to drag himself forward, as if this sudden shocking pain might vanish with a change of place; but he felt nailed to the spot²⁷ and collapsed there, his legs splaying out, all his senses in a state of utter bewilderment. He caught only a last glimpse of the door to his room flying open, his shrieking sister, and his mother running out of the room before her wearing only a chemise, for his sister had undressed the unconscious woman to let her breathe more freely, then he saw his mother rush to his father's side, her unfastened skirts slipping one by one from about her waist as she ran, saw her stumble across these skirts as she threw herself at his father and, embracing him, in perfect union with him²⁸—but now Gregor's vision began to fail him—she clasped her hands at the back of his father's head and pleaded with him to spare Gregor's life.

III

The grievous wound Gregor had received, which plagued him for over a month—the apple remained lodged there in his flesh, a visible memento, since no one dared to remove it—seemed to have reminded even his father that Gregor, despite his current lamentable, repulsive form, was a member of the family who should not be treated like an enemy, for family duty dictated that the others swallow down the disgust he aroused in them and show him tolerance, only tolerance.

And even though this wound cost Gregor some of his mobility, probably for good, and for the time being he required many, many minutes to hobble across his room like an old invalid—crawling up the walls was out of the question now—he was compensated for this worsening of his condition by what seemed to him a perfectly adequate substitute: as evening approached, the door to the living room, on which he would start keeping a sharp eye an hour or two beforehand, would always be opened so as to permit him, lying in his own dark room and invisible from the living room, to watch the entire family sitting at the brightly lit table and listen to their conversations now, as it were, in an officially sanctioned capacity and thus quite differently than before.

To be sure, these were no longer the animated conversations of earlier times that Gregor used to think back on with a certain longing from various cramped hotel rooms when it was time to throw himself, exhausted, into the damp bedding. Now everything was fairly quiet. Gregor's father would fall asleep in his armchair soon after supper; his mother and sister would admonish one another to silence; his mother, bent far over beneath the light, would be sewing ladies' underthings for a dress shop; his sister, who had taken a job as a salesgirl, was studying stenography and French in the evenings so as possibly to move to a better position later on. Sometimes Gregor's father would wake up and, as if unaware he had been sleeping, would say to Gregor's mother: "How long you've been sewing again today!" and then go right back to sleep, which would prompt Gregor's mother and sister to exchange weary smiles.

In a peculiar form of stubbornness, Gregor's father refused to take off his porter's uniform even at home; and while his nightshirt hung uselessly on its hook, he would slumber where he sat, fully clothed, as though he remained ready for service at all times and even here was awaiting his supervisor's call. As a result, his uniform, which had not been new to start with, soon forfeited much of its cleanliness, despite the care lavished on it by mother and sister, and Gregor would sometimes gaze for an entire evening at this stain-covered jacket resplendent with gold buttons, always highly polished, in which the old man slept in considerable discomfort but nonetheless soundly.

The moment the clock struck ten, Gregor's mother would attempt to rouse his father with a few hushed words and then persuade him to go to bed, for he would get no proper sleep sitting here, and sleep was something Gregor's father—who had to report for duty at six in the morning—desperately needed. But in keeping with the stubbornness that had taken hold of him when he started working as a porter, he always insisted on continuing to sit there at the table, even though he kept falling asleep, and then it was only with the greatest effort that he could be persuaded to exchange armchair for bed. Gregor's mother and sister could persist in their little admonishments as doggedly as they liked; for a quarter of an hour, he would just shake his head slowly, his eyes closed, without getting up. Gregor's mother would pluck at his sleeve, whispering cajoling words in his ear, and his sister would set aside her studies to come to her mother's aid, but to no avail. Gregor's father only settled deeper into his armchair. Only when the women gripped him beneath the arms would he open his eyes, looking by turns at mother and sister and saying: "What sort of life is this? Is this the peace and quiet of my old age?" Then, supported by the two women, he would rise,

laboriously, as though he himself were receiving the brunt of this burden, and allow the women to escort him to the doorway, where he would shoo them away and continue on his own, while Gregor's mother hastily threw down her sewing and his sister her pen so they could run after him to offer further assistance. The household was ever further reduced; the maid was now let go after all; a bony giant of a charwoman with white hair flapping about her head came by in the morning and evening to perform the heaviest labors; everything else was handled by Gregor's mother along with all her sewing. It even came to pass that several pieces of jewelry that had been in the family—jewels Gregor's mother and sister had delighted in wearing at entertainments and festivities—were sold, as Gregor would learn in the evening when the price each piece had brought would be discussed. But their greatest lament was always that they were unable to leave this apartment, which was far too large for their current circumstances, since no one could imagine how Gregor might be moved. But Gregor understood that it was not only out of consideration for him that a move was being ruled out, since he could easily enough have been transported in a crate of appropriate size with a few air holes; the main thing keeping the family from moving to a new apartment was their complete sense of hopelessness and the thought that they had been struck with a misfortune such as no one else in their entire circle of relations and friends had ever experienced. They were fulfilling to the utmost the demands the world makes on the poor: Gregor's father fetched breakfast for the petty employees at the bank, his mother sacrificed herself for the underclothes of strangers, his sister ran back and forth behind the shop counter at her customers' behest, but this was all the strength they had. And the wound in Gregor's back would begin to ache anew when mother and sister, having brought his father to bed, would now return and, leaving their work where it lay, huddle close beside one another pressing their cheeks together; when Gregor's mother, gesturing toward his room, would say: "Shut the door now, Grete"; and when Gregor was left in the dark again while next door the two women intermingled their tears or else sat there tearless, staring down at the table.

Gregor spent his nights and days almost entirely without sleeping. Sometimes he thought about taking the family's affairs in hand again, just as he used to, the next time his door was opened; once more his boss and the general manager would appear before his mind's eye after all this time, the clerks and apprentices, the dull-witted hired man, two or three friends from other firms, a chambermaid from a provincial hotel (a sweet, fleeting specter), the shopgirl from a haberdashery whom he had courted earnestly but too slowly—all of these now

appeared to him, interspersed with strangers or people already forgotten, but instead of coming to his aid and that of his family, every last one of them was unapproachable, and he was glad when they disappeared. At other times he would be not at all in a frame of mind to look after his family; instead he was filled with rage at how poorly he was attended to, and although he could not imagine anything he would have liked to eat, he plotted how he might gain access to the pantry so as to help himself to what—despite his total absence of hunger—was his due. Without bothering to consider how she might give Gregor particular pleasure, his sister would quickly thrust some randomly chosen foodstuff into his room with her foot on her way to work in the morning or at midday, only to sweep it out again at night with a quick swipe of the broom, paying no heed if the food had been only barely nibbled at or—as was most often the case now—not touched at all. Setting Gregor's room to rights, a task she now saved for the evenings, could not possibly have been done any more perfunctorily. Great streaks of dirt extended across the walls, with balls of dust and rubbish lying scattered about. At first when Gregor's sister came into his room he would position himself in corners particularly indicative of this problem—to reproach her, as it were, by his presence there. But he could just as well have spent entire weeks sitting there without any improvement on his sister's part; after all, she saw the dirt as plainly as he did, but had made up her mind to leave it be. At the same time, with a sensitivity that was new in her, one that had now taken hold of the family as a whole, she was on her guard to make sure the task of tidying Gregor's room was reserved for her. Once Gregor's mother had subjected his room to a thorough scrubbing, which she accomplished only after using up several buckets of water—admittedly, all this moisture was itself an affront to Gregor, who lay stretched out, bitter and immobile, upon the settee—but his mother did not escape punishment. For no sooner had his sister remarked the change in Gregor's room that evening than she ran into the living room, grievously insulted, and ignoring her mother's imploringly raised hands, set to weeping so violently that her parents—naturally her father was startled out of his chair—at first stood by helpless and astonished; until they too began to stir; on the right, Gregor's father reproached his mother for not having left the cleaning of Gregor's room to his sister; while on the left he shouted at Gregor's sister, threatening that she would never again be permitted to clean Gregor's room; while his mother attempted to drag his father, now so agitated he hardly recognized himself, into the bedroom; Gregor's sister, shaking with sobs, pummeled the table with her tiny fists; and Gregor hissed loudly in fury²⁹

because it had occurred to no one to shut the door of his room to spare him this sight and commotion.

But even if Gregor's sister, who was exhausted by her professional work, had wearied of caring for Gregor as she'd previously done, there was absolutely no need for his mother to fill her shoes, and Gregor needn't have suffered neglect. For now the charwoman was here. This old widow—who had seen and survived the worst in her long life with the help of her sturdy bones—felt no particular repugnance toward Gregor. Without being at all inquisitive, she had once chanced to open the door to his room and, seeing Gregor, who had begun to run back and forth although no one was chasing him, she stood there staring in astonishment, her hands clasped across her lap. Ever since, she never failed to open the door a crack for a moment every morning and evening to look in on him. At the beginning she would call him over to her, saying things that were probably intended to sound friendly, like “Hey, over here, you old dung beetle!”³⁰ or “Just look at the old dung beetle!” Thus addressed, Gregor gave no reply but instead remained where he was, immobile, as if the door had never been opened. If only this charwoman, instead of being allowed to disturb him uselessly at whim, had been given instructions to clean his room daily! Once, early in the morning—a heavy rain, perhaps already a portent of the coming spring, was beating against the windowpanes—Gregor became so infuriated when the charwoman started up again with her quips that he turned on her as if to attack, if admittedly slowly and decrepitiy. But instead of being frightened, the charwoman just picked up a chair that was standing beside the door and held it high in the air; and as she stood there, her mouth gaping wide, her intention was clear: not to close her mouth again until the chair in her hand had come crashing down upon Gregor's back. “Aha, so that's as far as it goes?” she asked as Gregor turned around again, and she placed the chair calmly back in its corner.

Gregor now ate almost nothing at all. Only if he happened by chance to wander past the food that had been prepared for him might he playfully take a bite of something into his mouth, where he would hold it for hours and then usually spit it out again later. At first he thought it was his sorrow at the state of his room that prevented him from eating, but in fact he had resigned himself very quickly to the changes there. Everyone had gotten into the habit of using his room to store things there was no space for in other parts of the apartment, and now there were many such things, since one room of the apartment had been rented out to three lodgers.³¹ These solemn gentlemen—all three of them were bearded, as Gregor once noted, peering through the crack of the door—were

scrupulously intent on having everything tidy, not just in their room but also, since they were now paying rent here, in the entire household, particularly the kitchen. They could not bear the presence of unnecessary, much less dirty items. Moreover, they had brought most of their own furnishings with them. For this reason, many things had become superfluous, things that could not be sold but were still too valuable to throw out. All of this found its way into Gregor's room. As did the ash box and the garbage pail³² from the kitchen. The charwoman, always in a great hurry, would simply fling any unserviceable item into Gregor's room; mercifully, Gregor generally saw only the object in question and the hand that held it. The charwoman may have intended at some point, when she had occasion or a free minute, to come collect these things, or else throw all of them out at once, but as it was they remained wherever they first landed, except when Gregor made his way through the refuse,³³ stirring it around—at first out of necessity, since there was no room left for him to crawl about, but later with ever-increasing pleasure, though after these wanderings, which left him mortally exhausted and sad, he would spend hours without moving.

Since the lodgers sometimes also took their supper at home in the shared living room, the living room door remained shut on some evenings, but Gregor was happy to forgo having the door open; in fact, even when it was open, he sometimes failed to take advantage of it and instead, unbeknownst to his family, would remain lying in the darkest corner of his room. Once, however, the charwoman had left the door to the living room slightly ajar, and ajar it remained even when the lodgers came in that evening and struck a light. They sat down at the head of the table where in earlier times Gregor had sat with his father and mother, unfolded the napkins and took up their knives and forks. At once Gregor's mother appeared in the doorway with a serving dish filled with meat, and right behind her came his sister bearing a plate piled high with potatoes. A heavy vapor rose from the steaming food. The lodgers bent over the dishes that had been placed before them, as though wishing to inspect them before beginning their meal, and in fact the one who sat in the middle and appeared to be an authority figure to the other two cut off a piece of meat right there on the platter to check whether it was tender enough and didn't have to be sent back to the kitchen. He was satisfied, and Gregor's mother and sister, who had been watching nervously, now smiled with relief.

The family members themselves ate in the kitchen. Nonetheless Gregor's father visited the living room on his way to the kitchen and with a single bow, cap in hand, took a tour around the table. The lodgers all rose from their seats

and mumbled into their beards. Left alone again, they ate in almost perfect silence. It struck Gregor as peculiar that amid all the various sounds of this meal, one could also make out their champing teeth, as if to demonstrate to Gregor that a person needs teeth to eat and that even the most splendid jaws, if toothless, can accomplish nothing at all. "I'm hungry," Gregor said sorrowfully to himself, "but not for these things. Just look how these lodgers take their nourishment while I am wasting away!"

On this very evening—Gregor couldn't remember having heard the violin once in all this time—the sound of it was heard coming from the kitchen. The lodgers had already finished their evening meal, the one in the middle had pulled out a newspaper, giving each of the others a page, and now the three of them were reading, leaning back in their chairs and smoking. When the violin began to play, their interest was piqued, they got up from their chairs and tiptoed over to the doorway leading to the vestibule, where they stood in a tight cluster. The sounds of this activity must have traveled to the kitchen, for Gregor's father now called out: "Are the gentlemen disturbed by this playing? It can be silenced at once." "On the contrary," said the one in the middle, "would the young lady care to join us and play here in the living room, where it is much more comfortable and pleasant?" "Why, of course," Gregor's father exclaimed, as though he were the violinist. The gentlemen went back into the room and waited. Soon Gregor's father arrived with the music stand, his mother with the sheet music and his sister with the violin. His sister calmly prepared to play; his parents, who never rented out rooms in earlier days and therefore were treating these lodgers with exaggerated deference, did not even dare to sit in their own armchairs; his father leaned against the door, his right hand tucked between two buttons of his closed livery jacket; his mother, meanwhile, was offered an armchair by one of the lodgers, and since she left the chair where he had happened to place it, she sat off to one side in a corner.

Gregor's sister began to play; on either side, his father and mother attentively followed each movement of her hands. Attracted by her playing, Gregor had ventured a bit further than usual and was already sticking his head into the living room. It scarcely surprised him that he had become so inconsiderate of the others; earlier on, his considerateness had been a source of pride. And he had all the more reason to keep himself hidden away now: thanks to the dust that lay everywhere in his room and would swirl up at the slightest motion, he too was covered in dust; he dragged around threads, hair and food scraps clinging to his back and sides; his general indifference was far too great now for him to keep up

with a habit he'd once practiced several times a day: flipping over so as to scrub his back against the rug. And despite his condition, he did not hesitate now to continue his advance a little way out onto the immaculate floor of the living room.

To be sure, no one paid him the slightest heed. The family was completely absorbed in the violin playing; the lodgers, on the other hand, having at first positioned themselves, hands in their trouser pockets, much too close behind his sister's music stand, so that they could all look at the sheet music, which surely must have distracted her, soon withdrew to the window, conversing in an undertone, and remained there, anxiously observed by Gregor's father. It appeared more than clear they had been disappointed in their expectation of hearing beautiful or entertaining violin music and now, tired of the whole performance, were continuing to tolerate this disturbance of their peace only out of politeness. Particularly the way in which all of them were blowing the smoke of their cigars high into the air from their noses and mouths suggested extreme agitation. And yet his sister's playing was so lovely.³⁴ Her face was tilted to one side; searchingly, sadly, her eyes followed the lines of notes. Gregor crept a bit farther forward and ducked his head down close to the floor so as perhaps to catch her eye. Was he a beast, that music so moved him? He felt as if he were being shown the way to that unknown nourishment he craved.³⁵ He was determined to creep all the way up to his sister, to pluck at her skirt and in this way indicate to her that she should come to his room with her violin, for no one here was rewarding her playing as he meant to reward her. He would not allow her to leave his room ever again, at least as long as he was alive; his horrific figure would, for the first time ever, be useful to him; he would be at all the doors of his room at once, growling at his attackers; but his sister should remain with him not by force but of her own free will; she should sit beside him on the settee, bend down, the better to hear, and he would confess to her that he'd had the firm intention of sending her to the Conservatory and that if the disaster had not disrupted his plans, he would have made a general announcement last Christmas—Christmas had passed now, hadn't it?—without letting himself be swayed by objections of any sort. After this declaration, his sister would be moved to the point of tears, and Gregor would raise himself to the height of her armpit and kiss her throat, which, now that she went to the office every day, she wore free of ribbon or collar.

"Herr Samsa!" the gentleman in the middle shouted at Gregor's father, and without wasting a single word, pointed his finger at Gregor, who was slowly

advancing. The violin fell silent, the middle lodger at first just smiled and shook his head, turning toward his friends, then looked again at Gregor. Gregor's father apparently found the task of driving Gregor back into his room less urgent than that of calming the lodgers, despite the fact that they did not appear particularly worked up and seemed to be finding Gregor more entertaining than the music. He hurried over to them and tried with outspread arms to herd them back into their room, at the same time using his body to shield Gregor from their view. And now they did in fact become a little angry, though it was no longer clear whether this was on account of Gregor's father's behavior or the realization dawning on them that without their knowledge they had been sharing their home with a roommate of this sort. They demanded explanations of Gregor's father; now it was their turn to throw their arms into the air; they plucked uneasily at their beards and only slowly withdrew in the direction of their room. Meanwhile Gregor's sister, who had been standing there at a loss since her playing had been so unexpectedly interrupted—she still held violin and bow in her carelessly dangling hands, looking over at the notes as though she were continuing to play—all at once pulled herself together, laid her instrument in the lap of her mother, who still sat there in her armchair, her lungs heaving as she fought for breath, and ran into the next room, toward which the lodgers were now moving somewhat more quickly as Gregor's father urged them on. One saw how, beneath his sister's practiced hands, the beds' blankets and pillows flew into the air and into orderliness. Even before the lodgers reached the room, she had finished making up the beds and slipped out. Gregor's father appeared to be once more so firmly in the grip of his own stubbornness that he forgot the basic respect that, after all, he owed his tenants. He kept up his pressing and urging until, already standing in the doorway, the middle lodger thunderously stamped his foot, causing Gregor's father to stop short. "I hereby declare," he said, raising his hand and seeking out Gregor's mother and sister too as he glanced about, "that in consideration of the reprehensible circumstances prevailing in this apartment and family"—and here he spat on the floor without forethought—"I give notice on my room effective immediately. It goes without saying that I will not pay a penny for the days I have spent here; on the contrary, I shall consider whether or not to pursue you with—please believe me—easily justifiable claims." He fell silent and went on looking straight before him expectantly. And indeed his two friends at once chimed in with the words, "We too give notice effective immediately." Hereupon he seized the door handle and with a great crash slammed the door.

Gregor's father staggered to his armchair with groping hands and let himself fall into it; it looked as though he was stretching out for his customary evening nap, but the violent nodding of his anchorless head showed that he was absolutely not sleeping. Gregor had gone on lying quietly on the spot where the lodgers had espied him. His disappointment at the failure of his plan and perhaps also the weakness caused by starvation rendered him incapable of moving. With a certain definitiveness he sensed, terrified, that everything was about to collapse all around him, and so he waited. Not even the violin startled him when it fell from his mother's lap beneath her trembling fingers, giving off a note that echoed in the air.

"Dear parents," his sister said, striking the table by way of preamble, "things cannot go on like this. Even if you two perhaps do not realize it, I most certainly do. I am unwilling to utter my brother's name before this creature,³⁶ and therefore will say only: we have to try to get rid of it. We have done everything humanly possible to care for it and show it tolerance, I don't think anyone would reproach us on this account."

"She is right a thousand times over," Gregor's father murmured under his breath. His mother, still incapable of breathing freely, began to cough dully into her lifted hand, a lunatic expression in her eyes.

Gregor's sister hurried over to her mother and held her forehead. Her words seemed to have given her father an idea, for he now sat up straight, playing with his uniform cap between the plates left behind on the table from the lodgers' supper and glancing over from time to time at a quiet Gregor.

"We have to try to get rid of it,"³⁷ his sister said, addressing her words exclusively to Gregor's father this time, for his mother was coughing too hard to hear anything. "It'll be the death of you two, I can see it now. When people have to work as hard as all of us have been doing, it just isn't possible to endure these endless torments at home. I cannot bear it anymore either." And she burst into sobs, weeping so forcefully that her tears flowed down upon her mother's face, from which the girl wiped them with a mechanical gesture.

"Child," her father said sympathetically and with noticeable compassion, "but what can we do?"

Gregor's sister just shrugged her shoulders as a sign of the helplessness that had come over her while she was weeping, in contrast to the confidence she'd displayed a moment before.

"If he understood us," Gregor's father said, half-questioning; his sister, still caught up in her weeping, shook one hand vehemently as a sign of how

unthinkable she found this.

“If he understood us,” his father repeated, closing his eyes to absorb her conviction that this was utterly out of the question, “then it might be possible to come to an agreement with him. But as things stand—”

“It has to go,” Gregor’s sister cried out, “that’s the only way, Father. You just have to try to let go of the notion that this thing is Gregor.³⁸ The real disaster is that we believed this for so long. But how could it be Gregor? If it were Gregor, it would have realized a long time ago that it just isn’t possible for human beings to live beside such a creature, and it would have gone away on its own. We still would have been lacking a brother but we would have been able to go on living and honoring his memory. But now we have this beast tormenting³⁹ us; it drives away our lodgers and apparently intends to take over the entire apartment and have us sleep in the gutter. Just look, Father,” she suddenly shrieked, “he’s starting again!” And in a fright that Gregor found bewildering, she now went so far as to leave her mother behind, launching herself from her chair as if she would rather sacrifice her mother than remain in Gregor’s proximity, and ran to take cover behind her father who, agitated by the way she was carrying on, rose from his own chair and half-raised his arms as if to shield her.

But Gregor was far from wanting to frighten anyone, above all his sister. All he’d done was start to turn around to make his way back to his room, and admittedly this operation would have been hard not to notice, since in his current injured state he was obliged to use his head to help with this difficult maneuver; he kept raising it up and then thumping it against the floor. Pausing, he glanced around. His good intentions seemed to have been recognized; it had been only a momentary fright. Now all of them gazed at him sadly and in silence. His mother lay in her armchair, her extended legs pressed together, barely able to keep her eyes open in her exhaustion; his father and sister sat side by side, and his sister had draped one hand across her father’s neck.

“Perhaps I’ll be allowed to turn around now,” Gregor thought and resumed his labors. He could not entirely suppress the wheezing this exertion produced, and now and then he had to rest. Otherwise no one was harassing him, he had been left to attend to matters on his own. When he had completed this rotation, he immediately made straight for the door to his room. He was astonished at how great a distance separated him from his destination, and he didn’t understand how, weak as he was, he had been able to traverse the same distance just a little while before almost without noticing. Steadfastly concentrating only on crawling as quickly as possible, he scarcely paid any heed to the fact that not

a word, not a cry came from his family to disturb him. Only when he was already in the doorway did he turn his head—not all the way around, as he felt his neck growing stiff, but even so he was able to see that all was unchanged behind him, except that his sister had risen to her feet. The last thing he saw was a glimpse of his mother, who had now fallen entirely asleep.

No sooner was he in his room again than the door was hastily pressed shut, locked and bolted. The sudden commotion at his back gave him such a frightful start that his little legs gave way beneath him. It was his sister who had hurried thus. She had already been standing there upright and waiting, then pounced so lightfootedly Gregor didn't hear her approach, and she cried out, "Finally!" to her parents as she turned the key in the lock.

"And now?" Gregor wondered, looking around in the dark. He soon made the discovery that he was no longer capable of moving at all. He wasn't surprised at this; on the contrary, it struck him as unnatural that he had actually until now been able to support himself on those thin little legs. As for the rest, he felt relatively at ease. Admittedly his entire body was racked with pain, but it seemed to him as if it was gradually becoming weaker and weaker and in the end would fade away altogether. Already he could scarcely feel the rotting apple in his back, nor the inflamed area surrounding it, both now enveloped in soft dust. He thought back on his family with tenderness and love. His opinion that he must by all means disappear was possibly even more emphatic than that of his sister. He remained in this state of empty, peaceful reflection until the clocktower struck the third hour of morning.⁴⁰ He watched as everything began to lighten outside his window. Then his head sank all the way to the floor without volition and from his nostrils his last breath faintly streamed.

When the charwoman arrived early the next morning, slamming the doors so loudly in her strength and haste—often as she'd been asked to avoid this—that sleep was out of the question anywhere in the apartment after her arrival, her usual cursory visit to Gregor's room revealed at first nothing out of the ordinary. She thought he was lying there so motionless on purpose, feigning indignation; she considered him perfectly capable of rational thought. Since she happened to be holding the long broom in her hand, she tried tickling Gregor with it from the doorway. When even this had no effect, she grew vexed and began to poke Gregor a little, and only when she had actually shifted him from the spot where he lay with no resistance at all were her suspicions roused. When soon thereafter the facts of the matter became clear to her, she gawked in surprise, gave a low whistle, then without further delay flung open the door of the bedroom and in a

loud voice shouted into the darkness: "Come have a look, it's gone and croaked—just lying there, dead as a doornail!"

The Samsa couple shot upright in their marital bed and first had to struggle to recover from their shock at the charwoman's conduct before they were able to grasp her words. But then Herr and Frau Samsa hurriedly got out of bed, one on either side, Herr Samsa threw the blanket about his shoulders while Frau Samsa emerged wearing only her nightdress; in this state, they entered Gregor's room. Meanwhile the door to the living room, where Grete had been sleeping since the lodgers' arrival, had opened as well; she was fully dressed, as though she had not slept at all, as even the pallor of her cheeks seemed to prove. "Dead?" Frau Samsa asked, looking questioningly up at the charwoman, although she herself was free to investigate and, indeed, could see how things stood even without investigation. "I should say so," the charwoman said, and by way of proof, pushed Gregor's corpse quite some way to the side with her broom. Frau Samsa made a gesture as though she wanted to hold back the broom but didn't. "Well," Herr Samsa said, "now we can thank God." He crossed himself, and the three women followed his example. Grete, who did not take her eyes off the corpse for a moment, said: "Just look how skinny he was. He went such a long time without eating anything at all. All the food that went into his room would come out again just as before." And indeed Gregor's body was completely flat and dry, which hadn't really been noticeable until now when he was no longer raised up on those little legs and nothing else remained to distract the gaze.

"Grete, come sit with us for a bit," Frau Samsa said with a melancholy smile, and Grete, glancing back at the corpse, followed her parents into their bedroom. The charwoman shut the door and opened the window wide. Despite the early morning, the crisp air was already tempered by a certain mildness: after all, it was already the end of March.

The three lodgers now emerged from their room and looked about in astonishment for their breakfast; they had been forgotten. "Where's breakfast?" the one in the middle asked the charwoman peevishly. But she just put a finger to her lips and then quickly, without a word, beckoned the lodgers into Gregor's room. They did as she bade them and with their hands in the pockets of their slightly threadbare little jackets, they surrounded Gregor's corpse in the room that had meanwhile become quite bright.

Then the bedroom door opened, and Herr Samsa appeared wearing his livery, with his wife on one arm, his daughter on the other. All three looked as if they'd been weeping; Grete kept pressing her face against her father's arm.

“Leave my home at once!” Herr Samsa said, pointing at the door without letting go of the womenfolk. “What do you mean?” the gentleman in the middle inquired, dumbfounded, and gave a saccharine smile. The two others held their hands at their backs and kept rubbing them together uninterruptedly, as if in gleeful expectation of a fight that was certain to be decided in their favor. “I mean exactly what I say,” Herr Samsa replied, now advancing on the lodger flanked by his two companions. The lodger just stood there at first, looking at the ground, as if things were just rearranging themselves in his head into a new order. “So we’ll be leaving,” he said then, looking up at Herr Samsa as if this new humility that had suddenly come over him required him to petition for the approval of even this decision. Herr Samsa merely nodded curtly in his direction a few times, goggle-eyed. At this, the gentleman did, in fact, make haste to stride back out to the vestibule, where his two friends had been listening attentively for some moments, their hands at rest, and now they practically hopped and skipped in their hurry to follow, as if worried Herr Samsa might somehow precede them into the vestibule, cutting off their line of communication with their leader.

In the vestibule, all three of them took their hats from the coat rack, withdrew their walking sticks from the cane stand, made a silent bow and left the apartment. Displaying what soon proved to be an utterly unfounded mistrustfulness, Herr Samsa stepped out onto the landing with the two women; leaning against the banister, they watched as the three gentlemen descended the long staircase, moving slowly but at a steady pace and disappearing on each floor at a certain bend of the stairwell only to appear again a few moments later; the farther down they went, the more the Samsa family’s interest in them faded, and when a butcher’s apprentice came toward and then passed them on his way up, proudly bearing his tray upon his head, Herr Samsa and the women abandoned the banister, and all of them returned, seemingly relieved, to their apartment.

They decided to spend the day resting and to go out for a stroll; they had not only earned this respite from their work, but were desperately in need of it. And so they all sat down at the table and wrote three letters of excuse: Herr Samsa to his supervisor, Frau Samsa to her employer, and Grete to her superior. While they were writing, the charwoman came in to say she was leaving, as her morning’s work was completed. The three scribes at first merely nodded without looking up, and only when the charwoman failed to go on her way did they glance up in annoyance. “Well?” Herr Samsa asked. The charwoman stood smiling in the doorway as if she had some splendid good fortune to announce to

the family but would not do so until she was properly questioned. The nearly vertical little ostrich feathers on her hat, which had annoyed Herr Samsa for as long as she had been in the family's service, bobbed gently in all directions. "So what is it you want?" she was asked now by Frau Samsa, the member of the family for whom the charwoman still had the most respect. "Well," the charwoman replied, her own good-natured laughter making it impossible at first for her to go on speaking, "there's no need for you to go worrying about how to get rid of that mess⁴¹ in there. It's already taken care of." Frau Samsa and Grete bent down over their letters as if they meant to go on writing; Herr Samsa, who saw that the charwoman was about to start describing everything in detail, summarily silenced her with an outstretched hand. And since she was not permitted to say what she wished, she suddenly remembered the great hurry she was in, and so with an insulted air she cried, "So long, everyone," turned wildly on her heel, and with the most excruciating slamming of doors left the apartment.

"Tonight she'll be let go," Herr Samsa said, but received an answer neither from his wife nor his daughter, for the charwoman seemed to have disturbed the equanimity they had only just attained. They rose from their seats, went to the window, and remained there with their arms about each other. Herr Samsa turned in his chair to look at them and observed them quietly for a little while. Then he cried out: "So come here already. Let these old matters rest. And show a little consideration for me as well." At once the women obeyed, hurried over to him, caressed him and quickly finished their letters.

Then all three of them left the apartment together, something they had not done for months, and took the electric tram all the way to the open countryside at the edge of town. The car in which they sat all alone was entirely suffused with warm sunlight. Cozily leaning back in their seats, they discussed their future prospects, and on closer investigation it appeared that these prospects were not bad at all, for all three of their positions—something they had never before properly discussed—were in fact quite advantageous and above all offered promising opportunities for advancement. The greatest immediate improvement in their situation, of course, would be easily achieved by moving to a new apartment; they now wished to take a smaller and cheaper but more convenient and above all more practical flat than their current one, which had been picked out for them by Gregor. As they were conversing in this way, Herr and Frau Samsa were struck almost as one while observing their daughter, who was growing ever more vivacious, by the thought that despite all the torments that

had made her cheeks grow pale, she had recently blossomed into a beautiful, voluptuous girl. Growing quieter now and communicating with one another almost unconsciously by an exchange of glances, they thought about how it would soon be time to find her a good husband. And when they arrived at their destination, it seemed to them almost a confirmation of their new dreams and good intentions when their daughter swiftly sprang to her feet and stretched her young body.

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1. Kafka's title, *Die Verwandlung*, uses a simple German word meaning "transformation." It does not immediately evoke the classical world of Ovid (though Kafka studied Latin at the Prague gymnasium and even translated the passage in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* about Circe's transformation of Odysseus's crew into pigs), but rather the German Romantic tradition of Goethe, Tieck, and Hoffmann. It can also refer to a scene change in the theater or to naturally occurring biological processes.
 2. The German term *ungeheueres Ungeziefer* is famously ambiguous because it does not refer to a particular insect or animal per se but in a general way to harmful, parasitic animals, especially insects and rodents, to bugs, fleas, lice, and beetles. The etymology of *Ungeziefer* shows an early connection to pagan sacrificial animals (or, alternatively, to unclean animals unsuited for sacrifice) and to unclean or rotten meat, refuse, and garbage. Note also the parallel structure of the German terms: both use the negative prefix *un-* and the generalizing prefix *ge-*, which typically shifts a word from a particular to a collective meaning. Employed literally as well as metaphorically throughout its history, *Ungeziefer* consistently refers to what is disgusting, damaging, or unclean. "Gregor Samsa": Kafka probably knew Jakob Wassermann's *Story of Young Renate Fuchs* (1901), which has a character named Gregor Samassa. The adapted form brings it closer to Kafka's own name and is in keeping with his semiautobiographical naming of his protagonists.
 3. The narrative voice, closely connected to but not synonymous with Gregor's view of things, insists on the reality of the transformation even as it suggests a relationship with the "uneasy dreams" immediately preceding Gregor's awakening.
 4. A literal translation of *menschliches Zimmer*.
 5. Possibly a reference to Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's notorious novel *Venus in Furs* (1870), whose protagonist wants to grovel at the feet of a cruel, punishing woman dressed in fur (the author's name is the origin of the term *masochism*). When the protagonist becomes a contractual servant to his Venus, she gives him the name Gregor. See Sacher-Masoch [here](#); [Anderson](#); and [Boa](#) in this volume. Note also the connection with the opening of Kafka's story "The Stoker," written a month earlier, in which the Statue of Liberty brandishes a sword rather than a torch.
 6. In German, *Verkehr*, which has multiple meanings, ranging from travel to social intercourse. In composite form, it extends to tourism, business exchanges, sexual intercourse, and even epistolary relations.
 7. Gregor's body seems to respond with its foreign and as yet incomprehensible reality. See Jensen [here](#).
 8. This passage uses the German word *Schuld*, which can refer to financial debt as well as to a moral or psychological guilt.
 9. The expression underlines the Christian underpinnings of Gregor's thoughts while casually establishing a link between his own father and a metaphysical authority figure.
 10. *Piepsen* in German; a sound often, though not exclusively, associated with smaller animals. Kafka uses the same word to refer to the "piping" of the mice in his last story, "Josephine the Singer or the Mice People."
 11. The first indication that Gregor's new body can be a source of childlike games or play (*Spiel*).

12. In German, *tanzten*, “dancing.”
13. *Prokurist* in German; used commonly in the Austro-Hungarian realm for a representative of a firm’s director. This is not the boss to whom the Samsa family is indebted.
14. *Schwindel-anfall* in German. The secondary meaning of *Schwindel* is, as the English cognate suggests, “swindle” or “fraud.”
15. Literally, “how that can only come over a person.” The sentence could also be understood as “this can happen only to a human being.”
16. *Unglück* in German; also meaning “misfortune.” As a student, years earlier, Kafka had written to a friend about what kind of books were important to him and used the same term: “We need books that work on us like misfortune (*Unglück*), that hurt us like the death of one who is dearer to us than ourselves, as if we were exiled into the woods far from all humans, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us. That is my belief” (Letter to Oskar Pollak, January 27, 1904).
17. This scene takes place as if on a stage, much like the silent melodramas of the early cinema.
18. The hospital, rather than a symbol of comfort and healing, appears as “infinitely long” and “dark gray.”
19. One of the rare, exact references to Gregor’s life before the metamorphosis.
20. Defined as what is repulsive and unclean, the *Ungeziefer* Gregor is drawn to food that the human community considers garbage. While he was writing *The Metamorphosis*, Kafka gave an extensive report about his own eating habits to his future fiancée, Felice Bauer: “I eat three times a day, nothing between meals. . . . At 2:30, out of filial affection, the same as the [other family members], but on the whole rather less, less meat in particular, even less than a little, and more vegetables. Winter evenings at 9:30: yogurt, pumpernickel, butter, all kinds of nuts, chestnuts, dates, figs, grapes, almonds, raisins, pumpkins, bananas, apples, pears, oranges” (*Letters to Felice*, November 21, 1912). See also [Miron](#).
21. On Gregor’s predicament of not merely being locked in his animal body but lacking a human voice while retaining the ability to understand others, see Driscoll [here](#).
22. *Hausmeisterin* in German. A kind of concierge or superintendent, the position was common in upscale apartment buildings in central Europe and situates the Samsa family firmly in the middle class.
23. Here we learn that the Samsas’ move to the present apartment coincided with the financial disaster that befell the father’s business, his debt to Gregor’s boss, and the beginning of Gregor’s self-sacrificing work to support the family.
24. There was no such street in Prague in Kafka’s time; the name recalls Charlottenburg, a famous neighborhood in Berlin. Kafka’s future fiancée, Felice Bauer, was a native of the German capital.
25. Another reference to Sacher-Masoch’s novel; see [here](#).
26. Note the biblical reference.
27. The literal translation is “As if nailed fast to the floor.” The expression recalls the crucifixion of Christ, especially since the scene involves a father/son conflict.
28. The literal translation is “complete union.” Freud’s notion of an *Ur-szene*, or primal scene witnessed by the child as the source of neurosis, was well known to Kafka. A few months earlier, after finishing his story “The Judgment,” he noted in his diary: “thoughts about Freud, naturally.”
29. *Zischte* in German; the same word used to describe the father’s hissing sounds in Part I.
30. *Mistkäfer* in German.
31. Little effort is made to differentiate these somewhat uncanny guests—they have no names; sport the same long beards, hats, and walking sticks; and behave as a unit.
32. See note 2 [here](#).
33. The German term consists of two components—*Rumpel* and *Zeug* (stuff, thing)—the latter of which is later used by the servant to describe Gregor when she has thrown him into the garbage. In *The Trial*, Josef K. opens a *Rumpelkammer*, or storage room in the bank where he works, and discovers a horrifying scene of torture; he demands that the “filth” be cleaned out at once.
34. Kafka held in great esteem a novella by the Austrian writer Franz Grillparzer, *The Poor Violin Player* (*Der arme Spielmann*, 1848), in part because of an autobiographical identification with the protagonist, whose artistic inclinations and incapacity for practical matters are disdained by his father and the

woman he loves. After the woman marries a butcher, the protagonist becomes a homeless wanderer playing the violin for his supper.

35. *Nahrung* in German; emphasizes the symbolic, nonmaterial quality of the sustenance Gregor is searching for. This theme runs through Kafka's works and is given a central role in his 1922 story "The Hunger Artist."
36. The irony in the German term *Untier* (creature) is impossible to translate into English. Literally, it means "unanimal" or "nonanimal"; to a German speaker, it immediately calls to mind the common construction of *Un-mensch* (unperson), used to signify someone who is behaving in an uncivilized fashion.
37. Grete's entire speech here refers to Gregor with *es*, the third-person neuter pronoun.
38. See note 41 [here](#).
39. *Verfolgt* in German; also means "persecuting." See Uexküll [here](#).
40. Possibly a reference to the death of Christ ("And it was the third hour, and they crucified him," Mark 15.25).
41. In German, *Zeug*, which means "stuff," "junk," or "thing" and is of neuter gender, like the word for animal.

TEXTS AND CONTEXTS



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Kafka

From Wedding Preparations in the Country[†]

And moreover can't I behave the way I did as a child for dangerous matters? I don't even have to travel to the country myself, that's not necessary. I can send my clothed body. If he stumbles on his way out, that doesn't show he's afraid but rather that he's nothing at all. And it's no matter to get worked up about if he trips on the steps, if he sobs while traveling to the country, or if he starts crying while eating his dinner. For I, in the meantime, I am lying in my bed, covered with a yellow-brown blanket, exposed to the air that comes in through the slightly opened window. * * * As I lie in bed I have the form of a large beetle, a stag beetle or a June bug I think.¹

* * *

The large form of a beetle, yes. I would pretend to be hibernating and I would press my little legs against my curved body. And I would whisper a small number of words—instructions to my sad body, which stands right next to me and is bent over. Soon I'll be done. He bows, leaves quickly and will do everything in the best manner possible while I rest.

[†] Translated by the editor of this Norton Critical Edition from Kafka's unfinished novella "Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande" (1906–09).

1. In Kafka's work, the first appearance of the idea of a person transformed into a beetle. The protagonist, Eduard Raban, is engaged to be married and must travel to the country for two weeks; he dreads the trip and imagines that he can send an emissary, his clothed body, while his essential self remains behind, safely and comfortably in a warm bed.

Kafka, Max Brod and Editors on *The Metamorphosis*[†]

*Letter from Kafka to Felice Bauer, Prague, November 17, 1912*¹

* * * Anyway, I shall be writing to you again today, though I still have to do a lot of running around, not to mention a short story that occurred to me in bed in my misery, and now troubles me and demands to be written.

† Unless otherwise noted as translated by the editor, the following selections are from three volumes: All letters and postcards from Kafka to Felice Bauer and to Grete Bloch are from *Letters to Felice*, trans. James Stern and Elizabeth Duckworth, ed. Erich Heller and Jürgen Born (New York: Schocken Books, 1973): 47–50, 57–67, 77–91, 209, 250, 390–95, 459. Translation copyright © 1937, 1956, renewed 1965, 1984 by Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House LLC. Used by permission of Schocken Books, an imprint of the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Random House LLC. All rights reserved. All letters from Kafka to Kurt Wolff, to Robert Musil, to René Schickele, to Georg Heinrich Meyer, to Max Brod, and to Oskar Baum are from *Letters to Friends, Family and Editors*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (New York: Schocken Books, 1977): 95–97, 109–14, 124–26, 288–89, 364, 371. Translation copyright © 1977 by Schocken Books, a division of Random House LLC. Used by permission of Schocken Books, an imprint of the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Random House LLC. All rights reserved. All Franz Kafka diary entries are from *Franz Kafka: The Diaries: 1910–1923*, trans. Joseph Kresh and Martin Greenberg, ed. Max Brod (New York: Schocken Books, 1948): 233, 253, 260. Translation copyright © 1948, 1949, copyright renewed 1976, 1977 by Schocken Books, a division of Random House LLC. Used by permission of Schocken Books, an imprint of the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

1. Kafka's first mention of his "little story," as he refers to *The Metamorphosis* in the following letters, occurs in his correspondence with Felice Bauer, a woman from Berlin he had met in Prague in August 1912. Kafka wrote to Bauer one month later, on September 20, proposing that they begin to correspond with each other in view of a possible trip to Palestine. The letter seems to have worked as a catalyst for his literary creativity, for after years of unsatisfying attempts he wrote his breakthrough story "The Judgment" in a single sitting during the night of September 22–23; the first five chapters of his first novel, *The Man Who Disappeared (Amerika)* in the following two months; and *The Metamorphosis* from November 17 to December 7. Kafka and Bauer maintained an intense correspondence for over five years and were engaged twice, but never married.

Letter from Kafka to Felice Bauer, Prague, November 17–18, 1912

My dearest, it's 1:30 at night, the story I mentioned is by no means finished, not a line of the novel has been written today, and I go to bed with little enthusiasm. If only the night were free to keep pen to paper and I could write straight through to the morning! That would be a good night. * * *

Letter from Kafka to Felice Bauer, Prague, November 18, 1912

* * *

I am just sitting down to yesterday's story with an overwhelming desire to pour

myself into it, which obviously springs from despair. Beset by many problems, uncertain of you, quite incapable of coping at the office, my novel at a standstill for a day, with a fierce longing to continue the new, equally demanding story, all but total insomnia for the last few days and nights, as well as some minor but nevertheless worrying and irritating things going around in my head—in short, when I went for my evening walk today, reduced by now to half an hour (always of course on the lookout for telegraph boys, actually meeting one, but a long way from our house), I decided quite definitely that my only salvation was to write to a man in Silesia, with whom I had made friends this summer and who for whole long afternoons had tried to convert me to Christ.—But now your telegram is here and we can leave that letter for a while, you sweet temptation! Now I am of two minds, whether in honor of the telegram I should write my story, or go to bed. * * *

Letter from Kafka to Felice Bauer, Prague, November 22–23, 1912

Dearest, oh God, how I love you! It is very late at night; I have put aside my little story, on which I really haven't worked at all these last two evenings, and which is quietly developing into a much bigger story. How could I give it to you to read, even if it were finished? It is rather illegible, and even if that weren't an obstacle—up to now I certainly haven't spoiled you with beautiful writing—I don't want to send you anything to read. I want to read it to you. Yes, that would be lovely, to read this story to you, while I would have to hold your hand, for the story is a little frightening. It is called *Metamorphosis*, and it would thoroughly scare you, you might not want to hear a word of it, for alas! I scare you enough every day with my letters. * * *

I am too depressed at the moment, and perhaps I shouldn't be writing at all. But my story's hero has also had a very bad time today, and yet it is only the last lap of his misfortune, which is now becoming permanent. * * *

Letter from Kafka to Felice Bauer, Prague, November 23–24, 1912

Dearest, once again I am putting aside this exceptionally repulsive story in order to refresh myself by thinking of you. By now it is more than half finished, and on the whole I am not too dissatisfied; but it is infinitely repulsive, and these things, you see, spring from the same heart in which you dwell and which you tolerate as a dwelling place. But don't be unhappy about it, for who knows, the

more I write and the more I liberate myself, the cleaner and the worthier of you I may become, but no doubt there is a great deal more to be got rid of, and the nights can never be long enough for this business which, incidentally, is highly voluptuous.

Letter from Kafka to Felice Bauer, Prague, November 24, 1912

* * * As usual on Sunday, I went this morning to see Baum (do you know Oskar Baum?) and read to them (Max was there too, with his fiancée) the first part of my little story. * * *

* * *

Max Brod, Diary Entry, 1912[†]

And already on November 24 of this unusually productive end of the year, Kafka reads to us at the house of [Oskar] Baum “his magnificent story of the cockroach” (hence “The Metamorphosis”). In this way Kafka completed or, with regard to his novel, wrote the bulk of three major works¹ between the end of September and November 1912, hence in two months.

[†] Translated by the editor of this Norton Critical Edition from *Über Franz Kafka* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1974), p. 113.

1. “The Judgment,” *The Man Who Disappeared*, and *The Metamorphosis*.

Letter from Kafka to Felice Bauer, Prague, November 24–25, 1912

Well today, dearest, I shall have to put aside my story, I have worked on it today nowhere near as much as yesterday, and on account of that maddening trip to Kratzau I will have to let it wait for a day or two. This grieves me, but I hope the story won’t suffer too much, though I shall need another 3–4 evenings to finish it. By “won’t suffer too much,” I mean that my story, alas, has already been harmed enough through my method of working. This kind of story should be written with no more than one interruption, in two 10-hour sessions; then it would have its natural spontaneous flow, as it had in my head last Sunday. But I haven’t got twice 10 hours at my disposal. So one has to try to do the best one can, since the very best has been denied to one. What a pity I can’t read it to you—a great pity. Every Sunday morning, for instance. * * *

Letter from Kafka to Felice Bauer, Prague, November 26, 1912

* * * One shouldn't ever go away; better to be insubordinate at the office, if at home there is work to be done that requires all one's energy. This everlasting fear (it hasn't left me yet) that the trip may have harmed my story, that I shan't be able to write any more, etc. * * *

Letter from Kafka to Felice Bauer, Prague, November 27, 1912

* * * Really, Felice, when I sit here all alone at night after writing rather badly as I have these past two days (the story progresses in a dull, placid way, illuminated only by moments of the essential clarity); when in this far from perfect state of mind I try to imagine our next meeting, I sometimes fear that seeing you would be unbearable to me, whether in the street, the office, or your home; so unbearable that no one, not even you, should witness it, and that I could bear it only when I am so utterly confused and in such a haze that I should be unworthy to appear before you. * * *

* * * Actually I was quite determined to use these days solely for my novel, perhaps even to finish it. And now that the novel has not been touched for more than a week, and the new story, though nearing its end, has been trying for the past 2 days to make me believe I have been all wrong, I should be more than ever determined to stick to my resolution. * * *

Letter from Kafka to Felice Bauer, Prague, November 30–December 1, 1912

Dearest Felice, after concluding the battle with my little story—a third but now quite definitely (how uncertain and full of mistakes my writing is until I become accustomed to the real world) the final section has begun to take shape—I simply must say goodnight to you, dearest, although I shan't be mailing this letter before tomorrow evening. * * *

Letter from Kafka to Felice Bauer, Prague, December 1–2, 1912

Dearest, only a few words, it's late, very late, and there's a lot of work to be done tomorrow, at last I am getting a little excited about my little story; my pounding heart is longing to drive me further and further into it, but I must try to extricate myself as best I can, and since this is going to be hard work and it will be hours before I can get to sleep, I must hurry to bed.

* * *

Dearest, I wish I could say something amusing, but nothing comes naturally to my mind, moreover, all four characters on the page of my story that lies before me are in tears, or at any rate in a very unhappy frame of mind. * * *

Letter from Kafka to Felice Bauer, Prague, December 3–4, 1912

Dearest, I really should have gone on writing all night. It would have been my duty, for I am nearing the end of my little story, and uniformity and the fire of consecutive hours would do this end an immense amount of good. And who knows whether I shall be able to write tomorrow after the reading—I curse it now. Nevertheless, I am stopping, I dare not risk it. It is not so long since I started writing regularly and continuously, but since then I have turned from a by no means exemplary, but in some ways rather useful employee (my present rank is Draftsman) into a nightmare to my chief. * * *

* * * My story would keep me awake, but the dreams you inspire will put me to sleep. * * *

Letter from Kafka to Felice Bauer, Prague, December 4–5, 1912

Oh dearest, infinitely beloved, it really is too late now for my little story, as I feared it would be; unfinished, it will lie turned heavenwards until tomorrow night; but for you, Felice, childish lady, this is the right moment, just as every moment is the right moment for you. * * *

Letter from Kafka to Felice Bauer, Prague, December 5–6, 1912

Cry, dearest, cry, the time for crying has come! The hero of my story died a little while ago. To comfort you, I want you to know that he died peacefully enough and reconciled to all. The story itself is still not quite finished; I am not in the right mood just now, and am leaving the end until tomorrow. Moreover, it's very late; it took me so long to recover from yesterday's disturbance. It's a pity that in some passages of the story my state of exhaustion and other interruptions and extraneous worries are so apparent; I know it could have been done more neatly; this is particularly conspicuous in the more tender passages. That is the ever-gnawing realization: in more favorable circumstances, with the creative powers I feel within me, and quite apart from their strength and endurance, I could have

achieved a neater, more telling, better-constructed piece of work than the one that now exists. This is a feeling which no amount of reasoning can dispel, though of course it is reason, too, that is right in saying that since there are no circumstances other than real ones, one cannot take any others into account, either. However that may be, I hope to finish the story tomorrow, and to return to the novel the following day. * * *

Letter from Kafka to Felice Bauer, Prague, December 6–7, 1912

Dearest, now listen, my little story is finished, but today's ending does not please me at all, it really could have been better, there is no doubt about this. * * *

* * *

Max Brod, Diary Entry, December 15, 1912[†]

Kafka reads his “bug matter” aloud to friends.

[†] This and the next Max Brod diary entry are translated by the editor of this Norton Critical Edition from *Oxford Quartheft 17 (Die Verwandlung)*, ed. Roland Reuss and Peter Staengle (Frankfurt: Stroemfeld, 2003). Quoted by Joachim Unseld, *Franz Kafka. Ein Schriftstellerleben* (Munich: Hanser, 1982), p. 87.

Letter from Kafka to Felice Bauer, March 1–2, 1913

* * * A pleasant evening at Max's. I read myself into a frenzy with my story. But then we did let ourselves go, and laughed a lot. * * *

Max Brod, Diary Entry, March 1, 1913

Kafka read his unbelievable insect story all the way to the end; it may be the best of our age.

Letter from Kurt Wolff to Kafka, Leipzig, March 20, 1913[†]

Herr Franz Werfel has told me so much about your new story—is it called “The Bug”?—that I would very much like to see it. Could you send it to me?

† All letters from Kurt Wolff are translated by the editor of this Norton Critical Edition from *Oxforder Quartheft 17 (Die Verwandlung)*, ed. Roland Reuss and Peter Staengle (Frankfurt: Stroemfeld, 2003).

Postcard from Kafka to Kurt Wolff, Berlin, March 24, 1913

Pay no attention to what Werfel tells you. He does not know a word of the story. As soon as I have had a clean copy made, I will of course be glad to send it to you.

Letter from Kurt Wolff to Kafka, Leipzig, April 2, 1913

I beg you kindly and most earnestly to do me the favor of sending me *immediately* the first chapter of your novel, which you and Dr. Brod believe could be appropriately published as a separate piece. And at the same time do send me as well a copy or the manuscript of the bug story.

Letter from Kafka to Kurt Wolff, Prague, April 4, 1913

Your very kind letter has just reached me late this evening. Under the circumstances I cannot get the manuscripts to you by Sunday. * * * I will indeed send you the first chapter of the novel, since most of it has already been copied. * * * My other story, *The Metamorphosis*, is not yet transcribed, since lately everything has combined to keep me away from writing and from my pleasure in it. But I will have this story, too, transcribed and sent to you as soon as possible. Perhaps later on these two pieces and the “Judgment” from *Arkadia* will make up quite a decent book whose title might be *The Sons*.

Letter from Kafka to Kurt Wolff, Prague, April 11, 1913

* * * I have only one request, which I have already mentioned in my last letter. “The Stoker,” *The Metamorphosis* (which is one and a half times as long as “The Stoker”), and “The Judgment” belong together, both inwardly and outwardly. There is an obvious connection among the three and, even more important, a secret one, for which reason I would be reluctant to forgo the chance of having them published together in a book, which might be called *The Sons*. Would it be possible, then, for “The Stoker,” apart from its publication in *Der jüngste Tag*, to appear eventually along with the other two stories in a book all their own, at some reasonable time which however I would leave entirely to your discretion?

And would it be possible to include a statement of this pledge in the present contract for *The Stoker*? You see, I am just as much concerned about the unity of the three stories as I am about the unity of any one of them.

Letter from Kurt Wolff to Kafka, Paris, April 16, 1913

Naturally, nothing would prevent us from publishing the three pieces, which you feel belong together, in book form. Since you are in agreement with my suggestion regarding “The Stoker,” we surely don’t need to write a separate contract for this. And I trust that my binding statement in this letter will suffice, namely that at a later point in time, to be determined, I wish to publish a book containing “The Metamorphosis,” “The Stoker” and “The Judgment.”

Letter from Kafka to Felice Bauer, Prague, May 1, 1913

* * * Yes, I haven’t told you yet that a very short book of mine (47 pages) is to be published next month, the page proofs are right here. It is called *The Stoker: A Fragment*, and is the first chapter of that unfortunate novel. It will appear in an inexpensive series which Wolff is publishing and which will be given the somewhat ludicrous title “The Day of Judgment,” 80 pfennigs each volume. I rather dislike the whole idea, as I do any useless contrivance of a unity that isn’t really there. But first of all I am indebted to Wolff; secondly he practically wormed the story out of me, and thirdly he was kind enough to guarantee to publish “The Stoker” later on, together with your story and another in one larger volume. * * *

Kafka, Diary Entry, October 20, 1913

* * * Instead of which I went for a walk, erased all the emotion I had absorbed in a conversation with Haas, whom I had run into, women excited me, I am now reading ‘The Metamorphosis’ at home and find it bad. * * *

* * *

Kafka, Diary Entry, January 19, 1914

* * * Great antipathy to ‘Metamorphosis’. Unreadable ending. Imperfect almost to its very marrow. It would have turned out much better if I had not been interrupted at the time by the business trip. * * *

Kafka, Diary Entry, January 23, 1914

* * * There is my weak point and will remain my weak point; otherwise the regular, hardly varying, semi-active life I have led these last days (worked at the office on a description of our bureau's activities; A.'s worries about his bride; Ottla's Zionism; the girls' enjoyment of the Salten-Schildkraut lecture; reading the memoirs of Thürheim; letters to Weiss and Löwy; proof-reading 'Metamorphosis') has really pulled me together and instilled some resolution and hope in me.

Letter from Robert Musil to Kafka, Berlin, February 22, 1914[†]

Many thanks for your letter! I must immediately ask for your forgiveness regarding the trouble of the special delivery (or the fault lies with the mail, for my first letter, as I now can see, got stuck with the editor by mistake). I stated there that [the publishing house] S. Fischer puts a certain number of pages of the *Rundschau* at my disposal each year so that I can present important and new authors (that is, not yet known to the *Rundschau* readers) to a major public. It's as if a new journal were being published, but with the difference that it will find a guaranteed audience.

Consider this "journal" as your personal vehicle for everything that you would like to see published in matters of art or related areas. Your own work above all. The only limitation is the length of the contributions, which mustn't exceed 20 *Rundschau* pages for we don't do installments. This is true for literature and essays. You will certainly feel that the weakness of the enterprise lies in the demand that the writer produce something innovative. * * *

I fear that your taste is too exclusive for this, but I would like to ask you to participate nevertheless since, from a practical point of view, there is a great deal of publicity connected with it. And if I merely have a few important contributors, I can give the enterprise a new and truly significant turn and leave its provisional qualities behind. If I've been unclear in sketching out this program, please communicate to me your questions or objections. I hope you can submit something (quite soon). * * *

Many thanks for your kind consideration in letting me publish your novella. If you think that the 77 typed pages will fit into 30 pages of the *Rundschau*, I must beg you to reconsider. I fear that this isn't the case and for that reason it would be technically impossible for me to publish it. I inquired immediately whether

the novella might appear in the *Rundschau* itself (for there I have no influence on cultural submissions) and Professor Bie¹ is very interested, but the process there is long and uncertain, and it's my impression that you would be better off not submitting for you might miss another opportunity while waiting for a response (spoken in confidence). I will continue to apply pressure and will write to you immediately if a quicker resolution than I predict comes to pass.

Send me something very soon and feel at liberty to ply me with questions, requests, etc. If I answer in an even worse style than today, or in telegraphic fashion, you must excuse me and chalk it up to the current circumstances.

† All letters from Robert Musil are translated by the editor of this Norton Critical Edition from *Oxforder Quartheft 17 (Die Verwandlung)*, ed. Peter Staengle (Frankfurt: Stroemfeld, 2003).

1. Oscar Bie, essayist and cultural editor of the *Neue Rundschau*.

Kafka, Diary Entry, February 23, 1914

Letter from Musil. Pleases me and depresses me, for I have nothing.

Letter from Robert Musil to Kafka, Berlin, February 25, 1914

Many thanks for your letter and submission. Despite your need to remain silent about our planned project, I will have to share a few thoughts with you in the coming weeks that will lessen a bit the great responsibility that your friendly consideration attributes to me.

Today just a quick request that you not ask the *weissen Blätter* to return your manuscript. [Franz] Blei finds the novella excellent, but it's too long for him to publish there, or rather he doesn't know how he could arrange it. I asked him for the manuscript and he loaned it to me. Since I told him of our relations and assured him that I was sure you would agree, you will hopefully not consider his gesture indiscreet. I for my part would like to use the time during which the manuscript is with me to do some politicking to get it accepted at the *Rundschau*. I would ask you to protect this small indiscretion on my part with complete discretion on yours.

Letter from Kafka to Grete Bloch, Prague, April 18, 1914

I have no control over my capacity for writing. It comes and goes like a

phantom. I haven't written anything for a year, nor can I, as far as I know. Yet in the last few days I had a stroke of luck, equivalent to your receipt of a patent: a story, actually my longest, but also my only story (written a year ago) has been accepted by the *Neue Rundschau*, moreover with some further pleasing offers.

Letter from Kafka to Grete Bloch, Prague, April 21, 1914

[You ask] if you should be looking forward to the "story"? I don't know, you didn't like the "Stoker." Anyway, the "story" is looking forward to you, there's no doubt about that. Incidentally, the heroine's name is Grete and she doesn't do you any dishonor, at least not in the first section. Later on, though, when the agony becomes too great, she withdraws, embarks on a life of her own, and leaves the one who needs her. An old story, by the way, more than a year old; at that time I hadn't begun to appreciate the name Grete, I learned to do so only during the process of writing.

Unsent Letter from Kafka to Robert Musil, July 1914(?)

Dear Herr Doktor,

We are faced here with an injustice to me and surely to you as well. The story was given careful consideration; it was kept long enough at the office for it to be considered in every respect, including its length, and was finally accepted unconditionally, or rather with the one proviso that I have more than adequately met, that I consent to wait a considerable time before publication. And now that months have passed after this acceptance I am being asked to shorten the story by one-third. This is undignified conduct. To tell the truth, dear Herr Doktor, for I know you will admit that I am completely right, if this request had been made to me at the beginning, before the acceptance, you and I would have been spared the present embarrassment. But I would not have shortened the story then any more than I would today. I am sure you will also approve of this stand—there is no other possible course.

As far as I can see, there remain only two possible compromises. Either the magazine publishes only the first chapter of the story, in accordance with the offer I made right at the start, which would at once represent an abridgment by two-thirds, or else the entire story is published, though at a still later date than scheduled, perhaps sometime in the course of the next year. I would be completely content with either of these two possibilities.

But perhaps they no longer want the story at all and are now belatedly employing, toward you as well, this form of a disguised yet clear rejection. In that case this whole affair, which has caused you more unpleasantness than was necessary, would be finally settled and I would be left only with the consolation that I am in no way responsible for this last unpleasantness, rather that I myself bear the brunt of it.

Letter from Kafka to René Schickele, Prague, April 7, 1915

* * * I do not insist at all on speedy publication of this story, but do request you to inform me as soon as possible whether you can take it at all. Since you wish to avoid installments, finding room for my story must make problems; of course I realize that. If I nevertheless do not withdraw it of my own accord, my reason is solely that I am especially eager to see it published. But if it is completely out of the question, I could offer you another story, that I also have ready and that comes to only some thirty typewritten pages, so that it would be less dubious a matter, at least in regard to its size.

*Letter from Georg Heinrich Meyer, of the Kurt Wolff Verlag, to Kafka, Leipzig,
October 11, 1915[†]*

I have heard that you are in Prague but since I don't have your address, I am sending this letter as well as the author's copies from the *weissen Blätter* to Dr. Max Brod.

1) It appears that you never received proof sheets from the *Metamorphosis*. If that is indeed the case, the responsibility lies with Herr Schickele. Here in Leipzig I have nothing to do with the editorial work for the *weissen Blätter*. Should Herr Schickele have failed to send you the proofs, please excuse it with the absurd contemporary conditions.

You should also especially take note of the fact that Schickele himself is not well and is living abroad, apparently with a frequent change of address.

2) I would like to propose to have *Metamorphosis* appear in the "Jüngste Tag" series. In the format of Sternheim's book "Napoleon," which I am sending to you with this letter, a series of modern writers will appear: Sternheim, Schickele, Edschmid; you would fit in exceptionally well with this group. The little volume could be printed immediately and be put on sale next month. That a book by you appears is to be desired for the following reason:

Very shortly the Fontane Prize for the best modern storyteller will be awarded. The prize this year should be given, as we learned in confidence, to [Carl] Sternheim for his three stories: “Busekow,” “Napoleon” and “Schuhlin.” But since, as you probably know, Sternheim is a millionaire and one cannot easily give a millionaire a monetary prize, Franz Blei, who is to choose the winner of the Fontane-Prize this year, arranged to have Sternheim give you the entire sum, which amounts to 800 Marks, I think. Sternheim has read your work and is, as you can see from the enclosed card, enthusiastically in support of you.

In this way the *Metamorphosis* would provide you with: 1) the honorarium from the *weissen Blätter* (I don’t know whether or how much Schickele agreed to pay you for this); 2) the honorarium for the “*Jüngste Tag*” series, which for a small printing will probably be 350 Marks—the highest fee that has ever been paid for the “*Jüngste Tag*”; and then the 800 Marks of the Fontane Prize. You are swimming in good luck!

The Fontane Prize will direct a lot of public attention to you and for this reason I would recommend that we give *Meditation* a new title page, for the existing copies of the book bear the imprint of the Ernst Rowohlt publishing house, and then send out the book in a new second edition. * * * Although it will be incredibly difficult, I will try to come to Prague for the honorary celebration for Dr. Max Brod on Wednesday, and I hope I can meet you then so we can talk over the entire matter in person.

† Translated by the editor of this Norton Critical Edition from *Oxfordier Quartheft 17 (Die Verwandlung)*, ed. Roland Reuss and Peter Staengle (Frankfurt: Stroemfeld, 2003).

*Letter from Kafka to Georg Heinrich Meyer of the Kurt Wolff Verlag, Prague,
October 15, 1915*

My warmest thanks for your letter of the 11th inst. Your news, especially that about Blei and Sternheim, has made me very happy and on several counts. As for your questions (which were no questions, really, since *The Metamorphosis* is already being set), I could answer them better if I knew exactly what the Fontane Prize is. I gather from what you have written, and above all from what you wrote to Max Brod, that the prize is going to Sternheim, but that he would like to give the money to someone else, possibly to me. Kind as such a gesture is, it raises the question of need. But not of need regarding the prize *and* the money, but need in regard to the money alone. But to my way of thinking it would also not

matter at all whether the recipient might need the money sometime in the future: rather the decisive factor should only be whether he needs it at the moment. Important as the prize or a share in the prize would be for me, I would not want to accept the money alone without a share in the prize. My feeling is that I would have no right to it, since I do not at all have that requisite immediate need for money. The only passage in your letter that contradicts my own view is the following: "The Fontane Prize will call attention ... etc." In any case the situation remains obscure and I would be grateful if you could clarify it somewhat.

As for your proposals, I completely trust your judgment. I would really have preferred to publish a sizable collection of stories (let us say, the story from *Arkadia*, *The Metamorphosis*, and still another novella, under the collective title of *Punishments*). By the way, Herr Wolff agreed some time ago to this, but I suppose in the present circumstances it would be better temporarily to proceed as you have outlined. I also quite agree with the idea of reissuing *Meditation*.

I enclose the corrected proofs of *Metamorphosis*. I am sorry that it is not to be in the same typeface as *Napoleon*, since when you sent me the latter I assumed that *Metamorphosis* would be printed in the same way. The appearance of the page in *Napoleon* is pleasantly open and legible, while *Metamorphosis* looks dark and cramped, although the letters are, I believe, of the same size. If something can still be done about that, I would be most pleased.

I do not know what binding you have used for the later volumes of your *Der jüngste Tag* series. *The Stoker* was not handsomely bound. There was something sham about the binding which after a while produced a kind of disgust. So I would ask for another binding. * * *

[P.S.] Might I have five more copies of the October issue of *Die weissen Blätter*? I could well use them. * * *

Letter from Kafka to Georg Heinrich Meyer, Prague, October 20, 1915

* * * I enclose the proofs herewith. I don't mind hurrying, but there are some days when I cannot manage to spare even the small amount of time they require.

* * *

I imagine you have received the small piece for the almanac, "Before the Law," and the first signature of the proofs for *Metamorphosis*.

Letter from Kafka to Georg Heinrich Meyer, Prague, October 25, 1915

You recently mentioned that Ottomar Starke is going to do a drawing for the title page of *Metamorphosis*. Insofar as I know the artist's style from *Napoleon*, this prospect has given me a minor and perhaps unnecessary fright. It struck me that Starke, as an illustrator, might want to draw the insect itself. Not that, please not that! I do not want to restrict him, but only to make this plea out of my deeper knowledge of the story. The insect itself cannot be depicted. It cannot even be shown from a distance. Perhaps there is no such intention and my plea can be dismissed with a smile—so much the better. But I would be very grateful if you would pass along my request and make it more emphatic. If I were to offer suggestions for an illustration, I would choose such scenes as the following: the parents and the head clerk in front of the locked door, or even better, the parents and the sister in the lighted room, with the door open upon the adjoining room that lies in darkness.

I imagine you have already received the proofs and the reviews.

Letter from Kafka to Felice Bauer, Prague, December 5, 1915

What is Erna [Bauer]'s address? I want to send her *Metamorphosis*.

* * *

Postcard from Kafka to Felice Bauer, Prague, December 23, 1915

* * * *Metamorphosis* has been published in book form; it looks nice bound. If you like, I'll send it to you. Erna's address? Did the parcel arrive safely?

*Letter from Kafka to Georg Heinrich Meyer, of the Kurt Wolff Verlag, Prague,
July 28, 1916*

* * *

For the present I cannot offer you a longish work and so the only question remains whether there is any point in publishing *Punishments* (the stories "The Judgment," "Metamorphosis," "In the Penal Colony"); I personally would think not. If however you were to decide that such a publication would make sense, even if no longish work were to follow in the near future, I would entirely defer to your undoubtedly better judgment.

* * *

Letter from Kafka to Georg Heinrich Meyer, Prague, August 13, 1916

In reply to your kind letter of the 15th, let me sum up the reasons for my request that “The Judgment” and “In the Penal Colony” be published as individual volumes.

Initially there was no talk of issuing them in *Der jüngste Tag* series, but only of a volume of stories, *Punishments* (containing “The Judgment”—“Metamorphosis”—“In the Penal Colony”), which Herr Wolff projected a long while ago. These stories have a certain unity and as a group would naturally have bulked up to a more substantial volume than any of the numbers of *Der jüngste Tag*. Nevertheless I would gladly give up the book if I saw the possibility that “The Judgment” could be issued as a separate work.

The question is hardly whether to publish “The Judgment” and “In the Penal Colony” together as a *Jüngste Tag* book, for “In the Penal Colony” is quite long enough, as you yourself have estimated in your last letter, to suffice for a volume of its own. I only wish to add that to my mind “The Judgment” and “In the Penal Colony” would make a dreadful combination; “Metamorphosis” might still mediate between them, but without that story you would have two alien heads knocking violently at each other.

* * *

Fragmentary, Unsent Letter from Kafka to Max Brod, Matliary, June 1921

* * * But why should the Jews be so irresistibly drawn to this language? German literature existed before the emancipation of the Jews and attained great glory. After all, that literature was, as far as I can see, in no way less varied than today—in fact, today there may be less variety. And there is a relationship between all this and Jewishness, or more precisely between young Jews and their Jewishness, with the frightful inner predicament of these generations. * * *

Psychoanalysis lays stress on the father-complex and many find the concept intellectually fruitful. In this case I prefer another version, where the issue revolves not around the innocent father but around the father’s Jewishness. Most young Jews who began to write German wanted to leave Jewishness behind them, and their fathers approved of this, but vaguely (this vagueness was what was outrageous to them). But with their posterior legs they were still glued to their father’s Jewishness and with their waving anterior legs they found no new

ground. The ensuing despair became their inspiration.

* * *

Letter from Kafka to Kurt Wolff, Prague, Received October 21, 1922

* * *

By chance I heard from a third party that *Metamorphosis* and “The Judgment” appeared in Hungarian translation in the Kaschau newspaper *Szebabság*. * * *

Letter from Kafka to Oskar Baum, Possibly Summer 1923

I read it through the same evening, with terror, terror-stricken by that steely animal looks and by the way it creeps closer on the sofa. I suppose such things occur to all of us, but who can do it as you do? I ineffectually tried it too, years ago, but instead of groping my way to the desk I preferred to crawl under the sofa, where I can still be found. * * *

Unsent Letter from Kafka to Max Brod, Prague, November 29, 1922[†]

Of everything I have written, only the following books count: Judgment, Stoker, Metamorphosis, Penal Colony, Country Doctor and the story Hunger Artist.

[†] Translated by the editor of this Norton Critical Edition.

Kafka's Contemporaries

LEOPOLD VON SACHER-MASOCH

From *Venus in Furs*[†]

Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's novel *Venus in Furs* is one of the few texts that can be clearly identified as an influence on *The Metamorphosis*. First published in German in 1870, this tale of a man who desires to be physically and spiritually dominated by a woman dressed completely in furs achieved wide notoriety in the following decades in European literature. In 1886, the Austro-German psychiatrist Richard Krafft-Ebbing proposed the term *masochism* to describe the condition of Sacher-Masoch's protagonist, which was appearing more and more frequently in his patients. Perhaps the first widely circulated image of a dominatrix, Sacher-Masoch's *Venus* requires a male subject who desires his own abject subjugation. Kafka makes no mention of the novel in his letters or diaries, but the opening picture of a woman dressed in furs brandishing her fist while Gregor Samsa lies helplessly on his bed leaves little doubt about the connection. Sacher-Masoch's protagonist is an aristocrat named Severin, but at a key point in his relationship with his mistress he is turned into her servant and given the name Gregor.

The Lord hath smitten him by the hand of a woman.
—Book of Judith, 16.7

I was in delightful company: the lady who sat facing me across the massive Renaissance fireplace was none other than Venus; she was no *demi-mondaine* who had taken a pseudonym to wage war upon the masculine sex, but the goddess of Love in person.

She had lit a crackling fire and was settled in a comfortable armchair; the firelight flickered over her pale face, her white eyes and from time to time her feet when she sought to warm them.

Her head was magnificent in spite of the stony, lifeless eyes, but this was the

only part of her that I was able to see, for the sublime creature had wrapped her marble body in a great fur beneath which she was huddled like a shivering cat.

"I do not understand, madam," I ventured. "It is no longer cold; in fact the past two weeks have been delightfully springlike. It must be your nerves."

"You may keep your spring," she replied in a toneless voice, and then sneezed divinely twice over. "I cannot stand it here, and I am beginning to see why...."

"What, my dear?"

"I am beginning to believe the incredible and understand the incomprehensible, namely the philosophy of the German people and the qualities of their womenfolk. It no longer surprises me in the least that you northerners are unable to love, for you have not an inkling what love is about."

"I beg your pardon, madam," I replied, my blood rising, "I have really given you no reason to speak in this way."

"No, it is true, you have not." The Divine One sneezed for the third time and shrugged her shoulders with inimitable grace. "That is why I have always been kind to you, and have even paid you a visit now and then although I invariably catch cold in spite of my furs. Do you remember the first time we met?"

"How could I forget it?" I said. "You had thick brown curls then, brown eyes and rosy lips, but I recognized you at once by the outline of your face and its marble pallor. You always wore a jacket trimmed with squirrel."

"Yes, you were truly in love with that jacket; and what an attentive suitor!"

"You taught me the meaning of love. Worshiping you made me forget two thousand years of history."

"How incomparably faithful I was!"

"Oh, as for faithfulness...."

"You ungrateful man!"

"I do not wish to reproach you. You are undoubtedly a divine woman, but above all you are a woman and, like every member of your sex, cruel in matters of love."

"What you call cruelty," the goddess of Love retorted, "is the very substance of sensual and natural love. It is woman's true nature to give herself wherever she loves and to love whatever pleases her."

"But can there be greater cruelty for a lover than a beloved's infidelity?"

"Alas," she replied, "woman is faithful as long as she loves, but you demand that she be faithful without love and give herself without enjoyment. Who is cruel then, woman or man? You northerners take love too seriously. You speak of duty where it is purely a question of pleasure."

“Yes, madam, as far as love is concerned our feelings are honorable and virtuous and our relations are durable.”

“And yet,” interrupted the lady, “you nurse a secret craving for a life of sheer paganism. You modern men, you children of reason, cannot begin to appreciate love as pure bliss and divine serenity; indeed this kind of love is disastrous for men like you, for as soon as you try to be natural you become vulgar. To you Nature is an enemy. You have made devils of the smiling gods of Greece and you have turned me into a creature of evil. You may cast anathemas on me, curse me or offer yourself in sacrifice like frenzied bacchantes at my altar, but if one of you so much as dares to kiss my crimson lips, he must make a barefoot pilgrimage to Rome in sackcloth and ashes, and pray until the cursed staff grows green again, while all around me roses, violets and myrtle bloom everlastingly. Their fragrance is not for you. Stay in your northern mists and Christian incense and leave our pagan world to rest under the lava and the rubble. Do not dig us up; Pompeii was not built for you, nor were our villas, our baths and our temples. You do not need the gods—they would freeze to death in your climate!”

The lovely marble creature coughed and rearranged the sable around her shoulders.

“Thank you for the lesson in classics,” I replied, “but I cannot deny that in your peaceful and sunny world just as in our misty climate man and woman are natural enemies. Love may unite them briefly to form one mind, one heart, one will, but all too soon they are torn asunder. And this you know better than I: either one of them must bend the other to his will, or else he must let himself be trampled underfoot.”

“Under the woman’s foot, of course,” said Lady Venus impertinently. “And that you know better than I.”

“Of course, that is why I have no illusions.”

“In other words you are now my slave without illusions, and I shall trample you mercilessly.”

“Madam!”

“You do not know me yet. I admit that I am cruel—since the word gives you so much delight—but am I not entitled to be so? It is man who desires, woman who is desired; this is woman’s only advantage, but it is a decisive one. By making man so vulnerable to passion, nature has placed him at woman’s mercy, and she who has not the sense to treat him like a humble subject, a slave, a plaything, and finally to betray him with a laugh—well, she is a woman of little wisdom.”

“My dear, your principles ...” I protested.

“Are founded on the experience of a thousand years,” she replied mischievously, running her white fingers through the dark fur. “The more submissive woman is, the more readily man recovers his self-possession and becomes domineering; but the more cruel and faithless she is, the more she ill-treats him, the more wantonly she toys with him and the harsher she is, the more she quickens his desire and secures his love and admiration. It has always been so, from the time of Helen and Delilah all the way to Catherine the Great and Lola Montez.”

“I cannot deny it,” I said. “Nothing could be more attractive to man than the idea of a beautiful tyrant, both voluptuous and cruel, who insolently and inconsistently changes her favorite to suit her humor.”

“And wears furs,” said the goddess.

“What made you think of that?”

“I know your tastes.”

“Are you aware,” I said, “that you have become quite a coquette since we last met?”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I mean that I can think of nothing more extravagantly flattering to your white skin than these dark furs....”

The goddess laughed.

“You are dreaming,” she cried. “Wake up!” She grasped my arm with her marble hand. “Wake up!” she repeated, this time in a low, gruff voice. I strained to open my eyes. I could see the hand that was shaking me, but suddenly it turned a tawny brown, and the voice became the husky alcoholic voice of my Cossack, who stood towering above me.

“Do get up,” said the good fellow, “this is disgraceful.”

“What is disgraceful?”

“To fall asleep with your clothes on and a book in your hand.” He snuffed the candles which had burned right down and picked up the volume that had fallen from my hand. He looked at the title page: “Aha, Hegel. Besides, it is time we left for Mr. Severin’s, he is expecting us for tea.”

“A very curious dream,” said Severin, when I had finished my tale. He sat with his elbows on his knees, his chin resting in his delicately veined hands, lost in deep thought.

As I expected, he remained for a long while without moving, almost without

breathing. I found nothing remarkable in his behavior, for over the last three years we had become very good friends and I was used to his eccentricities. He was undoubtedly an odd character, although he was not the dangerous madman that his neighbors and indeed the whole district of Kolome considered him to be. Not only did I find him interesting but I had a great liking for him, and consequently I too was regarded by many people as a trifle mad. For a Galician gentleman and a landowner, especially considering his age (he was barely thirty), he was surprisingly lucid and serious almost to the point of pedantry. He followed a rigorous philosophical and practical system: each minute of his life obeyed the dictates of the thermometer, the barometer, the aerometer, the hydrometer, Hippocrates, Hufeland, Plato, Knigge and Lord Chesterfield. Occasionally, however, he was subject to attacks of such violence that he seemed about to burst through the very walls; at such times people would wisely avoid him.

While he sat there in silence one could hear the faint singing of the fire, the humming of the venerable samovar, the creak of the old rocking chair on which I sat smoking my cigar, and the chirrup of the cricket in the wall. I let my gaze wander over the curious collection of objects: skeletons of animals, stuffed birds, globes, plaster casts. Suddenly my eyes alighted on a picture that I had often seen before but which today in the red glow of the fire made a particularly strange impression on me.

It was a large oil painting done in the powerful colors of the Flemish School, and its subject was quite unusual. A beautiful woman, naked beneath her dark furs, was resting on an ottoman, supported on her left arm. A playful smile hovered on her lips and her thick hair was tied in a Grecian knot and dusted with snow-white powder. Her right hand played with a whip while her bare foot rested nonchalantly on a man who lay on the ground before her like a slave, like a dog. The pronounced but well-shaped features of the man showed quiet melancholy and helpless passion; he gazed up at her with the fanatical, burning eyes of a martyr. This man, this footstool for her feet, was Severin, beardless and ten years younger by the look of him.

"Venus In Furs!" I cried, pointing at the picture. "That is how I saw her in my dream."

"I, too," said Severin, "but I was dreaming with my eyes open."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, it is a ridiculous story."

"It appears that my dream was prompted by your picture," I pursued. "Do tell

me what is behind it, and how it came to play such an important part in your life. I cannot wait to hear.”

“Then look at the picture facing it,” said my friend, without answering my question.

It was a remarkably good copy of Titian’s famous *Venus with the Mirror* which hangs in the Dresden art gallery.

“Yes, but what of it?”

Severin rose and pointed to the furs in which Titian had draped his goddess.

“She is also a Venus in furs,” he said, smiling subtly. “I do not think the venerable Venetian had any ulterior motive; he simply painted the portrait of some distinguished Messalina coldly inspecting her majestic charms, and he was tactful enough to paint in Cupid holding the mirror, with some reluctance I may add. The picture is merely a piece of flattery. Later some connoisseur of the baroque dubbed the lady ‘Venus,’ and the despot’s furs in which Titian’s model wrapped herself (more out of fear of catching cold than from modesty) became the symbol of the tyranny and cruelty that are common to beautiful women. But what does it matter? As it stands, the painting is a biting satire on modern love: Venus must hide herself in a vast fur lest she catch cold in our abstract northern climate, in the icy realm of Christianity.”

Severin laughed and lit another cigarette.

Just then the door opened and a pretty, plump blond with an amiable and intelligent air, wearing a black silk dress, trotted in with a tray of cold meat and eggs for our tea. Severin picked up an egg and opened it with his knife.

“Did I not tell you that I wanted them soft-boiled?” he shouted, with a violence that made the young woman quake with fear.

“But my dear Sewtschu,” she began fearfully.

“What do you mean, ‘Sewtschu’?” he shouted. “You are to obey, do you hear?”

Whereupon he tore down a knout that was hanging beside his weapons. The pretty woman fled from the room like a frightened doe.

“Let me catch you doing that again!” he shouted after her.

“But, Severin,” I said, placing my hand on his arm, “how can you treat a lovely little woman like that?”

“Take a look at her,” he said, with a sly wink. “If I had flattered her she would have tied a noose around my neck; but because I train her with a knout she worships me.”

“What nonsense!”

“Nonsense yourself. That is the way to train women.”

“You may live like a pasha in your harem if you choose, but do not foist your theories on me.”

“Why not?” he exclaimed. “Goethe’s words, ‘Be the anvil or be the hammer’ are never more true than when applied to the relations between man and woman. Incidentally, the Lady Venus informed you of this in your dream. Woman’s power lies in the passion she can arouse in man and which she will exploit to her own advantage unless he remains always on his guard. Man has only one choice: to be a slave or to be a tyrant. If he surrenders to her the yoke will begin to weigh on his neck and soon he will feel the touch of the whip.”

“What odd maxims!”

“Not maxims, but personal experience,” he replied, with a nod. “I have been thoroughly whipped myself and it cured me. Would you like to read about it?”

He rose and took from his massive desk a small manuscript which he laid in front of me.

“You asked me what the picture was about and I have long owed you an explanation. Here you are—read this!”

Severin sat by the fire with his back toward me, lost in reverie. Everything became quiet: the fire singing in the hearth, the samovar and the cricket were heard once more.

I opened the manuscript and read: “Confessions of a Super-sensualist.”

The margin of the manuscript bore in the form of an epigraph an adaptation of the famous lines from *Faust*:

Thou sensual, supersensual libertine,
A little girl can lead thee by the nose.

* * *

† From Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs*, in *Masochism*, trans. Aude Willm (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 143–51. Copyright © 1967 Les éditions de Minuit.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

From On the Use and Abuse of History[†]

Kafka never mentioned Nietzsche in his letters or diaries, but Max Brod reports

that when he first met him in 1904, Kafka was an enthusiastic believer in the philosopher's theories. A cult around the author of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil* developed in the first decade of the twentieth century among German-speaking writers, artists and intellectuals; his pronouncements about "becoming," "self-overcoming," and the role of art as a metaphysical justification for life became rallying cries for the countercultural youth movement as it sought to break with established morality and organized religion. Rejecting the "burden of history," embracing a child- or animal-like "forgetfulness," Nietzsche fundamentally questioned the human/animal hierarchy.

I

Consider the herds that are feeding yonder: they know not the meaning of yesterday or to-day, they graze and ruminate, move or rest, from morning to night, from day to day, taken up with their little loves and hates, at the mercy of the moment, feeling neither melancholy nor satiety. Man cannot see them without regret, for even in the pride of his humanity he looks enviously on the beast's happiness. He wishes simply to live without satiety or pain, like the beast; yet it is all in vain, for he will not change places with it. He may ask the beast—"Why do you look at me and not speak to me of your happiness?" The beast wants to answer—"Because I always forget what I wished to say": but he forgets this answer too, and is silent; and the man is left to wonder.

He wonders also about himself, that he cannot learn to forget, but hangs on the past: however far or fast he run, that chain runs with him. It is matter for wonder: the moment, that is here and gone, that was nothing before and nothing after, returns like a spectre to trouble the quiet of a later moment. A leaf is continually dropping out of the volume of time and fluttering away—and suddenly it flutters back into the man's lap. Then he says, "I remember ...," and envies the beast, that forgets at once, and sees every moment really die, sink into night and mist, extinguished for ever. The beast lives unhistorically; for it "goes into" the present, like a number, without leaving any curious remainder. It cannot dissimulate, it conceals nothing; at every moment it seems what it actually is, and thus can be nothing that is not honest. But man is always resisting the great and continually increasing weight of the past; it presses him down, and bows his shoulders; he travels with a dark invisible burden that he can plausibly disown, and is only too glad to disown in converse with his fellows—in order to excite

their envy. And so it hurts him, like the thought of a lost Paradise, to see a herd grazing, or, nearer still, a child, that has nothing yet of the past to disown, and plays in a happy blindness between the walls of the past and the future. And yet its play must be disturbed, and only too soon will it be summoned from its little kingdom of oblivion. Then it learns to understand the words “once upon a time,” the “open sesame” that lets in battle, suffering and weariness on mankind, and reminds them what their existence really is, an imperfect tense that never becomes a present. And when death brings at last the desired forgetfulness, it abolishes life and being together, and sets the seal on the knowledge that “being” is merely a continual “has been,” a thing that lives by denying and destroying and contradicting itself.

If happiness and the chase for new happiness keep alive in any sense the will to live, no philosophy has perhaps more truth than the cynic’s: for the beast’s happiness, like that of the perfect cynic, is the visible proof of the truth of cynicism. The smallest pleasure, if it be only continuous and make one happy, is incomparably a greater happiness than the more intense pleasure that comes as an episode, a wild freak, a mad interval between ennui, desire, and privation. But in the smallest and greatest happiness there is always one thing that makes it happiness: the power of forgetting, or, in more learned phrase, the capacity of feeling “unhistorically” throughout its duration. One who cannot leave himself behind on the threshold of the moment and forget the past, who cannot stand on a single point, like a goddess of victory, without fear or giddiness, will never know what happiness is; and, worse still, will never do anything to make others happy. The extreme case would be the man without any power to forget, who is condemned to see “becoming” everywhere. Such a man believes no more in himself or his own existence, he sees everything fly past in an eternal succession, and loses himself in the stream of becoming. At last, like the logical disciple of Heraclitus, he will hardly dare to raise his finger. Forgetfulness is a property of all action; just as not only light but darkness is bound up with the life of every organism. One who wished to feel everything historically, would be like a man forcing himself to refrain from sleep, or a beast who had to live by chewing a continual cud. Thus even a happy life is possible without remembrance, as the beast shows: but life in any true sense is absolutely impossible without forgetfulness. Or, to put my conclusion better, there is a degree of sleeplessness, of rumination, of “historical sense,” that injures and finally destroys the living thing, be it a man or a people or a system of culture.

To fix this degree and the limits to the memory of the past, if it is not to

become the gravedigger of the present, we must see clearly how great is the “plastic power” of a man or a community or a culture; I mean the power of specifically growing out of one’s self, of making the past and the strange one body with the near and the present, of healing wounds, replacing what is lost, repairing broken moulds. There are men who have this power so slightly that a single sharp experience, a single pain, often a little injustice, will lacerate their souls like the scratch of a poisoned knife. There are others, who are so little injured by the worst misfortunes, and even by their own spiteful actions, as to feel tolerably comfortable, with a fairly quiet conscience, in the midst of them,—or at any rate shortly afterwards. The deeper the roots of a man’s inner nature, the better will he take the past into himself; and the greatest and most powerful nature would be known by the absence of limits for the historical sense to overgrow and work harm. It would assimilate and digest the past, however foreign, and turn it to sap. Such a nature can forget what it cannot subdue; there is no break in the horizon, and nothing to remind it that there are still men, passions, theories and aims on the other side. This is a universal law; a living thing can only be healthy, strong and productive within a certain horizon: if it be incapable of drawing one round itself, or too selfish to lose its own view in another’s, it will come to an untimely end. Cheerfulness, a good conscience, belief in the future, the joyful deed, all depend, in the individual as well as the nation, on there being a line that divides the visible and clear from the vague and shadowy: we must know the right time to forget as well as the right time to remember; and instinctively see when it is necessary to feel historically, and when unhistorically. This is the point that the reader is asked to consider; that the unhistorical and the historical are equally necessary to the health of an individual, a community, and a system of culture.

* * *

† From *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche: The First Complete and Authorised English Translation*, Vol. II: *Thoughts out of Season: Part II*, trans. Adrian Collins, ed. Oscar Levy (Edinburgh and London: T. N. Foulis, 1909), pp. 6–10.

From Thus Spoke Zarathustra[†]

But Zarathustra looked at the people and marvelled. Then he spoke thus:

Man is a rope, fastened between animal and Overman—a rope over an abyss.¹

A dangerous going-across, a dangerous wayfaring, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and staying-still.

What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal; what can be loved in man is that he is a *going-across* and a *down-going*.²

I love those who do not know how to live except their lives be a down-going, for they are those who are going across.

I love the great despisers, for they are the great venerators and arrows of longing for the other bank.

I love those who do not first seek beyond the stars for reasons to go down and to be sacrifices: but who sacrifice themselves to the earth, that the earth may one day belong to the Overman.

I love him who lives for knowledge and who wants knowledge that one day the Overman may live. And thus he wills his own downfall.

I love him who works and invents that he may build a house for the Overman and prepare earth, animals, and plants for him: for thus he wills his own downfall.

I love him who loves his virtue: for virtue is will to downfall and an arrow of longing.

I love him who keeps back no drop of spirit for himself, but wants to be the spirit of his virtue entirely: thus he steps as spirit over the bridge.

I love him who makes a predilection and a fate of his virtue: thus for his virtue's sake he will live or not live.

I love him who does not want too many virtues. One virtue is more virtue than two, because it is more of a knot for fate to cling to.

I love him whose soul is lavish, who neither wants nor returns thanks: for he always gives and will not preserve himself.

I love him who is ashamed when the dice fall in his favour and who then asks: Am I then a cheat?—for he wants to perish.

I love him who throws golden words in advance of his deeds and always performs more than he promised: for he wills his own downfall.

I love him who justifies the men of the future and redeems the men of the past: for he wants to perish by the men of the present.

I love him who chastises his God because he loves his God: for he must perish by the anger of his God.

I love him whose soul is deep even in its ability to be wounded, and whom even a little thing can destroy: thus he is glad to go over the bridge.

I love him whose soul is overfull, so that he forgets himself and all things are in him: thus all things become his downfall.

I love him who is of a free spirit and a free heart: thus his head is only the bowels of his heart, but his heart drives him to his downfall.

I love all those who are like heavy drops falling singly from the dark cloud that hangs over mankind: they prophesy the coming of the lightning and as prophets they perish.

Behold, I am a prophet of the lightning and a heavy drop from the cloud: but this lightning is called Overman.—

* * *

Of the Three Metamorphoses

I name you three metamorphoses of the spirit: how the spirit shall become a camel, and the camel a lion, and the lion at last a child.

There are many heavy things for the spirit, for the strong, weight-bearing spirit in which dwell respect and awe: its strength longs for the heavy, for the heaviest.

What is heavy? thus asks the weight-bearing spirit, thus it kneels down like the camel and wants to be well laden.

What is the heaviest thing, you heroes? so asks the weight-bearing spirit, that I may take it upon me and rejoice in my strength.

Is it not this: to debase yourself in order to injure your pride? To let your folly shine out in order to mock your wisdom?

Or is it this: to desert our cause when it is celebrating its victory? To climb high mountains in order to tempt the tempter?

Or is it this: to feed upon the acorns and grass of knowledge and for the sake of truth to suffer hunger of the soul?

Or is it this: to be sick and to send away comforters and make friends with the deaf, who never hear what you ask?

Or is it this: to wade into dirty water when it is the water of truth, and not to disdain cold frogs and hot toads?

Or is it this: to love those who despise us and to offer our hand to the ghost when it wants to frighten us?

The weight-bearing spirit takes upon itself all these heaviest things: like a

camel hurrying laden into the desert, thus it hurries into its desert.

But in the loneliest desert the second metamorphosis occurs: the spirit here becomes a lion; it wants to capture freedom and be lord in its own desert.

It seeks here its ultimate lord: it will be an enemy to him and to its ultimate God, it will struggle for victory with the great dragon.

What is the great dragon which the spirit no longer wants to call lord and God? The great dragon is called 'Thou shalt'. But the spirit of the lion says 'I will!'

'Thou shalt' lies in its path, sparkling with gold, a scale-covered beast, and on every scale glitters golden 'Thou shalt'.

Values of a thousand years glitter on the scales, and thus speaks the mightiest of all dragons: 'All the values of things—glitter on me.

'All values have already been created, and all created values—are in me. Truly, there shall be no more "I will"!'. Thus speaks the dragon.

My brothers, why is the lion needed in the spirit? Why does the beast of burden, that renounces and is reverent, not suffice?

To create new values—even the lion is incapable of that: but to create itself freedom for new creation—that the might of the lion can do.

To create freedom for itself and a sacred No even to duty: the lion is needed for that, my brothers.

To seize the right to new values—that is the most terrible proceeding for a weight-bearing and reverential spirit. Truly, to this spirit it is a theft and a work for an animal of prey.

Once it loved this 'Thou shalt' as its holiest thing: now it has to find illusion and caprice even in the holiest, that it may steal freedom from its love: the lion is needed for this theft.

But tell me, my brothers, what can the child do that even the lion cannot? Why must the preying lion still become a child?

The child is innocence and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a sport, a self-propelling wheel, a first motion, a sacred Yes.

Yes, a sacred Yes is needed, my brothers, for the sport of creation: the spirit now wills *its own* will, the spirit sundered from the world now wins *its own* world.

I have named you three metamorphoses of the spirit: how the spirit became a camel, and the camel a lion, and the lion at last a child.—

Thus spoke Zarathustra. * * *

* * *

Of the Despisers of the Body

I wish to speak to the despisers of the body. Let them not learn differently nor teach differently, but only bid farewell to their own bodies—and so become dumb.

‘I am body and soul’—so speaks the child. And why should one not speak like children?

But the awakened, the enlightened man says: I am body entirely, and nothing beside; and soul is only a word for something in the body.

The body is a great intelligence, a multiplicity with one sense, a war and a peace, a herd and a herdsman.

Your little intelligence, my brother, which you call ‘spirit’,³ is also an instrument of your body, a little instrument and toy of your great intelligence.

You say ‘I’ and you are proud of this word. But greater than this—although you will not believe in it—is your body and its great intelligence, which does not say ‘I’ but performs ‘I’.

What the sense feels, what the spirit perceives, is never an end in itself. But sense and spirit would like to persuade you that they are the end of all things: they are as vain as that.

Sense and spirit are instruments and toys: behind them still lies the Self. The Self seeks with the eyes of the sense, it listens too with the ears of the spirit.

The Self is always listening and seeking: it compares, subdues, conquers, destroys. It rules and is also the Ego’s ruler.⁴

Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a mighty commander, an unknown sage—he is called Self. He lives in your body, he is your body.

There is more reason in your body than in your best wisdom. And who knows for what purpose your body requires precisely your best wisdom?

Your Self laughs at your Ego and its proud leapings. ‘What are these leapings and flights of thought to me?’ it says to itself. ‘A by-way to my goal. I am the Ego’s leading-string and I prompt its conceptions.’

The Self says to the Ego: ‘Feel pain!’ Thereupon it suffers and gives thought how to end its suffering—and it is *meant* to think for just that purpose.

The Self says to the Ego: ‘Feel joy!’ Thereupon it rejoices and gives thought how it may often rejoice—and it is *meant* to think for just that purpose.

I want to say a word to the despisers of the body. It is their esteem that produces this disesteem. What is it that created esteem and disesteem and value

and will?

The creative Self created for itself esteem and disesteem, it created for itself joy and sorrow. The creative body created spirit for itself, as a hand of its will.

Even in your folly and contempt, you despisers of the body, you serve your Self. I tell you: your Self itself wants to die and turn away from life.

Your Self can no longer perform that act which it most desires to perform: to create beyond itself. That is what it most wishes to do, that is its whole ardour.

But now it has grown too late for that: so your Self wants to perish, you despisers of the body.

Your Self wants to perish, and that is why you have become despisers of the body! For no longer are you able to create beyond yourselves.

And therefore you are now angry with life and with the earth. An unconscious envy lies in the sidelong glance of your contempt.

I do not go your way, you despisers of the body! You are not bridges to the Overman!

Thus spoke Zarathustra.

* * *

† From Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1961), pp. 43–45, 54–56, 61–63. Copyright © R. J. Hollingdale, 1961, 1969. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

1. Compare Kafka's aphorism of 1917: "The true path leads over a rope fastened not high up but just above the ground. It appears designed to be tripped over rather than walked upon." [Ed.]
2. In German: *ein Übergang und ein Untergang*.
3. In German: "*Geist*." The word has three basic meanings: spirit, mind, and intellect.
4. The German terms here for "Self" and "Ego" are *Selbst* and *Ich*.

HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL

From [The Lord Chandos Letter][†]

Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874–1929) was a Viennese wunderkind whose poetry, plays, essays and opera libretti (including the ones for Richard Strauss's *Elektra* and *Rosenkavalier*) played a major role in turn-of-the-century German and Austrian culture. His fictional letter of Lord Philip Chandos to Francis Bacon explaining his sudden incapacity to continue his literary career was a

sensation when it was first published in 1902 and has since become a classic instance of the “language crisis” in avant-garde German literature and philosophy. Nietzsche and other philosophers had pointed out the arbitrary relation between words and things, a perspective that threw into question the premises of a realistic fictional representation of reality. Hofmannsthal’s protagonist is beset by a linguistic and ethical crisis; words decompose in his mouth like “rotten mushrooms” when he tries to assert his role as father, landowner, nobleman and writer, and so he prefers to withdraw into silence. Kafka was an early and enthusiastic reader of Hofmannsthal’s works and many of the small, everyday creatures and objects cited by Chandos as the vessel for his newfound, epiphanic experience of reality—dying rats in a boarded-up cellar, a beetle swimming in a watering can, an abandoned harrow standing in the field—can be found in expanded and transformed ways in Kafka’s writings.

This is the letter that Philipp Lord Chandos, the younger son of the Earl of Bath, wrote to Francis Bacon, later Lord Verulam and Viscount St. Albans, in order to excuse himself to his friend for having completely renounced his literary activities.

* * *

My case, in brief, is the following: I have completely lost the capacity to think or speak about something in a coherent fashion.

At first I gradually lost the ability to speak about higher and more general topics. I found myself incapable of taking into my mouth those words that all human beings generally make use of without further reflection. I experienced an inexplicable uneasiness in simply pronouncing the words “spirit,” “soul,” or “body.” An internal resistance blocked me from giving my opinion about business matters of the court, bills in Parliament, or what have you. And this not for any sort of scruples, for you know well my almost reckless candor: no, abstract words—which the tongue must naturally make use of in order to express one’s point of view—decomposed in my mouth like rotten mushrooms. * * *

I could no longer understand [people and their affairs] through the simplifying gaze of habit. Everything dissolved into pieces, the pieces into smaller pieces, and nothing could be held together by a concept. Individual words floated around me; they curdled into eyes that stared at me and that I must again stare back at. They are a maelstrom that make me dizzy when I look down into them, they wheel about without stopping and through them one falls into the

void.

* * *

Since then I have been leading a life that, I fear, you can hardly grasp since it trickles away in such a soulless, mindless fashion. A life, to be sure, that hardly seems to differ from that of my relatives and most of the propertied nobles in this kingdom, a life that is not completely without its joyful, invigorating moments. It won't be easy for me to give you a sense of what these good moments consist in; words again fail me. For something that is completely unnamed and probably unnameable announces itself to me in such moments, filling some object of my everyday surroundings with a flood of higher life like a vessel.

I can't expect you to understand this condition without examples, and I must beg your indulgence for the ridiculousness of my examples. A watering can, a harrow abandoned in the field, a dog sunning itself, a humble churchyard, a cripple, a small peasant hut—all this can become the vessel of my illumination. Each of these objects, and the thousand other similar objects over which one's eyes glide with self-evident indifference, can suddenly assume for me in a given moment, which in no way do I have the power to conjure up by myself, a sublimely moving form that words alone cannot adequately convey.

Indeed, it can be the distinct memory of an absent object that, incomprehensibly, is chosen to be filled to the brim with a soft and suddenly rising flood of divine feeling. Recently for instance I had ordered my servants to spread an abundant dose of poison for the rats in the cellar of one of my dairy farms. I rode my horse out into the country that evening with no further thought of the matter, as you might well imagine. Then, just as I was cantering across a freshly plowed field, with nothing more in my vicinity than a brood of quail flushed out from their lair and, off in the distance, the great sun sinking over the waving fields, this cellar suddenly opens itself inside me, filled with the death struggle of this nation of rats. Everything was in me: the cool, musty cellar air saturated with the sweet, tangy scent of the poison and the shrieks of their death cries breaking against the moldering walls; the intertwined spasms of impotence and racing desperation; the fevered searching for an exit; the cold gaze of rage when two meet at the same blocked-up crack in the wall. But why am I trying to express myself in words that I have foresworn!

Do you remember, dear friend, the marvelous description that Livy provides of the hours preceding the destruction of Alba Longa? How the inhabitants wander the streets they are fated never to see again.... how they take their leave

from the very stones of the earth? I tell you, my friend, I carried within me this scene and burning Carthage as well. But it was more, more divine, more animal; and it was pure presence, the fullest, most sublime presence.

A mother was there who had her young ones trembling beside her and who looked not at the dying or at the pitiless stone walls but at the empty air. Or rather she looked through that air at infinity itself with a gnashing gaze! If a slave stood impotently by, shuddering as Niobe turned to stone, he must have endured what I endured when inside me the soul of this animal bared its teeth against its monstrous fate.

Forgive me this description, but don't think for a minute that what filled me was pity. You mustn't think that; otherwise I will have chosen a clumsy example. It was infinitely more and much less than pity: a monstrous empathy, an overflowing into those creatures, or a feeling that the sap of life and death, of dreaming and waking, flowed into them for a moment—but from where? For what does this have to do with pity, or with the intelligible train of human thoughts, when, one other evening, I find beneath a walnut tree a half-empty watering can left there by a gardener, and when this can and the water in it, darkened by the tree's shadow, while a water beetle rows itself across its surface from one dark shore to the other; when this combination of inanities courses through me with such an overwhelming force of infinity, courses through me from the roots of my hair to the marrow in my heels, so that I would want to break out into words of which I know, if ever I could find them, they would force those cherubim that I do not believe in from their perch in heaven, and that I then silently turn away from that spot and, weeks later, each time I glimpse this walnut tree, go past it with a shy, sideward glance, careful not to dispel the afterglow of the miracle that still lingers around its roots, nor disperse the more than earthly fear still emanating from the bushes in its vicinity.

In such moments any insignificant creature—a dog, a rat, a beetle, a gnarled apple tree, a cart path winding its way over a hill, a moss-covered stone—can mean more to me than the most beautiful, passionate lover has been in the happiest night. These mute and sometimes inanimate creatures lift themselves to me with such a fullness, such a presence of love, that my dazzled eyes cannot find a single dead spot all around.

Everything appears to me, everything that exists, everything I can remember, everything my jumbled thoughts can encounter, to be something. Even my own corporeal weight, the habitual dullness of my mind, seems to me to be something; I feel a delightful, simply unending play of forces in and around me,

and among the materials playing off against each other there is not one into which I would not be able to transport myself. At such times it is as if my body consisted of pure ciphers that revealed the secret of all existence to me. Or as if we could enter into a new, mysterious relationship with the world if we began to think with our hearts. * * *

I wish I were given the ability to press into the last words of this presumably last letter to Francis Bacon all the love and gratitude, all the limitless admiration I feel in my heart for the greatest philanthropist of my soul, for the first Englishman of my time, and that I will conserve there until death makes it burst.

A.D. 1603, this August Twenty-second.

Phi. Chandos

† Hugo von Hofmannsthal, “Ein Brief” (1902), in *Hugo von Hofmannsthal: Gesammelte Werke: Erzählungen, Erfundene Gespräche und Briefe: Reisen* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1979). Translated by the editor of this Norton Critical Edition.

RAINER MARIA RILKE

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926), an almost exact contemporary of Kafka’s, left his native Prague as a young man and spent his creative adult life wandering throughout Europe. He was never part of the “Prague Circle” of German-Jewish writers that constituted Kafka’s world. Nonetheless, he shares with Kafka the Nietzschean interest in reconceptualizing the relationship between humans and animals; his poetry collection *Neue Gedichte* (1907–08) includes three poetic evocations of animals—“The Panther,” “The Swan,” and “The Gazelle”—that quickly reached a wide audience and continue to engage readers today. The numbed, caged panther in Rilke’s famous poem, written in Paris in 1908 following a visit to the Jardin des Plantes, bears little immediate resemblance to Kafka’s quite conscious and self-aware protagonist. But both literary works insist that the reader adopt the animal’s point of view, a reversal that corresponds to a contemporary change in the European relation to animals. Rilke’s “Archaic Torso of Apollo” also insists on a reversal: in this case, that of the artwork that “sees” the viewer rather than the other way around. This poem formulates Rilke’s celebrated notion of an artistic “will” that becomes a moral imperative rather than an aestheticist retreat from life. It is relevant to Kafka precisely because the animal trope appears even in this evocation of classical sculpture, as

hard white marble becomes a “wild beast’s hair.”

Der Panther[†]

Sein Blick ist vom Vorübergehen der Stäbe
so müd geworden, dass er nichts mehr hält.
Ihm ist, als ob es tausend Stäbe gäbe
und hinter tausend Stäben keine Welt.

Der weiche Gange geschmeidig starker Schritte,
der sich im allerkleinsten Kreise dreht,
ist wie ein Tanz von Kraft um eine Mitte,
in der betäubt ein grosser Wille steht.

5

Nur manchmal schiebt der Vorhang der Pupille
sich lautlos auf—. Dann geht ein Bild hinein,
geht durch der Glieder angespannte Stille—
und hört im Herzen auf zu sein.

10

[†] From Rainer Maria Rilke, *Neue Gedichte* (*New Poems*; Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1907).

The Panther[†]

The motion of the bars has made his gaze
so tired that it can hold no more.
For him there are a thousand bars
and behind those thousand bars no world.

In strong and silken steps he paces
softly in an ever smaller round,
like a dance of power circling that place
at whose center a deadened will is found.

5

Only rarely does the curtain of the eye
lift up without a sound. Then an image enters,

10

goes through the clenched and silent limbs—
to reach the heart and die.

† Translated by the editor of this Norton Critical Edition.

Archaischer Torso Apollos[†]

Wir kannten nicht sein unerhörtes Haupt,
darin die Augenäpfel reiften. Aber
sein Torso glüht noch wie ein Kandelaber,
in dem sein Schauen, nur zurückgeschraubt,

sich hält und glänzt. Sonst könnte nicht der Bug
der Brust dich blenden, und im leisen Drehen
der Lenden könnte nicht ein Lächeln gehen
zu jener Mitte, die die Zeugung trug.

5

Sonst stünde dieser Stein entstellt und kurz
unter der Schultern durchsichtigem Sturz
und flimmerte nicht so wie Raubtierfelle;

10

und bräche nicht aus allen seinen Rändern
aus wie ein Stern: denn da ist keine Stelle,
die dich nicht sieht. Du mußt dein Leben ändern.

† From Rainer Maria Rilke, *Der Neuen Gedichte: Anderer Teil* (*New Poems: Another Part*; Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1908).

Archaic Torso of Apollo[†]

The shocking head we did not know—
nor the eyes ripening like fruit. But
the torso still glows like a candelabra,
in which the gaze, flickering low,

steadies itself and gleams. Otherwise the bow
of the breast could not blind you, and in the quiet turn
of the loins no smile could go
to that center where creation burned.

5

Otherwise this stone would seem marred and small
beneath the watery shoulders' fall,
and would not glisten like a wild beast's hair

10

nor rip through every surface
like a knife. For there is no place where
he does not see you. You must change your life.

† Translated by the editor of this Norton Critical Edition.

JOHANNES V. JENSEN

The Condignog[†]

Johannes V. Jensen (1873–1950) was a prominent Danish author whose short stories, essays, and anthropological travel reports featured prominently in German cultural life at the turn of the century. His story “Kondignogen” was translated into German as “Der Kondignog” in 1909, three years before the composition of *The Metamorphosis*. To be sure, the story it tells of the transformation of a young man into a giant lizardlike animal differs in crucial respects from Kafka’s tale: this metamorphosis may be a subjective hallucination prompted by hunger and melancholy, and the other characters don’t notice the young man’s ostensibly new animal form. The story is also set in an exotic Jugendstil landscape full of swaying ferns, jungles, and sea monsters. Indeed, the narrative springs from the Darwinian idea of a grand chain of being in which humans, animals, plants, and minerals are vitally connected, a theory that underlies the Jugendstil decorative motifs that flourished in the first decade of the century. And it ends sentimentally, the man regaining his human form through redemption by a woman. Nonetheless, Jensen’s story stems from the belief that the line between animal and human is permeable and can be “realistically” crossed, that is, without divine or mythological explanations—a

point of departure for many of Kafka's animal stories, of which *The Metamorphosis* is the first.

Once in my life I walked on all fours. I still remember this occasionally, if dimly, when, either because of fatigue or overexertion, my sense of time leaves me in the lurch. When I was young the notion of a day or a year didn't have the same meaning that it had for other people generally. I always seemed to find myself above or beneath or at the margins of the present. Only once did I fall outside of time itself in a completely inexplicable fashion: indeed, I felt myself so thoroughly isolated that, without experiencing any concern whatsoever for my actions, I felt compelled to fall onto my forelegs and move off to the side, out into the open, in order to eat some grass or crawl under a bush to die. Even now I still sometimes can feel the peculiar cold shiver, the inner, limitless sense of abandonment that took hold of me like a poison—the nausea in my soul that robbed me of all strength before the attack set in. Still today a wet shiver sometimes runs down my spine the way it crept into the bristles on my body back then. I sense a kind of memory in my skin of the incipient cold feeling, the deadly attack of “goose flesh” with which it began, and then I know that time itself abandoned me, that a nameless solitude gave me another skin and led me out of the present world even as I remained deeply ensconced within it.

When this bitter, ineluctable shudder returns, the last cold shiver of the soul accompanying death, then I will recognize the condition I was in at that time.

It was in Madrid, in the middle of the day with the sun shining down on the Prado Paseo, while sitting on a bench that I suddenly experienced the metamorphosis that neither I nor any power of this world could have prevented. To tell the truth, I was in a rather pitiful state. I hadn't eaten a thing for the last five days and was probably fit to be checked into a hospital. However, I didn't feel as if I were lacking any of my vital forces, and I took pleasure in sitting silently and watching the people walk by me in the sunlight, people who were speaking a language of which I grasped only the sound. A sign that my equilibrium was somewhat off kilter was that the day struck me as unusually precious although it was only an ordinary sunny day in May, warm by morning and growing hotter. The sky was a cloudless if hazy white beneath the sun's dominance, while the trees along the Prado unfurled their magnificent, newly green foliage like creatures courting one another. A biting smell of carbonic acid came from the chalk-white houses on the other side of the Alameda, pried loose from their walls by the heat of the sun, and at the same time one could sense a

very light draft, a cellar air from the stones on the other side that still retained some coldness and now spread it around them. A man with a clay jug strapped to his back walked by selling water. *Agua*, he said and stared at me with human understanding—*agua como la nieve*. I don't know why this look made me take a liking to him, why I felt myself drawn to this simple man with the water jug so suddenly and passionately that I could have started shouting and crying. Alas, I was so poor that I couldn't even purchase a glass of water from him. While I was sitting in this state I began to feel invaded by a silent love for everything I saw before me; at the same time I grew increasingly ill. Not that I was lacking in anything—but a sinking feeling of hopelessness slowly infiltrated my breathing as time slipped away. Yes, as time slipped away. I had the feeling as if I alone bore the responsibility for the fact that the trees were so green, that the sun was shining on the gravel walkways, that a fountain splashed somewhere behind the foliage without ever stopping.... What would happen if I became tired and incapable of fulfilling my duties? What would happen to the little children who came scurrying along the gravel, silent before their own luxuriant growth, if no one cared for them anymore, if I could no longer gaze at them with a heart bursting with emotion and a whole ocean of joy on my lips? ... Yes, they would probably still scurry along the same paths. So was it I in the end who had to die and thus clung to all these small, wonderful things of the earth? Was I dying? No, quite the contrary, I was filled with an inner divine strength, with a terrifying creative strength capable of carrying me everywhere. Fate was in the offing. Something was in the time, not in the air. Another being was stirring inside me; I felt now and again an obscure pain that became all the more intolerable the more I deigned to let it come and go.

In this excruciating moment, as I sat on the bench and the present time began to desert me, I was still completely conscious. I thought something like, now I am going crazy, or I am dying, because the sky took on another color and I grew completely cold, while a thousand finely-pointed needles seemed to be digging into the pores of my skin.... Oh, now I could no longer see the trees, I'd become blind, and where were my hands? A feeling of nausea.... Cramplike convulsions went through my intestines, I noticed how my neck fell forward—my head must have been so heavy—the splashing fountain turned into a roaring world ocean in my ears, I found myself in eternity, in the corrosive nothingness and silence dawning in my soul.... And in the midst of this limitless impotence I was still completely conscious; I repeatedly had the impression that I could see. Didn't I see the trees with my own eyes even if I was no longer alive and could no longer

understand? Wasn't I sitting on a bench? Perhaps I could still live if I wanted to, although I was absent, paralyzed, without senses, without a body or its members ... and yet still completely conscious. That's how forlorn I was.

That is when it happened that I went down on all fours and began walking in order to escape. And as I moved forward, my senses revived. I still had the storm of eternity ringing in my head, but otherwise I was alive again and felt myself to be the being that I was. I moved my short, thick legs and saw they were fashioned as they ought to be, with a dirty flesh color and scaly flecks of pigment here and there; I also recognized the horn nails on my red club feet. I felt my tail, my wing-like skin for flying, my mane. I opened and closed the scabby lips of my mouth and felt a pang of authentic hunger.

Was I a dragon or a basilisk? No, excuse me, I was a condignog, a truly strange human lizard, a creature that in all ages has been without a home. I had no bad intentions, wouldn't make a mistake or knock something over in choosing my food, I was simply taking a walk and had wandered onto the Prado, but myself wanted to go away if one would just let me pass through....

I still didn't understand my misfortune. It was only when I had walked for a while and came across the man with the water jug that I understood. He looked at me with the same gaze as before and politely pointed to what he was carrying —*agua, señor ... agua fresca*—how reliable and ordinary his voice sounded. I've never been able to forget it, nor how benevolently his naïve face shone beneath the green branches.... But he didn't see me, the condignog. No trace of shyness in his face indicated that he saw in me the fantastic animal I had become! I myself could see from my shadow how things stood with me. It was a bitter pill to swallow that he couldn't see me as I truly was.

Many people—gentlemen as well as ladies—walked past me and cast a glance in my direction without apparently seeing anything other than that I was a human creature like themselves. Then I knew I was lost. Fear was boiling in all my nerves, just like before, during my metamorphosis. The sky changed color and instead of houses and trees there rose up around me swaying ferns; copper-colored swamp holes opened before me. The image retreated but at the same time it appeared to remain as a faint shadow behind the houses standing in the bright sunlight. I took a deep sigh and left the city.

Out in the warm moonlit nights, in the open desert countryside surrounding Madrid, and where only poppies grow, I found my strength again and surrendered myself to my fate. There I heard for the first time my true voice, near midnight, when I raised my snout to the moon and had a good cry. I had a

deep, booming voice, a keening yowl that quite satisfied me as an expression of the world's solitude. I never saw what my head looked like. I could have looked into a puddle and thus gained certainty in the matter, but I didn't have the nerve. I knew that even without that I had enough horror to bear.

Incidentally, I didn't waste any time grieving. I was without pain. In the form of the animal into which my melancholic fear had metamorphosed me, I enjoyed myself quite agreeably during the lonely nights. I came upon the idea of play and amused myself alone in the moonshine with all the capabilities that a condignog has at its disposal and that, to my great astonishment, I also possessed. My strength was phenomenal and yet I was also very limber. I could leap twenty to thirty meters into the air, making use all the while of my wing-like membranes and my tail. This tail, endowed with thick calloused knots, was so powerful that I could dig long holes with it in the earth's crust. When I jumped high into the air I would make an abrupt turn and had time to look around to see where I would land before coming down. Once a storm came up and I began to bark and gallop in the dust clouds, now in the air, now along the ground. Before realizing it, I had covered a good part of the distance to the Sierra de Guadarrama—heavens, how magnificent it was to let my powers loose! I flew more than I jumped, and during one gigantic leap I landed not on the earth but in a small lake.... Oh, that was not at all unpleasant since I could swim like a creature that has never lived in any other element than water. I beat the entire lake into a foaming mass, circled above a spot until the lake's bottom was exposed and water overflowed its shores, then galloped off into the mountains and back down again, took a leap of several hundred meters down the sides of a cliff, landed on my four sturdy legs and could endure any kind of shock, whether I fell onto rock or the soft earth. I delighted in cavorting about, jumped into the ocean, by storm or by fog, touched the clouds with my wings and mane, snapped at hail stones falling through thin air, performed kangaroo leaps over entire forests.... And always I see with a lightning gaze the true reality behind the things around me, other colors, other plants, shadowy contours in fog, like tower-high forests of Paleozoic equisetum steaming in the light, mirrored blue lakes boiling as if from hot stones deep below the surface, pullulating clouds on the horizon that whirl around the blinding fire of the sun.... Finally I reach the coast and throw myself from the cliffs into the surging waves. I sail for miles out into the Atlantic Ocean, do battle with the green waves, leap upwards to reach the moon and then dig myself deep, deep, deep into the eternal watery night of the ocean bed, where the pressure envelops you like a leaden coat and where blind monsters, half plant

and half animal, move their slimy open mouths back and forth while drinking in the black water through their gills. I let myself float far out to sea until the surf awakens me and reminds me of land. I see gigantic, dark things floating by, deep below the bottle-green water—whales, or are they the shadows of formless sea monsters from another world? I throw myself against the foaming crests of the waves, which rise as high as mountains and then weightlessly disappear, I lay myself over the breakers, my entire membrane wings spread taut, until each twitching drop in the sea appears to merge with the most subtle pulse of my blood. And finally I go on land and sit on the shore, howling with pleasure, call out and roar into the sunset, cry blubbery tears and the whole time feel extraordinarily vigorous and fit.

Now however I wander once again over the bare, sun-baked fields surrounding Madrid, or I plod with my club feet over the city's sidewalks, the membrane dangling between my legs, up one street and down the other, and search out the gaze of every person I meet, look thousands of different people in the eye to find out if there isn't a single person among them who sees and knows me for what I am. But all of them meet my gaze without changing their expressions; all of them are blind to the condignog. And I know that my only hope for rescue is if a person, a quite ordinary person, sees me for what I am. Then the spell will recede, not before. I find no one. Nevertheless, I can't leave Madrid, for it seems to me that only here, where the metamorphosis took place, will I find my way back to my human form. It is here that I lost my way out of time, here is where I must find my way back into it.

In the meantime I go hungry, for in the world in which I live there is no nourishment for me, and the other reality which actually belongs to me never comes close enough so that I can see into it—fortunately, for only in moments of extreme fear does this reality come closer. It's as if I had to die once more in order to return. Now and again a kind of dizziness comes over me, and then the giant ferns above my head divide and I see something like dark spots in the sunlight, shadows of the rapacious monsters from another world. I see how they glide together and hear sounds like a raspy coughing and pawing at the earth—I have to gather all my strength to stand my ground. If I turn around suddenly I see a glimpse of olive-green necks and heads with ducks bills looming like factory chimneys over the houses.... Should I end up with them, should I go back thousands and thousands of years, until I have found my true home as condignog? Will I ever meet anyone who sees and redeems me, who gives me back my human form?

I sat on a snow-covered peak in the Sierra de Guadarrama and entertained myself with the most pitiful concert that ever emerged from the throat of an unhappy creature. I shed the lonely tears of the condignog which best suit wild territories. Occasionally I long for them to come back.

On the outskirts of Madrid, in a barren field, stands a gunpowder tower, not far from a half dried-out pond; and there I found my redemption.

I had become fond of the place since it exuded such solitude. The pond lay perpetually still like a leaden mirror in the confines of its cracked clay banks. The water produced a thin layer of mud and salt on the sparse reeds growing there, and the surface of the pond gave off a bitter haze of smoke beneath the warming rays of the sun. Close by stood the powder house, a windowless, blind edifice made of cement and rusted iron bolts. Around it grew large burdocks with spider webs between the sharp umbels. The scene reeked of desolation. Far off on the horizon, beyond the barren clay poppy fields of clay, rose the outposts of Madrid: high, bulky barracks for workers and factories, and above them the smoke of the city in the haze of the sun.

Here I like to sit: in the middle of the buzzing sunshine, which exposed the world on all sides.

And here at midday, as I approached the area, I saw a fiery red dot like a giant poppy flower. Everything was bathed in sunlight, everything lay open in blinding light; only I brought darkness wherever I went. What sort of fire-red giant flower was that which had grown by my pond? I set off at a brisk pace, beating my tail against the dry crust of the earth until it started humming, dancing under my red club feet.... What kind of giant, gaping poppy was that standing at the edge of my pond?

It was a red skirt. A young woman sat by the bank of the pond, a poor, homeless girl who probably came from one of the most desolate back alleys of Madrid and had become a vagabond like me. She was eighteen, thin as a reed, but with thick black hair gleaming, uncovered, in the sun. She had put blue make-up on her child-like, emaciated traits, just as elegant Spanish women are wont to do, but she couldn't cover up how pale she was. She sat completely still, had probably sat down to rest out of hunger. But before that she had chosen this spot, my spot. I could see from her looks that her stomach was crying out with hunger just like mine.... She had plucked a morning glory and held it listlessly in her hand. She had probably become aware of the rich, metallic fragrance of the place because hardship had sharpened her senses and brought out her gratitude. Her name was Consuelo.

Consuelo's eyes, which were as sad and empty and innocent as those of a child that knows no sin, and as despondent as the eyes of those who sit in the sun and go hungry, met mine and she instantly recognized me. What intelligent and all-knowing men in Madrid couldn't see, what soulful ladies were blind to, this poor, suffering proletarian child understood, one that through the fever of hunger had gained vision. We were both equally desperate. She recognized my entire suffering existence as condignog. I lay before her on the ground, writhing in pain ... and while she looked deep into my eyes I felt my human form returning. I was saved.

† From *Dolores und Andere Novellen von Johannes V. Jensen* (Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1913), pp. 60–70. Translated by the editor of this Norton Critical Edition.

JAKOB VON UEXKÜLL

From The Environment and Inner World of Animals[†]

Jakob von Uexküll (1864–1944) was a German-speaking biologist from Estonia whose call, at the beginning of the twentieth century, to give up Darwinian anthropocentrism for “the viewpoint of the animal” and its inner “life world” greatly interested scientists, philosophers, and poets. His focus on the animal's *Umwelt* (surrounding world or environment), especially that of lower animals, resulted in striking portraits of an “inner world” imagined from a nonhuman perspective, expressed in a lucid, dramatic prose style accessible to nonspecialists. His popular *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans* (1934) helped pioneer the development of biosemiotics, cybernetics and the modern environmental movement, and has influenced philosophers such as Martin Heidegger and Giorgio Agamben. But his first major work, a portion of whose introduction is presented here, dates from 1909, three years before the writing of *The Metamorphosis*. It is not clear whether Kafka read this work or even knew of the Baltic biologist. However, Uexküll moved in nonscientific circles, writing for the *Neue Rundschau* (to which Kafka subscribed) and corresponding with leading poets and thinkers of his time, including Ernst Cassirer, Rainer Maria Rilke and Gottfried Benn.

* * *

Modern animal biology owes its existence to the introduction of physiological experiments in the study of lower animals. The expectations that physiologists had regarding the expansion of the biological research field had not been met. One searched for an answer to the questions raised by the physiology of higher animals and found instead new problems. The reduction of life forms to chemical and physical processes didn't lead one step further. In this way experimental biology found itself discredited in the eyes of strictly observant physiologists.

For all those scientists however who saw the “essential” core of biology in the life process itself and not in its reduction to chemistry, physics and mathematics, the remarkable wealth of problems that could be solved experimentally had to be an incentive to turn toward the study of lower animals. In short order the abundance of experimental findings became so large that today the classification of this material appears as the more urgent task, given the constant progress of new research. Construction materials are everywhere at hand in order to begin building a new science. But we must simply agree on a plan or design.¹

The most natural path would simply be to extend the old, long existent designs. In the happy times when *anatomy* and *physiology* constituted an undivided basis for biology, every animal was understood as a *functional unity*. Its anatomical structure and physiological capabilities were studied at the same time and considered as belonging together.

No one would come up with the idea of creating a division of labor for technology and then training two kinds of engineers, one for the study of structure and the other for the utilization of energy in machines.

Technology and engineering would have soon foundered on such a division. Biology too would have foundered on the separation of anatomy from physiology if medicine, with its practical needs, had not demanded that they be brought together at least for the study of humans. The most recent studies owe their exceptional biological significance to this fusion of the two sciences. One need merely recall the life work of Pavlov,² or the great successes of the English physiologists Langley and Sherrington.³

Whenever physiology and anatomy have gone their separate ways, it has not been to their benefit. Finally comparative anatomy, which had increasingly neglected the capabilities of the organs, managed to consider the structure of living beings as a mere “formal unity.” “Homology” became the basis of an entirely new theory about the relations between different bodily forms, whereas “analogy” came into disfavor, and in this way dead spatial relations took the

place of the vital reciprocal influence of the organs on each other. It is only recently that experimental embryology has brought the science of anatomy back to the sources of the deepest life problems.

Similarly, general physiology increasingly lost touch with the notion that every living being is a “functional unity.” Instead of striving to discover the design behind every single living being, which can only be determined from the mutual study of anatomy and physiology, scientists conducted one-sided research into the most isolated partial functions in order to consider them as purely physical-chemical problems.

This has been the fate of the biology of the higher animals. An entirely different fate has governed the biology of the lower animals. Here anatomy and physiology didn’t take separate paths; rather, physiology was at times completely suppressed. This was due to Darwinism. Darwinism (not Darwin himself) considered the capabilities of the anatomical structure as “inessential” with regard to *one* problem: how the structure of the higher animals developed out of that of the lower ones.

The Darwinists saw in the evolutionary chain of animals the proof of a gradually self-perfecting structure that developed from the simplest to the most complex form. They forgot one thing however: namely, that the perfection of a given structure cannot be deduced from its complexity. No one will claim that an armored warship is more perfect than the modern rowboats of the international rowing clubs. Moreover, an armored warship would perform very poorly at a rowing regatta. In the same way a horse would quite imperfectly fulfill the role of an earthworm.

The question concerning a higher or lower degree of perfection among life forms can only be posed if one considers each design together with its implementation [in the animal itself] and checks to see which execution is the most successful. There is no doubt that by posing the question in this way the lower animals, because they belong to the oldest species, would claim first prize. For the rule seems to be: the older the family, the better the implementation.

One has also attempted to examine the problem of biological perfection by comparing the needs of organisms with their design and by asking to what extent design corresponds to need. This was the question posed by Darwinism. Only within this perspective does the claim that higher animals are the more perfect make any sense.

When one takes the needs of human beings to be the measure for the designs of all other animals, then of course the highest animals are the most perfect. But

this is such a manifest error of logic that we needn't waste our breath over it. For in the study of an animal's needs we have at our disposal no other resources than its design. This alone gives us insight into the active or passive role that an animal is called to play in its environment.⁴ That is why the entire [Darwinian] manner of posing the question is meaningless.

But even the claim that the varying individuals⁵ of a single species are more or less adapted to their environment rests on no firm experimental foundation. Every varying individual is different in accordance with its modified design, but completely and perfectly adapted to the world around it. For the *design creates in large measure by itself the animal's environment*.

This finding, which I propose to demonstrate step by step, can be considered the only lasting basis for biology. It alone provides the proper understanding of how living creatures order and control the chaos of the inorganic world. Every animal [does this] at a different location and in a different way. From the vast complexity of the inorganic world, every animal chooses what suits it best; that is, it creates its needs in accordance with its design.

Only to a superficial observer would it appear that all sea animals live in a world that is structured in the same way for all of them. Closer study teaches us that each one of these thousands of different life forms possesses a unique environment with which its design is in a reciprocal relationship of influence.

It cannot come as a surprise that an animal's environment includes other life forms. In this way the animals influence each other reciprocally and we find the remarkable phenomenon that the aggressor suits its prey just as well as the prey suits its aggressor.⁶ In this way it is not just the parasite that is adapted to the host but the host is adapted to the parasite.

Attempts to explain this reciprocal relationship between similar types of animals through adaptation have failed miserably. Moreover, they have deflected attention from the most immediate task, which is to identify and describe the environment of every single animal.

This task is not as simple as the uninitiated might believe. To be sure, it's not difficult to observe any given animal in its environment. But in doing so the job is far from being finished. The experimental biologist must try to determine which parts of this environment have an effect on the animal and in what form this takes place.

Our anthropocentric perspective must give way more and more to the standpoint of the animal, which must take absolute precedence.

In this way everything that strikes us as self-evident disappears: all of nature,

the earth, the sky, the stars, indeed, all objects surrounding us. The only thing that remains as factors of the world are those influences that have an effect on the animal in accordance with its design. Their number, their relation to each other are determined by the design. If we analyze this relation to the animal's design, a new world takes shape around each animal, one that is completely different from our own: the animal's *environment*.

Just as the factors of this environment are objective facts, so must we consider the effects they give rise to in the animal's nervous system. Similarly, these effects are classified and ordered by the animal's design. Together they constitute the *inner world* of animals.

* * *

† From *Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere* (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1909), pp. 2–6. Translated by the editor of this Norton Critical Edition. All notes are the editor's.

1. Uexküll's term in German is *Bauplan*, which also means "architect's plan" or "blueprint." He will also use the term to describe the "plan" or "design" that lies in his view behind every living organism.
2. Ivan Pavlov (1849–1936), Russian physiologist.
3. Charles Scott Sherrington (1857–1952), Nobel laureate and president of the Royal Society. John Newport Langley (1852–1925), known for his work on the chemical receptor theory.
4. Uexküll's term here is *Umwelt*, which means simply "surrounding world." It figures in the title of his book and will become one of his most influential definitions because he uses it to focus on the "inner life world" of the animal from its perspective and to discredit anthropomorphic views of biological forms.
5. *Individuum* in German, like its English cognate, is usually reserved for humans though it extends more easily to any single life form. Uexküll's use of the term here is programmatic for his reorientation of the biological hierarchy.
6. The original German terms are *Verfolger* (persecutor) and *Verfolgte* (persecuted), more commonly used in legal proceedings. The same term *Verfolgung* and the theme of parasitism runs through *The Metamorphosis*.

CRITICISM



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GÜNTHER ANDERS

From Franz Kafka[†]

II. The Literal Metaphor

KAFKA'S STORIES ARE NEITHER ALLEGORICAL NOR SYMBOLIC

Of the complex of problems surrounding Kafka's writings two in particular will require closer consideration: first, the phenomenon of time-paralysis, for on this depends the 'beauty' of his work; and secondly, the problem of inverted guilt and punishment, for this contains *in nuce* his moral theory and moral theology. The usual titles for such topics would be, perhaps, 'Kafka the Artist', and 'Kafka as *homo religiosus*'.

Before tackling these themes, however, we should do well to examine the actual language in which Kafka presents them: the language, so it would appear, of some mysterious allegory or symbolism. How is it to be understood, and what are its rules? By what grammar of the mind are the things of 'this' world rendered in terms of 'his' world? Or is perhaps Kafka's literary method a process *sui generis*, which does not fall into either of the accepted categories of allegory or symbolism?

We began by proposing the idea that 'distortion', in Kafka's work as in a scientific experiment, is a means to further knowledge about the world. As it stands this thesis is inadequate. For even if an experimental technique produces results, we shall still not have penetrated nature's secrets unless we understand exactly what our technique is and does. We must therefore elucidate the principle by which Kafka translates reality into his own idiom.

The writer of allegory follows rules laid down by convention, often of mythical or religious origin, in order to substitute an image in place of a concept. The true symbolist takes *partem pro toto*, i.e. he represents one object by another because one is supposed to share the substance, indeed to contain the essence of the other. Kafka does neither of these things. What he translates into images are not concepts, but situations. On the other hand, he cannot be said to create symbols in the usual way either; for symbols can be used only by a writer whose sense of the totality of things, of the innate bonds, the 'sym' which links them, and of the place of his own experience within a divine or natural scheme, remains intact. The fact that the majority of interpreters, prompted by a dislike of

the cold rationality of allegory, have decided rather to consider Kafka as a symbolist, merely indicates a superficial preference for depth; it does not mean that they have been able to provide the requisite key for the entirely new phenomenon which Kafka's prose represents.

In the absence of that community of belief which gives birth to and sustains symbols, all that Kafka has to work with is the common possession of language; for even he, the outsider, has this at his disposal still, in all its range and depth. It cannot be taken from him; he shares it with the enemy—the world—whose favour he seeks. More accurately: he draws on the inherent resources of language, on its figurative and associative character, and insists, as it were, upon its face value in the world.

For example: Because Gregor Samsa wishes to live as an artist (i.e. 'free as air'), he is considered in the eyes of the respectable, down-to-earth world, to be a 'bit of an insect'; thus, in *Metamorphosis* he wakes up as a beetle, whose idea of happiness is to be clinging to the ceiling.

Or again: 'They are really all the same to me,' we say of people who don't concern us at all; and so, as the inescapable companions of his hero during his stay in the village, Kafka introduces two 'assistants' who look exactly alike and whom he calls by the same name.

When an experience makes a 'deep impression', then, according to a similar German expression, 'We come to know it with our own body.' In *The Penal Settlement* the criminal is not told of his punishment verbally: it is inscribed on his back with a needle.

'To live in the public eye' is the idiom for lack of privacy. So in *The Castle* K.'s private life is enacted in a place which is in actual fact someone else's house, and not even a private house at that; and as he makes love to Frieda, the other inhabitants stand around passing comments.

These examples are by no means exhaustive, for even the smallest and apparently abstract parts of everyday speech consist of metaphors, and many of the strangest situations in Kafka's stories can be better understood once it has been realized that he has revived some forgotten visual or literal significance in a word or phrase. When Kafka demands, so to speak, every farthing of the face value of language, he is following (though in a rather unusual sense of the word) an empirical method. For the 'facts' of human experience should not be thought of as a kind of pre-linguistic raw material unshaped by words; man's conscious life is from the beginning interpreted and indeed identified with language. When a man says that he could 'die of shame', or that he is 'attached to someone', or

‘uplifted’ by a song, he has said something significant about human reality. All Kafka does is simply to reveal the full, concrete meaning of these linguistic images. None of his images, no matter how absurd it may appear, is without some inherent relevance to the conditions of human existence, which were realized in the earliest reflections of language long before Kafka undertook to re-examine their meaning.

This explains the fundamental difference between symbolism and allegory on the one hand, and Kafka’s method on the other. Kafka no longer lives—as, for example, Bunyan did—in a world with which he shares accepted symbols or allegories. But he is at the same time unable or unwilling to fabricate new allegories after the manner of Nietzsche or Wagner, those desperate creators of private mythologies. He does not invent images, but uses those which already exist, taking their visual content, their ‘real’ meaning and scrutinizing it under a microscope. Whereupon the commonest metaphor is suddenly discovered to contain such monstrous detail that its elaboration takes on a horrifying reality. By illuminating the detail inherent in an image he makes language yield a new insight into the reality of our world.

KAFKA’S WORLD IS OBSCURE BECAUSE HIS METAPHORS CLASH

Kafka’s imagery should therefore not, strictly speaking, be regarded as ‘mysterious’. His writing may be obscure, but this is largely because the metaphors he uses often obscure one another. It is possible to turn a given metaphor into a single pictorial image; many of Kafka’s shorter pieces are metaphorical monoliths of this kind, consisting of a minimum of sentences (and thus approaching that simultaneity of all the parts as they exist in a picture). The story entitled *Up in the Gallery* takes up a little more than a page and consists of only two sentences. But as soon as a number of metaphors has to be used—and a novel cannot grow out of a single metaphor—then inevitably these metaphorical scenes and situations begin to clash and overlap, and the sense is obscured. In *The Castle*, for example, the newcomer K., since he does not belong anywhere and has learned nothing which could be of use to him here, must ‘go to school’ again. So Kafka finds him sleeping-quarters in a school. But afterwards many things happen to him which have nothing to do with this metaphorical situation. What need has Frieda, his mistress, to be ‘at school’ with him, for she is an adult and a member of the village community, while only K. is a stranger? The ‘logic’ which makes K. live in a schoolroom is quite different from the ‘logic’ which

makes Frieda live there as K.'s mistress, and what might make sense in one case is inappropriate in the other.

Macaulay, in his remarks on Bunyan, points out with regard to Bunyan's allegory that 'the types are often inconsistent with each other'. And a reader of Kafka may often be unsure whether his difficulty is due simply to obscurity in this or that metaphor or to an impossible jumble of metaphors. It will at all events not be surprising if he decides that Kafka's short fables which are 'all of a piece' are more nearly perfect as works of art than the novels with their rich confusion of imagery.

That different metaphors may be superimposed on one another is not, however, the only difficulty that confronts the interpreter of Kafka. For there are also several even of the shorter stories which do not immediately yield their meaning, because they are, so to speak, locked with several keys at once. Even when every one of the keys is available to us, the door may still not open, because we are incapable of using all of them at the same time. Or, to put the matter a different way: there often occurs especially in the novels what is known in music as an 'enharmonic modulation'. In the course of the story a person or object whose existence is to be explained in terms of one metaphor takes on another metaphorical nuance: the 'D sharp' suddenly becomes an 'E flat'. But since this person or thing still preserves an apparently constant identity in itself throughout the story, its total significance becomes obscure. Or does its total significance not then consist precisely in this two-sidedness or ambiguity? As we have seen, for Kafka ambiguity is a dominant mode of experience: the world is for him in all its aspects an object both of fear *and* of desire.

Thus, the law courts in *The Trial* stand for two different things. On the one hand, the poor, whose very existence makes K. feel his own existence to be in itself 'guilty'. It is no accident that the court-rooms are situated in the attics of Pauper's Road, in practically every alms-house. On the other hand, in closest possible contact with the courts stand many members of that other 'world', the ruling class, and particularly those who regard K.'s social conscience as a disgrace. This ambivalence leads us to suppose again that Kafka's conscience is doubly burdened with guilt, both because he does not share the fate of the very poor, and also because he does not properly belong to the 'world'—because he is somehow inadequate. He never resolved in his own mind this dilemma of conscience; and it is scarcely too much to say that the metaphor of the 'high' court is meant to cover the vagueness of his moral position, and to elevate his indecision to the level of a paradox.

KAFKA'S CHARACTERS ARE NOT MORE ABSTRACT THAN REAL PEOPLE: THEY ARE PEOPLE
ATTACHED TO A JOB

Kafka, then, is not writing allegory. But are not Kafka's characters as much abstractions as those in allegory, close relatives, in fact, of those talking virtues and vices portrayed by Bunyan? Is not the reason why Kafka's work is obscure simply that he puts before us a private collection of metaphors which he has assembled *ad hoc* whereas Bunyan could take over his figures and situations from the familiar allegorical world of Christian theology?

Certainly, there is something abstract about the figures Kafka draws. But this abstraction must be understood less as a literary convention than as a real condition. Whereas allegory presents humanized abstractions, Kafka's stories represent abstract human beings. These men and women are 'abstract' in the sense suggested by the original Latin word *abstrahere*: they have been removed, torn away from the fulness of human existence. Many of them are indeed nothing but functions: this man is a messenger and nothing else, that woman is a useful contact and nothing else. But this state of being no more than one's 'function' is not an invention of Kafka's; it has its precedent in the modern world where a man only counts in terms of some minor specialized function, so that he really *is* this job, reduced by the division of labour to a 'bit part' devoid of character. The average realistic novelist makes little use of this fact and usually contrives the action of his novel in such a way that the professional function of the character is kept out of sight. He may even be said to falsify reality by portraying his characters as full and complete individuals. We can see now that Kafka's 'marionettes' are prophetically enacting through their grotesque selves and experiences the most ghastly occurrences of our time. Societies have reached the dreadful stage where a man who has no particular function to perform may be regarded as not real, as nothing, as unworthy of life. Death in concentration camps has been the fate of those to whom society could not or would not assign a particular function.

Many nineteenth-century novels, by ignoring or trivializing the importance of a man's profession (or by taking for their hero that exceptional example of the complete man, the artist), imply that a man's real self exists only outside his profession. Kafka goes to the opposite extreme and shows a man's profession as his exclusive mode of existence, and man as completely swallowed up by it. In this way the concept of profession acquires something of the absolute character of a religious vocation. And this gives rise to a striking similarity between Kafka's picture of man and that represented by Calvinist doctrine. What a man

‘really’ is—the question despairingly asked by existentialism—Kafka neither asks nor answers, simply because there is no room for this ‘real’ person in the ‘professional’ world he describes. *Imperator somnians imperator*: the emperor is emperor even while he sleeps. Kafka makes this identification of man and profession in the modern world absurdly obvious, by inventing absurd professions; but the point is no less true—it only does not strike us as abnormal—in the case of everyday professions. In a story which Kafka wrote when he was only twenty-five, *Conversation with a Praying Man*, this man says, ‘It is the purpose of my life to be gazed upon by others.’ What self remains to pray, if the man is nothing but the figure, the function of a praying man?

‘I have been appointed as a beater, so I beat,’ a man explains (in *The Trial*), who, as a result of K.’s unwitting guilt, is made to spend his days beating two officials. Thirty-five years ago, when Kafka created this character, it was felt to be the work of a sadist, some perverse oddity of imagination to be explained by psychoanalysis. The ordinary reader rejected such figures as unreal, because they were nothing but functions and because, without the slightest trace of a moral conscience, they no longer really acted but merely obeyed. To-day we have heard the answer, the same kind of answer as Kafka had already put into the mouths of his ‘mad’ characters, from men employed not only to beat but to exterminate, when they were put on trial at Nuremberg. It is the reply of those deprived of their power, of those who are irresponsible because no responsibility is left to them—in short, of those who do not really live but whose lives are used by others.

If a man is nothing but his profession, if his being is nothing more than the role for which he is ‘cut out’, then he himself is indeed a nonentity, existing not in his own right but, as it were, by permission of the authorities, an authorized copy of his own official papers. Compared with these documents, which are the token of his reality in the administrative world, the individual (*L’homme attaché à sa carte d’identité*, as a French author formulated it fifteen years later) is as valueless as the actual phenomenon compared with its Platonic Idea. This bureaucratic Platonism is anything but a farce of Kafka’s invention. That a man having no original document to which he corresponds can count as socially non-existent is now simply a fact of history, just as it is a fact that men employed as torturers will do this job like any other. Here, indeed, Kafka has proved to be a prophetic realist.

Yet again there is an ambiguous element in his inspiration. Mixed with the despair he feels at the sight of man as a mere functionary, there is also envy and

yearning. From the point of view of the hero who has no function (and this is largely Kafka's own view) it appears that the only people who are real and adult are those who have a definite occupation and purpose in society, and who identify themselves with their job. Ask a man with a profession what he 'is' and he will say: 'I am an architect' or 'I am an innkeeper'. Kafka's characters are certainly not mere allegorical concepts; they are men for whom it is as impossible to be separated from their function as it is for a table to become a chair. Kafka was so absolutely unsure about what his own place in society really was, that he inevitably relished the idea of rigid classifications. When he identified a man with his profession this was not realism only but also the projection of an inner wish.

KAFKA'S AGNOSTICISM IS BORN OF POWERLESSNESS, FOR TO BE POWERLESS IS TO BE
UNINFORMED

The entanglement or clash of metaphors often obscures the sense of Kafka's stories, and sometimes obliterates it altogether; just as a conglomeration of sign-posts would mean nothing as a whole despite what might be plainly written on each one.

There is, however, another reason for the obscurity of events in Kafka's writings, and for the consequent difficulty of interpretation. It lies in the fact that the majority of his characters never know where they stand and are confronted by fundamentally incalculable situations. Kafka gives the impression that he himself can see no further than they—as if he really knew no more than these creatures of his imagination! In this assumption of ignorance he is very much more rigorous and consistent than any other author who may have pretended to disguise his 'omniscience'. Kafka 'does not know' with an intensity which is truly agnostic, and this agnosticism is to be explained in terms again of his feeling that he has no rights. Since his characters are without rights they do not *deserve* to know, to be informed; they are not worthy to be told what their civil status is, for instance, despite the reign of a Super-bureaucracy. When they say, 'one never knows', what they really mean is 'one has no right to know'. Kafka's agnosticism is a matter of rights, a political phenomenon.

If no one knows who he is, this would seem to contradict our earlier assertion that Kafka's characters are identical with their profession, their official status. But the experience of any totalitarian state shows how this contradiction may exist in reality. It is part of the human ignominy of Kafka's world that, although each individual depends for his existence upon being an official employee, no

one enjoys the right to see through the role he plays in the bureaucratic whole. A man is taken account of and allowed to 'be' only in so far as he is a means: thus he himself has no access to truth, and lives as an agnostic. In this way a total absence of freedom becomes synonymous with agnosticism.

If a man does not know what position he is in nor where he is going, what he owes nor to whom, what he may be suspected of, or why he is accused, or whether or not he is tolerated (if so, for how long, if not, on what authority), then all his energies will be consumed by an unremitting search for meaning, a kind of mania for interpretation. No event will be so insignificant, no gesture so fleeting, that it does not at once provoke the question, 'What does this mean?' This mania for interpretation is thus the stigma of the individual deprived of power; of one who (to adopt an old saying) must forever interpret the world because others rule and change it.

At the same time it also gives Kafka a chance to display his literary art. Interpretation opens a door into endless possibilities and complexities. Kafka's characters step from the narrowest threshold of reality into the limitless spaces of if-clauses and subjunctives, and often a story is largely created out of such an excursion into hypothesis; the mania for interpretation becomes a logical fantasy. The story *Up in the Gallery* begins with such an 'if': the subjunctive, offspring of uncertainty, establishes its sovereignty and grows into a masterpiece of short-story writing.

The prose-piece entitled *The Sudden Walk* (in *Reflections*) is another example; consisting of a single enormous sentence, it is 'introduced' by an if-clause of twenty-four lines. To achieve the effect of precision, Kafka divides this if-clause into nine coordinated if-clauses, and these in turn into others. The weight of the main clause following these 'if's' is insignificant by comparison.

This discrepancy between the significance of what 'might be' and the insignificance of what 'is' characterizes the fate of those condemned to live in a world where they can consider many possibilities, but yet lack the authority to decide between them. Theirs is a state for which 'slavery' is too primitive a word since it prompts the mind to think only of external circumstances. Such people are in a condition that had best be called simply 'unfreedom', in which 'mere possibility' ceases to be hypothetical and insubstantial. Their free will, their capacity either to realize an idea or to reject it, becomes paralysed. And so these unrealized possibilities, which they cannot dispose of, begin to haunt them, assuming the character of real things that seem to demand description. Thus, Kafka's meticulous elaboration of conditional clauses is yet another symptom of

the absence of personal will, the most striking expression of that syntax of unfreedom which is the groundwork of all his prose.

In a sense, the problem of Kafka's entire work is to know to what extent it should be read in the indicative, and to what extent in the subjunctive. 'If the world were to signify this,' he seems to reflect, 'then this would be the right course to follow, and it would have these consequences; if, on the other hand the world were to signify such and such other things, then I would have such and such a course to follow, and that again would have other consequences.' What the consequences will be is always deadly certain; but whether or not they rest on a valid hypothesis Kafka is never sure. The result is that he often allows two or more possibilities to stand side by side without being able to say himself which he really means. All that finally remains as real is his own uncertainty, which he now denounces in himself on moral grounds as lack of resolution, now again humbly respects on religious grounds as a consciousness of not being worthy of the truth. Where many different positions have been adopted about a single scene (as when K. is finally condemned in the cathedral in *The Trial*) the resultant impression is of a many-sided and inscrutable truth at the core. And although Kafka would probably have been happier had he at times been able to forego his profound thoughts, he has nevertheless again and again created the doubtful virtue of depth out of the dire necessity of ambiguity.

We read in *The Castle* that 'every step' is recorded in the official dossiers but that the entries are never read, and that the fact that they are never read has a deep significance; and yet this frightening description of red tape is not merely ironical. Nor is it only another way of saying that though the conscience registers everything the divine authorities remain indifferent—i.e. that morality is without effect. The sentence in question may well have these implications, but it is primarily a symptom of Kafka's readiness to believe in paradoxes, of his desire to see the distorted negative of the world transformed into a religious positive. It is again a symptom of his readiness to recognize in the merciless greatness and inscrutability of power some evidence of meaning, even as Job finally recognized God's justice because He had created such gigantic creatures as the hippopotamus and the crocodile. Perhaps Kafka himself could not have said what he really means when he abandons the indicative for the subjunctive mood. But must not this mean for us, at least, that his work, despite its richness of insight, will remain philosophically and morally suspect? Is it not almost in itself suspicious that he, whose concerns and cast of mind certainly do not suggest that he was primarily a novelist in any conventional sense, should have chosen to

describe reality and express his philosophical ideas through the medium of fiction? Even where he is telling a fable, like the magnificent *Before the Law*, he still leaves us with a number of possible interpretations and no means of knowing which is the correct one.

III. Medusa

Viens-tu du ciel profond ou sors-tu de l'abîme,
O Beauté? Ton regard, infernal et divin,
Verse confusément le bienfait et le crime ...
Baudelaire

FEAR PARALYSES TIME. HENCE KAFKA'S USE OF STATIC IMAGES

In view of what has already been said about Kafka's novels, it will not be found surprising that they contain scarcely any plot. Where a man is condemned before he starts and is forced to repeat again and again the same kind of experience, there can be neither development nor climax, in a sense not even any grandly conclusive catastrophe. The famous execution scene with which *The Trial* ends could easily come immediately after the opening chapter. On the other hand, there are some shorter stories, several no more than a page in length, which are perfectly organized and self-contained; they are difficult to classify but achieve the effect in some cases of logical poems, in others of religious pamphlets. Their perfect completeness is due to their representation of an absolute, immobile moment of time. Paradoxically, his style here, where clearly he must write within the narrowest limits, runs to sentences of extraordinary length, which concentrate a succession of events into a single frozen gesture.

Whereas nearly all modern literature, at least that more or less directly influenced by the Romantic movement, has an affinity with music, Kafka's prose is far more closely related to the plastic arts. For him, and for the characters in his stories, life is so entangled that it does not progress, and this failure to progress can only be rendered by a static picture. For example, in the second of his *Diary Notes* (published in the sixth volume of his *Collected Works*) Kafka speaks of a 'wound inflicted by a flash of lightning which still persists'; the vision of a 'lasting flash' we should associate rather with painting than with literature.

The paralysis of time portrayed in Kafka's stories is fundamentally different from that which we find in the works of a 'classicizing' writer like Stefan George, who aimed at a 'sculptural' rather than a 'musical' effect in some of his

later poems. For George it is fear that all will be swallowed up by the relentless course of history which inspires in him the desire to arrest the flow of time. As with all 'classicists' he *wishes* to immortalize the moment in a work of art, whereas for Kafka the opposite is true: *his* eternal moment is a curse, the cataleptic terror of one who has reached an absolute *impasse*.

This transformation of a process into a picture, so typical of Kafka, is reflected in the very syntax of his prose. The difference between a picture and a sentence might be described by saying that the language of painting has no parts of speech. A picture has not yet made the simplest, the basic distinction of verbal language, that between subject and predicate. A sentence is an instrument of communication, it plays its part in the process of life, it *does* something; for instance, it draws someone's attention *to* something *in* an object or situation: 'to' and 'in' mark the divisions of what in a painting is all one. Thus, a picture shows ruins; the sentence communicates, by dividing the picture into its component parts: 'The town is destroyed.'

The device by which Kafka transforms sentences into pictures is often very simple: he concentrates the sentence, 'Machines are lethal', into the execution machine of the *Penal Colony*; the sentence, 'The objects of our world are inscrutable', into the object 'Odradek', the patent model of meaninglessness; the sentence 'Artists starve', into the *Hunger-Artist*—in short, the objects in his world are frozen truths, objects created out of truths about objects in our world.

There are passages in Kafka's writings where he leaves out the verb altogether—rather like that part of a film script which indicates only what is to be seen. In the following example a man is actually likened to a stone figure in a sentence which 'petrifies' through its very lack of a main verb. 'In bed' (we read in the third entry in the *Diary*), 'the knee a little raised, lying there in the folds of the blanket, gigantic like the stone figure beside the outer steps of a public building, motionless amid the milling crowd of people hurrying by and yet in distant, scarcely real contact with them.' And here the sentence ends. If it were to go on and say what happened or was being done, it would contradict itself: for what it describes is total immobility.

Thus, happy endings are seldom to be found in Kafka; *America* and *The Great Wall of China* are virtually the only exceptions. Most of his stories are broken off without a solution once the problem has been discussed; and since they never contain even the seeds of an ultimate solution, the ending comes with the finality of death itself. Yet this inconclusiveness is not an accident but a virtue; for if Kafka had rounded off his stories in a more conventionally 'artistic'

manner, he would have belied his purpose, which was to present life as a complete *impasse*. Whenever a story is rounded off, some measure of optimism is always implied. In his early novel *America* Kafka tried in fact to imitate Dickens, that master of the happy ending; later he came to see that the fragmentary experience of an entirely isolated individual could find its true expression only in a literary fragment. *The Castle* was to have ended in the following way: K., ostensibly appointed as a land-surveyor in the village but never recognized as such, continues his endless attempts to legalize his status, i.e. to secure his right to belong. Finally, as he lies dying, he learns that, though he does not actually possess any right to live here, now that he is here he will be tolerated. This conclusion can hardly be called 'happy'—though by comparison with the way Kafka's prophetic nightmare was to end in reality, it may well appear comforting enough.

It is ultimately true to say that most of Kafka's stories do not need the conventional ending, any more than a sculpture needs the final resolution of a major chord. They have their artistic perfection in the static completeness and finality of the image.

BEAUTY IN KAFKA IS LIKE THE BEAUTY OF THE GORGON'S HEAD

'The wound ... inflicted by a flash of lightning which still persists': the phrase suggests a flash of lightning turned to stone. Or again we read: 'They pressed their shoulders firmly against his from behind, they did not bend their arms but used them to entwine the full length of K.'s arms, below they held his hands with a well-practised, irresistible, standard grip. K. walked stiffly stretched between them and now the three of them formed such a unity that *if one of them had been shattered by a blow, the others would have been shattered with him*. It was the kind of unity which perhaps only a lifeless thing can form.' (My italics.)

'Only a lifeless thing'—a marching statue, in fact: these three men are as if petrified. And it is this petrification which lends beauty to Kafka's world—the terrible beauty of the Medusa.

'It is truly admirable,' we read in a learned treatise of 1832, 'how the spirit of the Greeks, capable of making all things beautiful, could extract even from the ancient and terrible figure of the Medusa an ideal of sublime virginal beauty in the very moment of violent death.' Such admiration is justified, although the explanation may be misleading. For the Greeks did not simply create beauty out of the terrible *despite* its terror, but discovered a source of beauty in the very

terror itself. It is important to realize that there is always a potential kinship between the experiences of beauty and fear.

SOME POINTS OF AFFINITY BETWEEN TERROR AND BEAUTY

1. Both the terrible and the beautiful are unapproachable. Thus beauty and fear come together in a beast of prey which is 'frighteningly beautiful'. Its terrible aspect makes us keep our distance; and from a distance we can see also that it is beautiful, for distance is a primary condition of all aesthetic values.

'Temenon' (or in Latin 'templum'), i.e. that which is secluded, was the name given by the Greeks to their holy and terrible place of worship, which was taboo. Similarly, a work of art is secluded, placed at a distance from the everyday world perhaps by a curtain, or by a frame, or by a pedestal.

2. Time stands still for the man who is frightened, so that he may be said to experience, in a more primitive form, that timeless or absolute awareness which the greatest art has the power to awaken in us.

3. In describing what fear 'does' to us we invariably use metaphors: it 'overwhelms' us, or 'roots us to the spot'; it is difficult to say precisely in what way such effects are 'real', and the same sort of difficulties, and metaphors, are to be found in descriptions of the effect of art.

PRECEDENTS BOTH ANCIENT AND MODERN

In early versions of the myth Artemis rises not out of the foam of the waves, but out of the emasculated remains of Chronos, which had been thrown into the sea. In one of his odes Pindar praises the beauty of the Medusa's cheeks, even though he says of her that she possesses the deadly power to petrify. In another ode he tells how Athene, after the Gorgon has been beheaded, invented the sweetness of flute-music to imitate the cries of lamentation. In other versions Pegasus rises from the bloody torso of the murdered Gorgon. And Ovid, too, declares in the fourth of his *Metamorphoses* that the Medusa was so captivating that many men cherished the hope of winning her.

Such classical examples may be taken at random; and others can be found even in modern literature: 'For the beautiful is only the beginning of the terrible,' writes Kafka's contemporary, Rilke, 'for it serenely despises to destroy us.' These lines might have been written as a motto for Kafka's work.

If we translate this insight of Rilke's into the terminology of classical aesthetics, it implies that the beautiful and the sublime are not two categories *sui*

generis. The sublime (or the supremely powerful, or the terrifying) is identical with the beautiful, so long as it does not exercise its overwhelming power, i.e. so long as it remains at a distance. This definition will help us to understand the nature of beauty in Kafka's work. For what is the Castle, for instance, if not both unapproachable and supremely powerful? Since it inspires neither confidence nor faith, K. beholds this world always with fearful eyes: it is fixed, transfixed, in his mind as though indeed it 'serenely despised to destroy' him. And so long as it refrains from making full use of its power, it appears dazzlingly beautiful in its breath-taking immensity.

Rilke's poetic meditation, which in Kafka's works becomes a reality, stresses the idea of *renunciation*: supreme power is beautiful in so far as it refrains from destroying. The idea that some form of renunciation is involved in beauty is not without historical antecedents: it plays a part, for instance, in the aesthetics of Kant and Schiller. They too see the realm of beauty, the realm of 'freedom in the phenomenal world', as the fruit of renunciation. It is attained when man succeeds in suspending his desire, his personal interest in the things of the world, and is able to enjoy them with disinterested pleasure. Yet there is a decisive difference between this theory of renunciation and that inherent in the works of Rilke and Kafka. For Kant it is man himself who renounces. Beauty arises from an act of man's free will, an affirmation of his freedom from all desire to possess, appropriate or destroy the things of the world. For Rilke and Kafka, on the other hand, man does not have the power to renounce; it is rather power itself—all but deified in some symbol of sublime otherness—it is Rilke's angel or Kafka's castle, which 'renounces'. This renunciation is a gift of grace, and it is the grateful response to such grace which makes these symbols appear beautiful. Power arrayed in its robes of glory is always beautiful; even a weapon may be beautiful—before it has been used. It is here, in this nuance of menace, this permanent sense of danger, that we must seek the principle of beauty in Kafka's world and the secret of his most striking effects, which he at once symbolized and exemplified in the image of the 'static flash'. Yet viewed sociologically, this conception of beauty can only be described as the notion of a man who is not free, or, more accurately, of a man who is only just tolerated and who continues to admire so long as he is permitted to live.

If it is true that this fusion of the beautiful and the terrible is the source of widespread admiration for Kafka to-day, then we must seriously ask ourselves whether the time for such aesthetic pleasures has not passed. For the terrible in our time means the secret police and concentration camps and gas-chambers; it

means power in a form which it is disastrous to idealize.

Conventional aesthetics assume as self-evident that in the relationship between man and the work of art, man is the beholder and the work the thing beheld. Thus Husserl, for instance, distinguishes between the ‘intentional act’, and the ‘intentional object’, of contemplation. But as soon as terror becomes a constituent element of beauty, this relationship between a voluntary act of beholding and the thing beheld is completely reversed. The mask of the Gorgon is essentially the very opposite of an object of contemplation. It performs the act of seeing itself, it is the evil eye which compels the beholder to go on beholding, and even turns him to stone. What is true of the mask is also true, *mutatis mutandis*, of Kafka’s world. It is not we who look at it, but *it* which fixes us with its baleful stare.

The experience of living under the constant stare of others is a terror which has become all too familiar in modern Europe, the terror of being not the beholder but the object beheld. One phase of that terror is now over; yet the trauma it has inflicted is too deep to heal easily. Not only do many real reminders persist to prevent it from healing, but the very popularity of such a writer as Kafka may betray an unwillingness to recover. For in his work the trauma is cherished as a cultural possession.

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† From Günther Anders, *Franz Kafka*, trans. A. Steer and A. K. Thorlby (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1960), pp. 42–62. Reprinted by permission of The Random House Group Limited.

WALTER H. SOKEL

Kafka’s “Metamorphosis”: Rebellion and Punishment†

Only recently has serious attempt been made to subject *Metamorphosis*, one of Kafka’s most characteristic works, to genuine critical analysis. These analyses have so far employed three basic concepts: the “extended metaphor”;¹ the “inverted fairy tale”;² the “parable of human irrationality.”³ It is my feeling that the first two of these concepts, though significant as far as they go, are insufficient as total explanations of *Metamorphosis*. The third concept I consider, as will appear in the course of my remarks, to be based on a misunderstanding.

Günther Anders has pointed out that Kafka’s literary uniqueness lies in the

fact that he dramatizes conventional figures of speech and endows them with full and consistent detail; his tales act out the implications of metaphors buried in the German idiom. *Metamorphosis*, the story of the travelling salesman Gregor Samsa's transformation into a giant species of vermin, is cited as a prominent example. In German usage the appellation "drecksiger Käfer" (dirty bug) denotes a slovenly and unclean individual. Kafka transforms the metaphor into a narrative with a minutely detailed bourgeois setting. To contribute to Anders' interesting idea, I would like to note here that the charwoman in the story calls Gregor an "alter Mistkäfer." *Mistkäfer* literally means any species of beetle whose habitat is dung, garbage, and dirt generally.⁴ Figuratively the term denotes, in Austrian and South German usage, a person of unclean and untidy habits. Gregor's father, before he can know of Gregor's metamorphosis, assumes that Gregor's room is untidy. He assures his son that the chief clerk will excuse the disorder in his room—a disorder expected of someone whom one would call "alter Mistkäfer." Gregor's metamorphosis into a disgusting insect seems to confirm the father's opinion of his son.

However, to see nothing but an extended metaphor in Kafka's work is not to see enough. The tale is too long, too packed with statements, too rich in meaning to be defined simply as a metaphor, no matter how extended. As a first approach to a formal analysis of Kafka's opus Anders' concept is excellent (Kafka himself is reported to have claimed that the metaphor is the basis of all poetry);⁵ as the sole key to his long work it does not suffice. It ignores, for example, the numerous statements in the narrative dealing with the situation of Gregor and his family before the metamorphosis. These alone make for a textual and poetic complexity which overburdens the theory of the single metaphor.

The German scholar Heselhaus and the American Angus have analyzed Kafka's *Metamorphosis* as a pessimistic and bitterly parodistic inversion of the *Beauty and the Beast* type of fairy tale. In Kafka's world love fails to overcome horror, and the "beauty" (Gregor's sister) condemns the "beast" (Gregor) to die instead of re-transforming him with her kiss. This view cannot fail to attract. Gregor indeed seems to test his family, especially his sister, and his tragedy lies in their inability to pass the test, i.e., to recognize and love the son and brother in the monster. Yet, like the "extended metaphor," the "inverted fairy tale" definition fails to take into account the background of Gregor's metamorphosis, his relationship to his work and his employer. (Nor does it accord with the fact that Gregor consents to his rejection by the family and dies without bitterness toward them.) Moreover, it assigns a central role to Gregor's erotic daydream

about his sister when he hears her playing the violin, a motif about which another investigator, F. D. Luke, comes to very different conclusions. Mr. Luke shifts the responsibility for the tragedy from the sister (and the family) to Gregor himself. He points up the aggressive, egotistical, and incestuous nature of Gregor's "poetic" daydream and shows how, if realized, it would ruin the sister whom he pretends to love so tenderly. Luke detects in Kafka's tale the dichotomy between art and life, disease and health, refined perversion and insensitive normality, so familiar to us from Thomas Mann. The major difference is that Kafka ruthlessly shears the sphere of "Art" and the "unnatural" of its traditional splendor and beauty which Thomas Mann's Venetian setting in *Death in Venice*, for example, still bestows upon it.

It lies in the nature of Kafka's deeply ambiguous art that no single analysis can completely comprehend his multi-faceted creation. Each can merely be one step toward the explanation of a "mystery," the essence of which can perhaps never be fully resolved. My own contribution must not, therefore, be considered as intending to supersede previous studies; rather it proposes to supplement them by viewing certain portions of Kafka's *Metamorphosis* which have not as yet been given sufficient attention.

I propose to raise this question: Does Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis possess a function in the total narrative? Is there a reason for it? The total narrative includes a time before the metamorphosis; it begins with the business failure of Gregor's father and the debt to Gregor's employer contracted at that time. To find an answer to my question it will be necessary to examine the pre-history of the metamorphosis itself, which previous studies have largely ignored, contained in Gregor's musings after he wakes up, specifically his relationship to his firm and to his employer. Also it will be necessary to consider the role of the chief clerk. Finally we must deal with the meaning of the specific insect shape into which Gregor has changed. Mindful of the advice of a number of recent critics to investigators of Kafka's work,⁶ this study will "take Kafka at his word"; it will assume, that is, that every statement made by the author "counts" in the context of his work and that a careful scrutiny of the text may reveal his art and a good bit of its "mystery" to us.

Any reader of Kafka's *Metamorphosis* must have noted with some surprise that Gregor Samsa, upon waking up to find himself transformed, ponders much more over his job than over his strange misfortune. Appearing to forget what has happened to him, he resents the necessity of getting up and continuing the harried existence of a travelling salesman. Gregor has been intensely dissatisfied

with his job; he especially chafes under the lack of respect shown him by his firm and the degrading treatment accorded him by his boss, a tyrant who addresses his employees from a high desk as though he were seated on a throne. We learn from Gregor's reflections that he has nurtured rebellious thoughts about his boss and dreamed of telling him off in a fashion that would send the old man toppling off his high desk, while Gregor would walk out into freedom. However, he has had to inhibit this rebellious wish because of the huge debt which his father owes the employer and which Gregor has to pay off slowly by working for him. He has to continue his hated bondage until the distant day when the debt will be paid. Now he must get up, dress, and catch the early train.

However, the metamorphosis has intervened and made this impossible. It accomplishes, as we can see, in part at least, the goal of Gregor's longed-for rebellion. It sets him free of his odious job. At the same time, it relieves him of having to make a choice between his responsibility to his parents and his yearning to be free.⁷ The metamorphosis enables Gregor to become free and stay "innocent," a mere victim of uncontrollable calamity.

The text of the story will shed further light on this function of Gregor's metamorphosis. During his bitter reflections upon his job Gregor flares up, cursing it: "The devil take it all!" Immediately he feels an itching sensation on his belly and touches the spot with one of his legs; but a cold shudder ripples through him at the touch of his new body. We note that no sooner does Gregor express the wish that the devil free him of his job than he is reminded of his transformed body. This conjunction endows the figure of speech with a sinister and literal significance. If we substitute "metamorphosis" for "devil" Gregor's wish has actually been granted, for the metamorphosis has surely taken the job from him. A parallel to the Faust legend suggests itself, with the important qualification that the "devil's gift" to Gregor has been given him in his sleep. At any rate Gregor has, to be sure unconsciously, exchanged his birthright, his human form made in the image of God, for a "guiltless" escape from an intolerable situation. But a chill seizes him when he realizes his new form of existence. His shudder is the price exacted for his escape.

Furthermore, we discover through the chief clerk's remarks that shortly before the metamorphosis a crisis has been developing in Gregor's relations with his work. The chief clerk claims that Gregor's efforts have slackened badly and that his sales have diminished to such a point that his job is endangered. The boss even strongly suspects him of having embezzled funds of the firm. Gregor denies the truth of these accusations; but he admits that he has been feeling

unwell and should have asked for a sick leave. We see then that Gregor's body was beginning to feel the strain of his work too hard to bear when the metamorphosis occurred, freeing him of any further responsibility.

The question arises whether illness would not have served the same purpose. Indeed there are frequent references to illness in the beginning of the story. Gregor behaves in some respects like a sick man. One of the first thoughts occurring to him is to report himself sick. He feels a "faint dull ache" in his side. He interprets the change in his voice as a symptom of a beginning cold. His sister asks him whether he feels unwell. His mother insists that he must be sick and sends for the doctor, from whom Gregor expects a miraculous deliverance. I have already mentioned that Gregor actually felt sick before the fateful event.⁸ But when he considers reporting himself sick, he immediately rejects the idea. The firm never believes in the illness of its employees; it relies on the *Krankenkassenarzt*, the doctor of the Health Insurance, who "regarded all mankind as perfectly healthy malingerers." Gregor visualizes the boss coming to the apartment with the physician and reproaching his parents about their "lazy" son. Illness, therefore, would still leave him helpless in the company's power. Besides Gregor feels perfectly well physically, after his change, and has a ravenous appetite. The metamorphosis is not sickness. For sickness would not provide a condition vital to Gregor's metamorphosis—the element of retaliation and aggression against the firm.

Gregor's daydream, as we have seen, embraced not only freedom from the job, but also aggressive action against the boss. The metamorphosis realizes this dream of revolt in an oblique, indirect way. To explain this, we must examine the role the chief clerk plays in the story.

The chief clerk comes to the apartment to accuse Gregor of grave neglect of duty and threatens him with dismissal. His arrogant tone, his readiness to suspect the worst motives, his pitiless view of an employee's decline in usefulness, so reminiscent of the Taylor "speed-up system" ("This is not the season of the year for a business boom, of course, we admit that, but a season of the year for doing no business at all, that does not exist, Mr. Samsa, must not exist")⁹—all these typify the inhumanity of the business from which Gregor longs to escape. Whether Kafka intended to pillory the "ethics" of the Central European business world, made merciless by the petty scale of its operations and the stiff competition, does not concern us here. What interests us is that the junior manager's or chief clerk's visit highlights the oppressive hold the company has over Gregor, because of his father's debt, and the terror which it can inspire in

him. By sending the chief clerk, the firm pursues Gregor in order to crush him with its threat of instant dismissal before he has had a chance to pay off the debt.

What is Gregor's reaction to the chief clerk's coming? First he feels intense anger. Then the thought occurs to him that the chief clerk himself might be changed into a bug some day. ("Gregor tried to suppose to himself that something like what had happened to him today might someday happen to the chief clerk; one really could not deny that it was possible.") There is a parallel between this thought and his former wish of seeing the boss fall down from his high seat. In either case Gregor imagines his superiors humiliated. In one case the desire is openly acknowledged; in the other it is disguised as a possibility imagined, but clearly the fantasy conceals a wish. Two factors might be noted here marginally: the ill-will hidden in the fantasy is aimed only at the representative of the firm, never at the members of Gregor's family; the other is the curious fact that the fate imagined for the chief clerk is actually Gregor's own. The following discussion will shed light on this circumstance.

When the chief clerk starts his reproaches and threats, Gregor quickly succumbs to fear and pushes his anger out of his consciousness. But his metamorphosis, his horribly changed appearance, has precisely the effect which an outburst of rage on Gregor's part would have; it functions as aggression against the chief clerk. The moment Gregor opens the door and shows himself in his new shape to the chief clerk, the roles of the two are reversed in fact even though Gregor does not recognize this. The chief clerk, who has come to threaten Gregor, now retreats in terror while Gregor, hitherto the poor exploited and despised salesman, drives him out of the apartment so that he leaves his hat and cane behind, tokens of Gregor's triumph. Thus the metamorphosis fulfills Gregor's secret wish for rebellion and the humiliation of his superior in the firm. To be sure, it is not the chief himself whom Gregor humbles, but the second in command. However, the switch in targets is not too important, since the chief clerk has acted with the same brutal arrogance which Gregor hated in the boss.

More important is the fact that the metamorphosis fulfills Gregor's desire for revolt without implicating his conscious mind. The conscious aim of Gregor's pursuit of the chief clerk is not to frighten but to reconcile him. While chasing the man, who runs away from him in speechless fright, Gregor begs him to champion him in the office, and promises he will work his way out of the embarrassing predicament. Yet his inadvertent use of the term "pursuit" to describe his advance toward the chief clerk reveals what is actually happening, as does the chief clerk's flight itself.¹⁰ The discrepancy between the actual result

of Gregor's action and his own explanation of it has a ludicrous effect upon the reader. It is grotesquely comic to watch the startled chief clerk run away, staring with gaping mouth over his shoulder at the monstrous creature that is relentlessly scuttling after him, while Gregor begs him to stay calm and put in a good word for him at the office. A similarly funny effect is achieved earlier in the story when Gregor tries to assure the chief clerk that he will get dressed, pack his collection of samples, and still catch the train—a program patently absurd in view of his transformation.

In this comic discrepancy between the actual situation and Gregor's rationalizations, Mr. Luke has seen a satiric parable on the irrationality of human mental processes; Gregor's transformation into a subhuman creature is for him the external correlative to the atavistic, irrational nature of his thinking.¹¹ However, it is less faulty logic than a psychic compromise which lies at the basis of Gregor's self-deception—a compromise between the satisfaction of an aggressively rebellious impulse and a duty-bound conscience that demands submission. The function of the metamorphosis is to allow the compromise. Rebellion proceeds by mere physical phenomena—Gregor's frightening appearance, his misunderstood movements toward the chief clerk, the snapping of his jaws—facts over which his conscious mind has no control. Thus he remains “innocent,” the victim of an external calamity which he does not understand. It is Gregor's ignorance of his suppressed anger and hostility toward his superiors that causes him to be surprised at the chief clerk's (and his parents') reactions toward him. He thinks he is animated only by the best intentions; all he wants is to propitiate the chief clerk and return to his job as soon as possible. How deeply he loathes his job and hates his superiors he has forgotten. But the others cannot hear what he tries to tell them; they cannot hear his rationalizations. All they perceive are his appearance and his motions, and these look menacing, and utterly contradict his professed good intentions. What the metamorphosis does is to make Gregor's suppressed desire visible. It turns his inside out, as it were. (Here, of course, we see the technique of expressionism.) His hostility, having erupted, has made his whole body its horrifying manifestation. His conscious mind, of course, does not participate in this eruption, but its rationalizations cannot be communicated to the others. Only the inner truth is there to see for all except Gregor himself. When the chief clerk runs away from him in fright he reacts to Gregor's true wish and, in a way, understands him better than Gregor dares to understand himself. Likewise when Gregor's father reacts to the metamorphosis as though it were a malicious trick

of Gregor's, a refusal to do his duty, he is, as our analysis so far has shown, closer to the truth than Gregor and the superficial reader, for whom the catastrophe is an inexplicable blow of fate, a monstrous "accident."

Viewed in this way, the metamorphosis reveals a pattern which Freud has made known to us in his study of accidents.¹² Accidents, says Freud, are often acts springing from motives of which the conscious mind keeps carefully unaware. Accidental injuries are often self-punishment induced by hidden guilt feelings. Accidents in which one person injures another may be caused by unconscious hostility. For example, a person A, who may feel nothing but respect for B, suddenly hurts B "accidentally." A careful analysis of the relationship of the two may disclose a history of suppressed hostility in A. By the time he wrote *Metamorphosis* (November, 1912) Kafka was familiar with the writings of Freud; he alludes to Freud in his diary, in connection with his earlier story *The Judgment*, two months before he wrote *Metamorphosis*.¹³ His familiarity with the world that Freud opened to the Occidental mind does not, of course, mean that he applied Freudian insights deliberately during the composition of his works; everything we know about Kafka's spontaneous mode of creation, especially in the autumn of 1912, would speak against a deliberate, calculating manner of composition. It is something else to suspect that Freudian ideas might have colored the background of his mind and influenced his spontaneous thinking. At any rate, the remarkable parallelism between the pattern of the metamorphosis and the pattern of many "accidents" described by Freud remains unaffected, whether or not Kafka was aware of it during the writing of his work.

Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis resembles both types of "accidents" described by Freud, those in which a person satisfies his suppressed hostility by "accidentally" hurting someone else, and those in which he hurts himself. So far we have established that Gregor's metamorphosis expresses his secret hostility toward his work and his boss. Now we have to show that it also expresses his guilt and the punishment for this guilt. The metamorphosis clears him of any "official" responsibility for betraying his parents; but it fails to free him of a vague, pervasive sense of guilt toward his family. This sense of guilt manifests itself in a panicky need to prove his innocence, and this need in turn plays a vital part in bringing him to ruin.

When the story begins, the metamorphosis is not complete. Gregor is still able to speak and be understood by his family. When he first hears his voice issuing from his altered body, he is, to be sure, "shocked." "As if from below"¹⁴

a humming or twittering squeak mixes with his speech and tends to distort and obscure his words. But by pronouncing each syllable slowly and distinctly, Gregor is able to counteract this tendency “from below” (from the subconscious, the realm of dreams, the country of sleep in which Gregor fails to hear the alarm clock summoning him to the routine life, and from which he wakes late to find himself transformed). He retains a control over his speech that leaves it intelligible and recognizably human. He loses this control after the chief clerk accuses him of indulging in “strange whims”¹⁵ and warns him of losing his job (the very thing Gregor secretly desires). These accusations throw him into a state of “agitation” in which he forgets “everything else” but the desperate need to show his good will and conceal the truth of his situation. Thus he forgets to discipline his voice during his frantic pleading with the chief clerk and his speech is no longer intelligible. The chief clerk tells the flabbergasted parents that what they heard from Gregor’s room was “no human voice”; and from then on Gregor loses all possibility of communication and is thrown forever into his terrifying isolation.

Gregor’s isolation crowns his metamorphosis. As long as he can be understood, he cannot be a complete insect. To be sure, his mind always remains human; but, after the loss of his voice, his humanity cannot be perceived by his fellow men. It cannot communicate with and act upon them. For the world he has become nothing but an insect although continuing to be a human being for himself. This is, of course, Gregor’s agonizing tragedy: that he feels and thinks as a human being while unable to make his humanity felt and known. In this respect he is like the hero of Dalton Trumbo’s *Johnny Got his Gun*, who lost face and limbs in the war and was left a mute, deaf, and blind torso with a mind shut up inside. The nature of the physical transformation in either case makes any attempt to communicate ineffectual—unnoticed or misunderstood; and the mind stays imprisoned, a torturing instrument in a functionless vacuum. But whereas Trumbo’s anti-war tract shows this tragedy caused by entirely external factors, Kafka’s incomparably more subtle work shows that the hero at least accentuates his tragedy by his panicky urge to conform to what is expected of him, while leaving his real desires unacknowledged even when they work havoc with him. Gregor loses his ability to be understood when he tries to minimize and conceal his catastrophe. He pretends that nothing unusual has occurred and promises he will catch the eight o’clock train. Mr. Luke has seen in Gregor’s specious pleading the deterioration of his rationality, an inner correlate of his external transformation into a subhuman creature. But the pleading is a failure of nerve

rather than a failure of logic. It is the compulsive effort to deceive himself and the others about the truth; for his sense of guilt at “deserting his parents,” which has been aroused by the chief clerk’s accusations, will not let him face this truth. By his deception, however, he only worsens his situation, excludes himself from the human community, and prevents the possibility of his restitution. Let us suppose, for instance, that Gregor, instead of succumbing to panic, had retained the control over his words which he exercised before the junior manager’s arrival. His speech would have been intelligible. Let us further suppose that instead of concealing the true facts Gregor had reported them in a slow disciplined speech. Such a report would have made it clear to the others that his mind at least had remained human. Communication would have been established and Gregor’s fate would have lost its most essential and horrible aspect—utter isolation.

To further confirm our argument let us examine another passage in the text. Soon after waking up, Gregor thinks that if he lies still in bed and ceases to worry about getting up, “such complete repose” will “restore things to their real and normal condition.” His hope for a return to human status, to his “real and normal condition,” lies in consenting to his true desire—his longing for leisure and freedom. But his powerful conscience does not allow him to rest. It leads him away from “cool reflection” and “complete repose,” it leads him to fret and to try by “desperate resolves” to do his duty, no matter what his *real wish* is. The antidote to the metamorphosis, so the passage hints, would be Gregor’s yielding to his guilty desire, which his conscience forbids. Thus it is his obedience to duty, his cowed compliance with something he deeply hates, that tends to carry him away from the hope of recovery and to involve him ever more deeply in his catastrophe. Soon afterwards, as we have seen, this sense of obligation to his family and his work achieves his final isolation and seals his doom.

The same tendency helps bring about his physical destruction in the end. When his angry father pursues him, Gregor, bent on proving his obedience and good intentions, abstains from fleeing up the walls to the ceiling, and so deprives himself of the only advantage his insect shape gives him. Instead he stays on the floor within reach of the father’s menacing boots and becomes the easy target of the apples with which his father bombards and cripples him. Gregor never recovers from this wound, and it hastens his death.

From these examples we can now deduce that Gregor’s catastrophe is intimately linked to the appeasement both of his own conscience and of his superiors in firm and family. He loses his voice when he seeks to appease the

chief clerk; he courts death in seeking to appease his father. Now, it is remarkable that this appeasement has precisely the opposite of the effect it should have. Instead of saving Gregor, it brings him ever closer to destruction. Above all, the examples show us that this ineffectual appeasement of the “superego” tends to accentuate the natural effects of the metamorphosis, namely isolation and helplessness. May we not infer from this that the metamorphosis itself is such a treacherous appeasement of a sense of guilt which in demonstrating innocence and helplessness actually invites punishment and destruction? In order to answer this question let us see what it is exactly that Gregor has been changed into.

Kafka states in the first sentence that Gregor wakes up to find himself changed into a giant kind of vermin (“Ungeziefer”). The term “vermin” holds the key to the double aspect of the metamorphosis. Vermin connotes something parasitic and aggressive, something that lives off human beings and may suck their blood; on the other hand, it connotes something defenseless, something that can be stepped upon and crushed. Gregor’s hugeness emphasizes the aggressive aspect. Moreover, at the beginning of the story the reader might be inclined to think of Gregor’s new form as that of a bedbug. Kafka’s famous letter to his father would give support to such a view since Kafka has his father refer to him as a blood-sucking type of vermin, a bedbug or a louse.¹⁶ But later we discover that Gregor does not possess the aggressiveness of the blood-sucking vermin. He does not feed on blood, but on garbage. This diet (as well as the term “Mistkäfer” used by the charwoman and a later reference in Kafka’s diary to “the black beetle” of his story)¹⁷ lead one to believe that Gregor is akin to a cockroach, a creature that may nauseate human beings but does not attack them. Offensive in looks, it is defenseless in fact.

The image of the giant cockroach perfectly expresses the two aspects of the metamorphosis, aggression and helplessness, and the order of their importance. The metamorphosis endows Gregor with a terrifying exterior; it causes panic in the chief clerk and makes his mother faint. But at the same time it renders him infinitely more vulnerable than he was in his human form. A foot held up over his head, a chair raised over his back, threaten death. An apple almost kills him. Gregor realizes that, apart from his “frightening appearance,” he has no weapons. At one point, to be sure, he thinks of jumping into his sister’s face and biting her; soon afterwards, however, while watching the roomers devour their meals, he understands that one needs teeth in order to bite and that “toothless jaws even of the finest make” are quite useless. When he dreams of keeping his

sister in his room and defending her against all intruders, he relies on his frightening looks and not on any tangible means of defense. As soon as his appearance fails to intimidate—as it fails to intimidate his father and the charwoman—Gregor is absolutely defenseless. His menacing appearance is merely appearance, but his helplessness is real. It exposes him to merciless punishment by anyone who, like his father, is eager to exploit it.

Thus the metamorphosis links punishment to aggression, for the very transformation which enables Gregor to drive the chief clerk away renders him helpless in the face of his father's wrath; but punishment, rather than aggression, is its ultimate function. For the father transforms Gregor's victory over the chief clerk into ruinous defeat. He takes over as the chief clerk flees. He seizes the trophy of Gregor's triumph, the chief clerk's cane, left behind in his flight, brandishes it over Gregor's head, and threatens to crush and flatten him with it. Gregor has to cease his movement toward the outside, toward the world and freedom. Under the threat of his furious father he now has to turn back to his room, henceforth the prison in which he will pine away his life in solitary confinement.

In conclusion, it may be said that the metamorphosis would not have occurred in either of these two cases: if Gregor had not nurtured hostility toward his work and his boss, or if he had revolted openly and thrown up his job without regard to his parents. To put it in positive terms: the metamorphosis accommodates Gregor's conflicting needs, the need to rebel, and the need to suffer punishment for this rebellion. Above all, by being an unconscious process, the metamorphosis protects him from self-knowledge. Indeed, one of the most curious facts about it is Gregor's lack of curiosity as to the causes of his change. These causes are something Gregor wishes not to know, something he would prefer to leave buried. Therefore, the metamorphosis appears as an utterly mysterious, inexplicable event. The author, however, by letting us see Gregor's feelings of revolt at the opening of the story (after which they are repressed and extinguished in guilt and fear) has given us a key to the mystery of the metamorphosis. If we make use of this key, Kafka's work seems like the expressionist illustration of an "accident" that is not a true accident according to Freud. To the victim and the superficial observer such a calamity appears a senseless and unforeseeable event, a brute happening bare of meaning. Upon analysis of the victim's life, however, the accident is found to fulfill a function. It comes as the climax of a secret history of hostility and guilt. These combine to erupt in the catastrophe which mutilates and destroys him who has failed to face

the turmoil in his soul.

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- † From Walter H. Sokel, *Monatshefte* 48.4 (April–May 1956): 203–14. Copyright 1956 by the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. Used by permission of the University of Wisconsin Press.
1. Günther Anders, “Franz Kafka—pro und contra,” *Die neue Rundschau* (1947), especially 139–140.
 2. Clemens Heselhaus, “Kafkas Erzählformen,” *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, XVI (1952), 353–376; Douglas Angus, “Kafka’s Metamorphosis and ‘The Beauty and the Beast’ Tale,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, LIII (1954), 69–71. The germ of the “fairy tale” theory is already contained in Herbert Tauber’s pioneering work on Kafka, *Franz Kafka: Eine Deutung seiner Werke* (Zurich, 1941), pp. 31–32. Tauber points to the analogy between Kafka’s tale and medieval legends such as the legend of St. Julianus Hospitator, in which true charity is tested by the horrible and physically repulsive.
 3. F. D. Luke, “Kafka’s ‘Die Verwandlung,’” *Modern Language Review*, XLVI (1951), 232–245. On the one hand, Mr. Luke relies on the psychoanalytical approach of Hellmuth Kaiser’s *Franz Kafkas Inferno* (Vienna, 1931), which, though chiefly concerned with *The Report of an Ape* and *The Penal Colony*, makes a few comments on *Metamorphosis*; on the other hand, he applies to *Metamorphosis* Charles Neider’s theory of “cabalism,” expounded in *The Frozen Sea* (New York, 1948).
 4. According to Meyer’s *Lexikon* the term includes three subgroups of the beetle—aphodinae, coprinae, and geotrupinae. The translation given in Cassell’s and Hebert’s German-English dictionaries is “dung-beetle.” Mr. Lloyd in his translation of the story uses the term “cockroach,” which comes closer than the Muir “dung-beetle” to Kafka’s meaning, since Gregor lives not in a farmyard, but in a city apartment.
 5. Reported by John Urzidil in “Recollections,” *The Kafka Problem*, ed. Angel Flores (New York, 1946), pp. 20–24.
 6. See Heinz Politzer, “Problematik und Probleme der Kafka-Forschung,” *Monatshefte*, XLII (1950), 279; Theodor W. Adorno, “Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka,” *Die neue Rundschau*, XLIV (1953), 327.
 7. This yearning for freedom on the part of one forever held back by obligations and dependence was, of course, Kafka’s own. In a letter to his fiancée F[elice] B[auer], he put it this way: “I, who for the most part have been a dependent creature, have an infinite yearning for independence and freedom in all things.” *Diaries: 1914–1923*, ed. Max Brod, trans. Martin Greenberg with the co-operation of Hannah Arendt (New York, 1949), pp. 166–167.
 8. Heselhaus has drawn attention to an analogy between the metamorphosis and psychosomatic illness, and has pointed out that Kafka called his own tuberculosis “das Tier” (“the animal”). But he rightly concludes that such an analogy does not get us nearer the symbolism, the *Gestalt*, of the work.
 9. All citations, unless otherwise specified, are from Willa and Edwin Muir’s translation of *Metamorphosis* in Franz Kafka, *The Penal Colony: Stories and Short Pieces*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (New York, 1948), pp. 67–132. Since my citations from the work are always clearly indicated by their context and since most of them come from the first third of the story, I have dispensed with page references.
 10. The term “pursuit” is an exact translation of the original.
 11. See Luke, 238–240.
 12. See *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Authorized English Edition, with introduction by A. A. Brill (New York, 1914), pp. 198–211.
 13. *The Diaries of Franz Kafka: 1910–1913*, ed. Max Brod, trans. Joseph Kresh (New York, 1948), p. 276.
 14. This is my literal translation of the original “wie von unten her.” Muir’s translation “like an undertone” is more definite and, at the same time, more limited than Kafka’s original and excludes some of its connotations.
 15. My literal translation of the original “sonderbare Launen.”

16. "Letter to his Father," *Dearest Father: Stories and Other Writings*, trans. Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins (New York, 1954), p. 195.

17. *Diaries: 1910–1913*, p. 304.

NINA PELIKAN STRAUS

Transforming Franz Kafka's "Metamorphosis"[†]

In 1977 there were already ten thousand works on Franz Kafka in print,¹ nearly all of them written by men. The reasons for scholars' interest in Kafka, particularly his short masterpiece, "Metamorphosis," reflect a recognition on the part of students of religion, philosophy, psychoanalysis, political and social criticism, Marxism, and literature that Kafka's work is inexhaustible. No single interpretation invalidates or finally delivers the story's significance. Its quality of multivalency (*Vieldeutigkeit*) keeps us talking to each other, against each other, and to ourselves. For fifty years Kafka's work has been seeding thought and precluding that closure of discourse that would imprison us in our old histories. Yet until 1980, gender-based theories and feminist criticisms were rarely articulated in discussions of Kafka's stories.² "Metamorphosis" is an important source, therefore, for the recent addition to the traditional list of disciplines: feminist studies.

Kafka's story of a family whose son, Gregor Samsa, wakes one morning to find himself transformed into a giant insect is what Christian Goodden calls "a literary Rorschach test ... Kafka critics have hitherto been looking into the mirror of his works to find reflected there the images of their own interpretative attitudes," when they should be looking at the "more significant ... phenomenon of the mirror."³ If the mirror of "Metamorphosis" reflects a different image for a feminist, it is because the ambiguities of Kafka's language effect a tension between culturally sanctioned attitudes toward women and his own exploration of those attitudes. Throughout the narration of his characters' experiences, Kafka holds in suspension European, urban, and early twentieth-century masculine attitudes toward women and transforms these attitudes by presenting Grete and mother Samsa in the roles of Gregor's caretakers and feeders and then revealing their rebellion against these roles. Kafka's refusal (or inability) to provide his readers with a clear message about his work or his attitudes toward women is not only characteristic but also useful and prophetic. By reserving judgment on his characters, Kafka puts traditional attitudes regarding gender on trial and

deconstructs the reader's expectations as well. His story thus provides correctives to feminist as well as traditional readings that exacerbate through ideological fixations what they seek to remedy. "Metamorphosis" is about invalidation, our self-invalidations and our invalidations of others; and it does nothing—offers us nothing morally—but this vision of how we do it. The narration focuses on how Gregor invalidates his family, how his family invalidates and destroys Gregor, how his sister, Grete, learns to invalidate her brother. It also compels us, as readers of this fictive mirror, to seek out the perpetrator or the victim of this invalidation and in pointing at him, her, or it, establish our own validation at others' expense.

Traditionally, critics of "Metamorphosis" have underplayed the fact that the story is about not only Gregor's but also his family's and, especially, Grete's metamorphosis. Yet it is mainly Grete, woman, daughter, sister, on whom the social and psychoanalytic resonances of the text depend. It is she who will ironically "bloom" as her brother deteriorates; it is she whose mirror reflects women's present situation as we attempt to critique patriarchal dominance in order to create new lives that avoid the replication of invalidation. We cannot read "Metamorphosis" with the sense that we "emerge unscathed,"⁴ and we write about Kafka with the suspicion that we are writing about "On Not Understanding Kafka."⁵ I write this article, therefore, to share my suspicion that I have not hitherto understood Kafka and with the "commandment" Walter Benjamin finds intrinsic to approaching Kafka's work: "Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image."⁶ Thou shalt not make Woman (in texts and in life) an icon whose images can remain fixed or dominated.

Just as "Metamorphosis" is written in the kind of language that reflects upon what it is reflecting (or in deconstructionist terms, folds back upon itself), so the story of Gregor is a parabolic reflection of Kafka's own self-exposure and self-entombment. Kafka's articulation of self-exposure is ironically concomitant with self-dehumanization. For him exposure is both liberating, because writing releases the repressed, and dehumanizing, because language can describe the human as nonhuman. This pattern of simultaneous liberation and dehumanization is repeated when Grete is pried loose from her social role and liberated at the end of the story, and, like Gregor, she must pay a dehumanizing price for her liberation. If Grete is a symbol of anything, it is the indeterminacy of gender roles, the irony of self-liberation. Grete's role as a woman unfolds as Gregor's life as a man collapses into itself. It is no accident that this gender scrolling takes place in the literature of a writer who had curious experiences in

his life with women—experiences of his own weakness and of women’s strengths.⁷

One of the most dominating and accessible registers of meaning in “Metamorphosis” is the psychoanalytic. Traditionally, the text has been read not as revealing brother-sister or gender-based relationships but as revealing a father-son conflict or Oedipus complex. It has been understood by Hellmuth Kaiser, for example, as the merciless attack of the elder Samsa upon his insect son, through three chapters which climax consecutively in Gregor’s maiming, starvation, and death. “Metamorphosis” has also been read by Marxist critics as a fable of alienation from patriarchal culture, with its tyrannical bureaucracy, its class warfare between appropriators and expropriators, its conversion of workers (like the salesman Gregor Samsa) into dehumanized things whose labor is exploited. Feminist critics, such as Evelyn Torton Beck, make use of the Marxist-Engelian approach to stress Kafka’s patriarchal treatment of women, pointing out that he refers to Gregor as “Samsa,” but to Grete as “Grete,” and implying that what Kafka describes, he sanctions. Only recently have critics expressed interest in the idea that Grete’s experience is crucial to the meaning of Kafka’s tale and that Kafka’s attitude toward women needs further interpretation.⁸

Although it is clear that Grete’s labor, like her brother’s, is exploited, and that she rises, as it were, from the ashes of Gregor’s grave, few readers have been struck with surprise or horror at this transposition. Because the mirror of “Metamorphosis” has usually reflected masculinist attitudes and orientations, Grete’s plight and role have been subsumed by the paradigm of male alienation. The Marxist focus on Gregor suggests that long before his metamorphosis into a giant insect, he discovered that “human power may be exchanged and utilized by converting man into a slave. Men had barely started to engage in exchange when they themselves were exchanged. The active became a passive, whether man wanted it or not.”⁹ Engels’s language of exchange, conversion, and passivity seems pertinent to Kafka’s metamorphic trope because “Metamorphosis” transforms the subject into an object and addresses the father’s power to barter with his children’s bodies. “The sale of his children by the father,” writes Engels, “such was the first fruit of father right and monogamy.”¹⁰ Gregor is so conditioned to an identity in which he must be sold and must sell that despite the discovery of his new insect body, he continues to agonize about missing a day of work, being “sacked on the spot,” and about the debt he owes his “chief.” “If I didn’t have to hold my hand because of my parents I’d have given notice long

ago, I'd have gone to the chief and told him exactly what I think of him.... Well, there's still hope; once I've saved enough money to pay back my parents' debts to him—that should take another five years—I'll do it without fail.”¹¹

This Marxist interpretative focus brings with it an unfailing sympathy for Gregor as the symbol of all men who work, of the burden men carry in relation to their families and their women. This interpretation, however, fails to recognize that the women of the Samsa household also work and that Grete's work in particular has to do with cleaning Gregor's mess. Undeniably the story suggests a grotesque escape (through the change of Gregor's male body into a subhuman form) from Gregor's burdensome patriarchal obligations (an insect cannot be expected to pay off debts), but it is also about Gregor's exchange of roles within his family. As a gigantic insect, Gregor exchanges responsibility for dependency, while Grete exchanges dependency for the burdensome efficiency and independence that Gregor formerly displayed. Once transformed, Gregor is consigned to an inactivity and submission associated with the female role. As Bernard Bödeker has noted, the relations between those who are transformed suggest not only oedipal but family conflict.¹² The struggle is between the sexes, and the primary exchange occurs not between Gregor and his demoralized sloven of a father but between Gregor and Grete. The brother's and sister's interchange of male and female roles and powers, the hourglass-shaped progression of the plot as they switch positions, suggests the idea that “Metamorphosis” is Kafka's fantasy of a gender role change. The transformation of Gregor's body is a “trying out [of] some unreal fable or meaning life *might* have.”¹³ Its deepest resonances involve the relations of men and women, of the man's wish to be a woman, the woman's wish to be a man.

Yet the emphasis on the exchange of daughter for son, of male supremacy for the blooming of a female daughter, like the financial exchanges that dominate the Samsas' world and Gregor's bodily changes, suggests for the feminist reader neither political prophesy nor transcendent resolution. A feminist reading enlists no parable of recovery or resurrection at the story's end in the service of its interpretation, but it shares with Jungian analyses of “Metamorphosis” such as Peter Dow Webster's, the idea of “the substitution of the reanimated and completely changed Grete (as *anima*) for the ego of the hero.”¹⁴ The ambiguities of Kafka's language do not suggest that Gregor becomes more spiritual or that Grete *gets anywhere* once she replaces her brother. As Günter Anders notes, Kafka's language allows “two or more possibilities to stand side by side without being able to say himself which he really means.”¹⁵ In the labyrinth of exchanges

that dominates the text, exchange of powers may replicate exchange of identity and exchange of gender but not imply, in the exchange of sister for brother, the spiritual transformation of either.

The multivalency of Kafka's language, discussed by the most notable of Kafka critics,¹⁶ situates Kafka's attitude toward women in an interpretable space that eludes easy feminist formulation. Although Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that texts written by men about women symbolize Woman either as angel in the house or madwoman/bitch,¹⁷ Kafka's language undermines such fixedly sexist habits of thought. Kafka's use of imagery in place of concepts, so that "rhetorical figures ... enable him to verbalize his mental operations without ever freezing fluid processes into solid conclusions,"¹⁸ serves not only to deconstruct political and philosophical certitudes but also to question the origin of such certitudes in sexual difference. Not only does Kafka's language "break forms, encourage ruptures and new sproutings,"¹⁹ but also it explores the barriers imposed on language by notions of gender and biological destiny. Descriptions of Grete's intentions toward Gregor as she takes care of him and his room, for example, are deliberately rendered in a labyrinth of double-entendre that suggests the blurring and exchanging of masculine and feminine "essences." "The furniture did not hamper him in his senseless crawling round.... Unfortunately, his sister was of the contrary opinion; she had grown accustomed, and not without reason, to consider herself an expert in Gregor's affairs as against her parents.... This determination was not, of course, merely the outcome of childish recalcitrance and of the self-confidence she had recently developed so unexpectedly and at such cost; she had in fact perceived that Gregor needed a lot of space to crawl about in" (103). In this example, the phrase, "not without reason" (sympathetic to Grete as a rational person), contradicts the initial "unfortunately" (critical of Grete's female fussiness) just as the words "determination" and "confidence" (suggesting male qualities) contradict the phrase "childish recalcitrance" (traditionally ascribed to women and children). The narrator thus serves as the advocate for Grete's new sense of self while simultaneously suggesting that her confidence is the result of a will to power achieved only "at such cost" and over which neither gender holds the monopoly. In this sense, the principle of indeterminacy claimed by Alice Jardine and others as fundamental to female writing²⁰ is also fundamental to Kafka's writing—so fundamental that "Metamorphosis" can be read as disclosing the plight and tragic solution of one who is caught between the shameful desire to identify himself with women and the consciousness that he

cannot identify himself with men. The rupture inscribed by Kafka's text parallels the fissure between a male identity (historically determined) which is obsessively concerned with Woman as its opposite, and a male desire to *become woman*, not to possess her.

The word "shame" is central to both Grete and Gregor's experiences. It is a shame that Gregor cannot get out of bed, that he cannot get up to go to work, that his voice fails him, that he cannot open the door of his room with his insect pincers, that he must be fed, that he stinks and must hide his body that is a shame to others. Shame comes from seeing oneself through another's eyes, from Gregor's seeing himself through Grete's eyes, and from the reader's seeing Grete through the narrator's eyes. The text graphically mirrors how we see each other in various shameful (and comic) conditions. Through Gregor's condition, ultimately shameful because he is reduced to the dependency of an ugly baby, Kafka imagines what it is like to be dependent on the care of women. And Kafka is impressed with women's efforts to keep their households and bodies clean and alive. This impression is enlarged with every detail that humiliates and weakens Gregor while simultaneously empowering Grete, who cares for Gregor, ironically, at his own—and perhaps at Kafka's—expense.

The change or metamorphosis is thus a literary experiment that plays with problems the story's title barely suggests. For Kafka there can be no change without an exchange, no blooming of Grete without Gregor's withering; nor can the meaning of transformation entail a final closure that prevents further transformations. The metamorphosis occurs both in the first sentence of the text—"As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect" (67)—and in the last paragraph of the story, which describes Grete's transformation into a woman blooming and stretching toward the family's "new dreams" once Gregor has been transformed into garbage (132). Grete's final transformation, rendered in concrete bodily terms, is not only foreshadowed but also reflected by Gregor's initial transformation from human into insect. This deliberately reflective textual pattern implies that only when the distorting mirrors of the sexual fun house are dismantled can the sons of the patriarchs recognize themselves as dehumanized and dehumanizing. Only when Grete blooms into an eligible young woman, ripe for the job and marriage markets, can we recognize that her empowerment is also an ironic reification. She has been transformed at another's expense, and she will carry within her the marketplace value that has ultimately destroyed Gregor, a value that may destroy her as well.

As many readers have noted, Kafka records the damage that patriarchal capitalist-oriented society inscribes in the psyches of men, but Kafka also records the damage that is done to women. Kafka's transformation of the male role into the female, of Gregor into Grete, mitigates the differences between them and the disrespect accorded to women in a culture concerned with men's upward mobility, a concern with which Kafka was well acquainted in his professional and private life. Kafka's fantasies about the women in his world are revealed in the experiment of "Metamorphosis," a text written with particular women in mind and suggesting that a relationship with a woman, as Elias Canetti notes, was necessary to Kafka's writing. The purpose of Kafka's correspondence with Felice Bauer, for example, was to forge "a channel between her efficiency and health and his indecisiveness and weakness." Kafka insisted that Felice Bauer provide him with the emotional security he needed to produce the work of "a great period in his life," which included "Metamorphosis."²¹ His fantasies about women's "fat" and strength are crucial to the understanding of a text in which descriptions of the male character's frailty, the drying up and flattening out of Gregor's wounded insect body, are chronicled with meticulous precision. Kafka's description of this process in fiction reflected his urge to resolve his own masculine identity, to decide whether he was fit as a husband and a man. As Canetti suggests, Kafka attempted this resolution by writing passionate letters to a strong and healthy woman and by describing his ailments to her in obsessive detail. The three most important women in Kafka's life—Felice Bauer, Milena Jesenka and Grete Bloch * * *—were "securities somewhere far off, a source of strength, sufficiently distant to leave his sensitivity lucid ... a woman who was there for him without expecting more than his words, a sort of *transformer* whose every technical fault he knew and mastered well enough to be able to rectify it at once by letter" (my italics).²²

By the time Kafka met Felice Bauer, he "had come to feel that his entire future hinged on the resolution of this terrifying dilemma."²³ Could he marry Felice and remain Kafka the writer? Kafka's marriage proposals to Felice took the form of letters that discussed marriage in general, and both Canetti and Ernst Pawel describe them as intimating a preordained failure, summarized by Kafka's statement, "I cannot live with her, and I cannot live without her."²⁴ The dilemma was ultimately resolved by his letter of April 1, 1913, in which he confessed to Felice Bauer, "My true fear—and surely nothing worse can ever be said or heard—is that I shall never be able to possess you, that at best I would be confined, like an insentient, faithful dog, to kissing your distractedly proffered hand, not as

a sign of love, but merely as a token of despair on the part of an animal condemned to silence and eternal separation.”²⁵

By writing about Gregor’s imprisonment in the armored insect body, a writing he pursued at the same time as he wrote his letters to Felice, Kafka seems to have found an image for his self-imposed distance from women as well as an image for the sickness that would make a particular woman, as a source of energy and transformation, necessary to him. Written in a period when his letters to Felice were most self-exposing and agonized, “Metamorphosis” engaged Kafka in deep self-scrutiny regarding his gender and sexual identity. It could be said that Kafka’s writing sprang from his capacity for equivocal self-identifications: struggles with both male/father images and female/mother images that made him unable to live the role of dominating malehood (an incapacity represented by Gregor) but which also enabled him to invent a subversive language that undermined the traditional authority of his father tongue. The “permanent estrangement” resulting from his failure to form an “unequivocal” masculine identity, this arrival “at no solution at all,” enabled him to imagine a world in which male and female desires, characteristics, and differences did not figure as essential properties of human nature.²⁶ The image of this gender neutrality emerges when Gregor is referred to as a “thing,” an “it.” “It’s dead,” the charwoman announces. “It’s lying here dead and done for!” (128).²⁷ The increasing reification or it-ness of Gregor’s body is the ground for Grete’s ultimate repudiation of him as a brother and for her own transformation. “But how can it be Gregor?” (125) she asks, a question which echoes Kafka’s own response in writing to Felice Bauer; “I just don’t rest in myself ... I am not always ‘something,’ and if I ever was ‘something,’ I pay for it by ‘being nothing’ for months on end.”²⁸

Such cryptic self-disclosures intimate that this “something” from which Kafka sought to escape by way of ambiguous writings and from which Gregor escapes through his transformation into an insect is Kafka’s image of an unequivocal, completely virile and powerful body. In contrast, we must imagine Kafka’s own body, a body with which he felt “nothing could be achieved”;²⁹ and that body’s imagistic parallel in the “pitifully thin ... legs” of the insect Gregor, waving “helplessly” around a “bulk” that is “divided into stiff arched segments” (67). The solution for this body, or the fantasy of its possible recovery, is linked to the fat and warmth that woman’s body is imagined to provide. Writing to Felice Bauer, Kafka petitioned for warmth and life-giving blood that he felt his body lacked. “My body is too long for its weakness, it has no fat whatsoever for

creating a beneficial warmth, for maintaining an inner fire, no fat from which the mind could someday nourish itself beyond its daily need without damaging the whole. How shall the weak heart ... manage to push the blood through the entire length of these legs?"³⁰

Woman's body, in contrast to Kafka's own, is fantasized as the carrier of a life force, just as Grete is the carrier of the nourishment (initially milk, then cheese) upon which Gregor greedily sucks. "Metamorphosis" thus unfolds by contrasting Gregor's maimed and dying body with the evolving, blooming body of Grete, who takes Gregor's place as family provider and favorite. The incident is more than allegorical: it is the literal representation of the family's need. And since this need and the fantasy it engenders not only is situated in the text's images but also permeates the text's rhetoric as it eschews "solid conclusions," it signals Kafka's attempt to dismantle his own male presumptions by destroying Gregor's. Gregor's obsession with his father is transformed into an obsession with his mother and sister. To be closer to them, and because of them, he infantilizes his body, struggles with his sister, and, consequently, moves toward death.³¹ The source of the image of Gregor's gigantic, armor-plated body is Kafka's fantasy about burying his own body and being born into another that can create (as he imagines woman's body does) a beneficial warmth, an inner fire.

While the first image in the story's first paragraph suggests a man buried in an insect body, the desire for an exchange of bodies is even clearer in the second image of the paragraph, a picture Gregor keeps on his wall of the muff-laden "lady." This image extends the burial metaphor by indicating how one soft (symbolically female) image is followed swiftly by another "hard" (symbolically male) image, to conflate them in terms of gender. Sharply contrasted with Gregor's "stiff," "dome-like," and impenetrable form, with its small openings that make it difficult for him to speak, the lady in furs has a large opening; she is vaginal and furry: "The picture ... showed a lady, with a fur cap on and a fur stole, sitting upright and holding out to the spectator a huge fur muff into which the whole of her forearm had vanished!" (67).

In this ambiguous sentence, which suggests both Gregor's male erotic response to women, the desire to stick a phallic "forearm" into a fur muff, *and* Gregor's identification with a lady encased in fur the way he is encased in armor, a third possibility also arises: that this is a metaphor for a male-female compound. The lady is also engaged in a phallic or lesbian action on her own behalf, as if her body sported both penis and vagina to which the male spectator can only respond: "!" Kafka's mocking of strict sexual symbolism, his conflation

of male and female, parallels the duplication in the names “Gregor” and “Grete.” The lady in the muff foreshadows the transformations that will occur in the Samsa siblings—the first a change of Gregor into a body that rocks “to and fro” (73), that snaps its jaws, that “crawls” (88), and sucks “greedily at the cheese” (91). Gregor’s transformation is regression; his male sexuality is neutered and infantilized. He is suspended not only “between being and non-being”³² but also between opposing symbols in a world recreated to confound them. Gregor does not, as Kafka does not, “just ... rest in [him]self,” he wishes to rest somewhere else; namely, in another body, in a woman’s body. Such a wish also indicates Gregor’s wish to rest *in* Grete. She is an image of an alternative and possible self. “With his sister alone had he remained intimate, and it was a secret plan of his that she, who loved music, unlike himself, and could play movingly on the violin, should be sent next year to study at the Conservatorium, despite the great expense that would entail” (95).

What Pawel, Kafka’s biographer, calls Kafka’s “crab-like approach to women” and “often most comically earnest eagerness ... to foster women’s intellectual growth,” does not seem prompted, at least for Gregor, by what Pawel calls an “unconscious need to desexualize them.”³³ Instead, it is Gregor who wishes to become unsexed or re-sexed, and Kafka who imagined, in his diaries, that a powerful woman could empower him as well: “With my sisters—and this was especially true in the early days—I was often an altogether different person than with other people. Fearless, vulnerable, powerful, surprising, moved as I otherwise only am when I am writing.”³⁴ Kafka’s sister Ottla would have served particularly well for the figure of Grete. “Throughout her rebellion and search for self, defying the father, working the land, breaking away from home, marrying a non-Jew—she in fact acted out her brother’s wildest and most impossible dreams.”³⁵ If Ottla was the female double who lived out Kafka’s dreams, it can be argued that the exchange motif in “Metamorphosis” is a radical autobiographical fantasy, concerned not only with the relationships of fathers and sons, but also with those of sisters and brothers, and suggesting what Kafka might have been had he been more like Ottla. Inscribed within this wish, however, is an ironic nightmare about masculinity that affects both brother and sister, both Gregor and Grete.

Kafka’s relation to Ottla, and Gregor’s to Grete, cannot be subsumed by the term “womb envy,” but the notion of a masculine disorientation so acute that the imagination en-tombs or en-wombs itself indicates the degree to which the male world is a horror and a prison for both Kafka and Gregor. Identification with the

apelike father Samsa and the contemptuous, pseudo-urbane boarders (who demand that Grete play the violin for their entertainment) becomes impossible for Kafkaesque men whose introversion is the sign and style of their sensitivity to women, as well as to masculinist brutality. Kafka's wish to feminize his being appropriates the image of the "box" or "house" found frequently in women's writings; Gregor's body is a kind of box or tomb in which his maleness is both incarcerated and protected against masculine requirements and invasions.³⁶ In "Metamorphosis" Kafka imagines the stages by which the repressed bachelor—whose "only amusement ... is doing fretwork" as he "stays at home every single evening" (76)—is replaced by the potentially marriageable Grete with her lively "young body," musical talent, and "good job" (132). This replacement is envisioned as a transformation of *bodies*. Descriptions of the insect's body emphasize its passivity, its being sealed off and shut in. Gregor's brown belly is "dome-like"; he "could not turn himself over" (68); he "let himself fall against the back of a near-by chair, and clung with his little legs to the edges of it" (79). Gregor vacillates between the active, transcendent mode of the male and what Simone de Beauvoir calls the "immanence" of the second-sex's condition,³⁷ first penetrating the world outside his room, from which he is violently driven back by his father, then returning to rest passively within his "naked den" to wait for his sister to minister to him.

Kafka's text is structured to represent systematically, in the most concrete terms possible, the process by which Gregor's male identity is demolished. Initially, he is preoccupied with male ideals; " 'I'll be attending to business very soon,' " he assures his family and chief clerk (78). Even after he realizes what his body has become, he expects the attendance due an older brother; he expects Grete to "notice that he had left the milk standing, and not for lack of hunger ... would she bring in some other kind of food more to his taste?" (90–91). Ironically, by making such demands, Gregor empowers Grete to make him her dependent, and when her attitude toward him becomes less sympathetic as he becomes more filthy and stinking ("hardly was she in the room when she rushed to the window, without even taking time to shut the door") he responds by becoming hostile: "Not only did she retreat, she jumped back as if in alarm and banged the door shut; a stranger might have well thought he had been lying in wait for her there meaning to bite her" (99).

Using the subjunctive—"a stranger might well have thought"—Gregor quickly distances himself from hostility and disassociates himself from the violent "stranger" he might become. With Grete's increasingly frequent gestures

of disgust, Gregor passes through various stages of responsive male aggression, each of which is thwarted not only by his father's physical abuse, but by his own awareness of Grete's growing "determination" and "self-confidence" that tempts her to "exaggerate the horror of her brother's condition" (103). She is no stranger to him once he begins to see himself through her eyes. He must submit his masculine prerogative to her. He must eat what she gives him (she becomes the family's cook), scuttle under the sofa so that she is protected from the sight of him, even though he finds this difficult because "the large meal had swollen his body" (92), and he must remain there in deference to her. As Grete sweeps his room and feeds him, the only one who has not forgotten him, he realizes that he has relinquished his male status to her. The sentence "In this manner Gregor was fed" (92) highlights, even in its grammar, his passive, dependent relation to her and indicates the moment in the text when Gregor's degradation and gradual disappearance are finally exchanged for Grete's social upgrading and visibility. As Grete tires of functioning as Gregor's charwoman and nurse, he becomes dirtier, less human; without her ministrations he ceases to care for himself. As she withdraws her service from him, her female voice begins to rise independently in the text, alongside the conflated voice of narrator and male character. "Streaks of dirt stretched along the walls ... Gregor used to station himself in some particularly filthy corner when his sister arrived, in order to reproach her with it ... but she simply had made up her mind to leave it alone" (115). It is Grete, not the oedipal father or desultory mother, who announces that Gregor " 'must go ... that's the only solution, Father. You must try to get rid of the idea that this is Gregor. The fact that we've believed it for so long is the root of all our troubles. But how can it be Gregor? If this were Gregor, he would have realized long ago that human beings can't live with such a creature, and he'd have gone away on his own accord' " (125).

Speaking *for* her idea of Gregor and *as if she were* Gregor, Grete pronounces a death sentence whose symptomatic word choices ("solution," "believed it for so long," "root of ... our troubles") mark the moment of her rite of passage into an independent, if harsh, sphere of womanhood that separates her from the world of her father(s). " 'We must try to get rid of it,' his sister now said ... 'When one has to work as hard as we do, all of us, one can't stand this continual torment at home on top of it. At least I can't stand it any longer' " (124). Having passed through stages of submission and sympathy, through the burden of symbolically mothering a being that resembles a sickly and degenerate child, and having replicated her brother's stages of maturation and professionalism (for she now

has a job), Grete initiates her liberation. Like Gregor, who had wanted to “tell his chief exactly what I think of him” (68), Grete feels repressed and exploited at work. She becomes, in the words of Juliet Mitchell, “vulnerable to the return of (her) own repressed, oppressed characteristics.” Her decision that Gregor “must go” involves her in a “tit-for-tat psycho-moral solution”³⁸ that dehumanizes her ethically as it inspires the bloom of her body and confidence.

The exchange of Grete for Gregor, of feminine for masculine prerogatives, is dramatized incrementally throughout the text but reaches a point of crisis when Grete is compelled to strip the picture of the lady in the muff from Gregor’s walls. The image suggests Gregor’s last physical contact with women, his need to be in-furred and enclosed, to objectify women as sex and “pussy,” his wish to be taken care of by women who no longer want to take care of him. He “quickly crawled up to [the picture] and pressed himself to the glass ... This picture at least, which was entirely hidden beneath him, was going to be removed by nobody” (105). Grete’s decision to deprive him of the picture is perhaps motivated by her sense that it represents a pornographic image of women against which she has rebelled and to which Gregor still clings, yet her interpretation of the image oversimplifies the complex meaning it may have for him. “ ‘Well, what shall we take now?’ said Grete.... Her intention was clear enough to Gregor, she wanted to bestow her mother in safety and then chase him down from the wall. Well, just let her try it! He clung to his picture and would not give it up. He would rather fly in Grete’s face” (105).

By yielding the picture to Grete finally, Gregor is made to abandon his male prerogative to exploit women’s sexual image, and he is severed from the fixed libidinal habits of the patriarchal world. He not only gives in to Grete’s will, but he also gives up his sexual image repertoire in exchange for her repertoire of new—and I will now say, feminist—desires. Grete’s solution for Gregor thus becomes his solution for himself. “He thought of his family with tenderness and love. The decision that he must disappear was one that he held to possibly even more strongly than his sister.”³⁹ With this emphasis, Kafka transfers power and responsibility from the traditional patriarchal inheritor, Gregor, to his sister Grete. The exchange is complicated by the fact that it occurs through the horrific metamorphosis and death of one whose doubles are both male and female: both father Samsa who beats his son, and sister Grete whose “young body” emerges in spring from the “completely flat and dry” corpse (129) of her brother. Kafka’s final solution for Gregor involves both oedipal and female complexes; it represents the urge to kill the potential father figure who is himself, as well as

the urge to become woman. Such a reading of “Metamorphosis,” through what might be called a biographical gender analysis, suggests that the tale is not merely an oedipal fantasy but more broadly a fantasy about a man who dies so that a woman may empower herself. Her self-empowering, the transference of a woman into a position where a man used to be, does not transform the social system, however, but merely perpetuates it. When women become as men are, Kafka seems to be saying, there is no progress. Such metamorphoses merely exchange one delusive solution for another.

In the finale of “Metamorphosis” a return to normal sex roles is parodically celebrated. Grete has “bloomed into a pretty girl with a good figure” for whom “it would soon be time to find a good husband” (132). The final irony of Kafka’s text is that despite the bizarre experiences that the Samsas have endured, no tragic meaning has been attached to them. The exchange of Grete for Gregor represents the idea that persons, like utilities, can be replaced. Grete can serve as her family’s breadwinner either as a woman married to a salaried husband, or as a woman who has learned to exploit (and be exploited by) the system that has exploited her brother. The disappearance of Gregor simply means that the Samsas will move into a cheaper house, “but better situated,” and that they will take more journeys to improve the chances of procuring a husband for Grete (132). It is Grete who will now sell and be sold, who will perpetuate the system of exchanges and debts that was formerly Gregor’s business. The significance of Gregor’s death is referred to with the utter confidence of a patriarchal blindness that all three Samsas now share equally: it is all a matter of letting “bygones be bygones” (132). And Grete, not surprisingly, has become a little patriarch. The sale or sell-out of her brother Gregor is the “first fruit” of her new rights.

The reader who finds this interpretation of Kafka’s mirror possible has probably already learned that some feminist projects are not metamorphoses but only changes into another kind of the same—which explains almost a century of interpretations that do not recognize Grete’s centrality to the story or speak, particularly, to women. That Grete can be exchanged for Gregor in “Metamorphosis,” that her substitution for him can be inscribed through male imagination, suggests also that we must distinguish between masculine writers and writers who are male; we should acknowledge Kafka’s discomfort with the male role and with a language symbolically “owned” by a male literary establishment. As a prophet of the complexities engendered by “the woman question,” Kafka’s text, fortunately, no longer delivers a message only to (alienated) men.

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- † From Nina Pelikan Straus, *Signs* 14.3 (Spring 1989): 651–67. © 1989 by the University of Chicago. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the University of Chicago.
1. Christian Goodden, “Points of Departure,” in *The Kafka Debate*, ed. Angel Flores (New York: Gordimer Press, 1977), 2–9, esp. 2.
 2. In 1980 and 1981 three articles discussing gender in “Metamorphosis” appeared in English: Sammy McClean’s “Doubling and Sexual Identity in Stories by Franz Kafka,” in *University of Hartford Studies in Literature* 12, no. 1 (1980): 1–17; Larysa Mykyta’s “Woman as the Obstacle and the Way,” *Modern Language Notes* 95, no. 3 (April 1980): 627–40; and Evelyn Torton Beck’s “Kafka’s Traffic in Women: Gender, Power and Sexuality,” *Notes of the Kafka Society* 5, no. 1 (June 1981): 3–14.
 3. Goodden, 8.
 4. Réda Bensmaïa, “Foreword: The Kafka Effect,” trans. Terry Cochran, in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, ed. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), ix–xxi, esp. ix.
 5. Eric Heller, “On Not Understanding Kafka,” in Flores, ed., 24–41.
 6. Quoted in Bensmaïa, xiii.
 7. These experiences and their impact on Kafka’s writing have remained unexplored until the publication of Kafka’s letters to Milena Jesenka (see Hartmut Böhme, “Mother Milena: On Kafka’s Narcissism” [1962], in Flores, ed., 87) and, especially, to Felice Bauer (see Erich Heller and Jürgen Born, eds., *Letters to Felice*, trans. James Stern and Elizabeth Duckworth [New York: Schocken, 1973]).
 8. Hellmuth Kaiser, “Kafka’s Fantasy of Punishment,” in “*The Metamorphosis*” by Franz Kafka, trans. and ed. Stanley Corngold (New York: Bantam, 1972), 147–56; for the Marxist critique, see, e.g., Kenneth Hughes, ed., *Franz Kafka: An Anthology of Marxist Criticism* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England for Clark University, 1981); Beck. Some recent works that address Kafka’s attitudes toward women are Nahum Norbert Glatzer, *The Loves of Franz Kafka* (New York: Schocken, 1986); and Rudolph Binion, *Soundings: Psychohistorical and Psycholiterary* (New York: Psychohistory Press, 1981).
 9. Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, trans. Evelyn Reed (New York: Pathfinder, 1972), 163.
 10. *Ibid.*, 111.
 11. Franz Kafka, “Metamorphosis,” in *Franz Kafka, The Penal Colony: Stories and Short Pieces*, trans. Willa Muir and Edwin Muir (1958; reprint, New York: Schocken, 1964), 67–132, esp. 68–69; all subsequent quotations from “Metamorphosis” are cited parenthetically in the text.
 12. Bernard Bödeker, *Frau und Familie im erzählerischen Werk Franz Kafka* (Bern and Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1974).
 13. Günter Anders, *Franz Kafka*, trans. A. Stein and A. K. Thorlby (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1960), 81–82.
 14. Peter Dow Webster, “Franz Kafka’s ‘Metamorphosis’ as Death and Resurrection Fantasy,” *American Imago* 16 (1959): 349–65, esp. 365; reprinted in Corngold, trans. and ed. (n. 8, p. 131 above), 157–68.
 15. Anders, 53.
 16. This group includes Günter Anders, Walter Benjamin, Hartmut Binder, Elias Canetti, Stanley Corngold, Gilles Deleuze, Ronald Gray, Félix Guattari, Eric Heller, Kenneth Hughes, George Lukács, Karel Kosík, Walter Sokel, and Joseph Peter Stern.
 17. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1971).
 18. Hartmut Binder, “The Letters: Form and Content,” in Flores, ed. (n. 1 above), 223–41, esp. 229.
 19. Deleuze and Guattari, eds. (n. 4 above), 28–42, esp. 28.
 20. Alice Jardine, *Gynesis* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985).
 21. Elias Canetti, *Kafka’s Other Trial: The Letters to Felice*, trans. Christopher Middleton (1969; reprint, New York: Schocken, 1974), 12–13.

22. Ibid.
23. Ernst Pawel, *Franz Kafka: The Nightmare of Reason* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1984), 265.
24. Quoted in *ibid.*, 283.
25. *Ibid.*, 286.
26. Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1966), 336.
27. The Muirs' translation of "Metamorphosis," quoted in this article, has been criticized by Ronald Gray in "But Kafka Wrote in German," in Flores, ed. (n. 1 [above](#)), 242–52. The Muirs' translation of this particular passage, however, supports my reading of Grete's eventual transformation in relation to Gregor's dehumanization.
28. Quoted in Canetti, 33.
29. Franz Kafka, *The Diaries of Franz Kafka, 1910–1913*, ed. Max Brod, trans. Joseph Krash (1948; reprint, New York: Schocken, 1949), 160.
30. *Ibid.*
31. See the discussion of unwanted siblings as vermin in Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretations of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon, 1966), 385–412, esp. 392.
32. Anders (n. 4 [above](#)), 23.
33. Pawel (n. 5 [above](#)), 84.
34. Quoted in *ibid.*, 86.
35. *Ibid.*, 87.
36. Canetti (n. 3 [above](#)) writes in this connection that "Kafka's room is a shelter, it becomes an outer body, one can call it his 'forebody' " (27).
37. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (1953; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1974), xxxiii and *passim*.
38. Juliet Mitchell, *Woman's Estate* (New York: Random House, 1971), 178–79.
39. The Muirs' translation (n. 2 [above](#)) does little justice to the strength of Gregor's agreement with Grete's decision against himself, translating the German *womöglich* as "if that were possible" (127) when the more accurate translation is "possibly even."

MARK M. ANDERSON

Sliding Down the Evolutionary Ladder? Aesthetic Autonomy in *The Metamorphosis*[†]

Was he an animal that music moved him so?
(*The Metamorphosis*)

I

A few years ago an art gallery in New York created a mild sensation by dousing a number of human models, clothes and bodies, in green paint and hanging them on its bare white walls. Although the models adopted various poses, they made no attempt to deny their living status, and interacted freely with the bemused public. Somewhat at a loss to describe the artwork, which apparently was not for sale, the media spoke of 'Dada', 'performance', and 'action' art. Franz Kafka's

literary masterpiece of 1912, *The Metamorphosis*, enacts essentially the same scenario when its human-sized bug hero climbs the wall of his bedroom and usurps the aesthetic space occupied by a gilt-framed photograph, hugging his flat body against the glass until it ‘completely covers’ the picture. When his mother, less blasé than a New York audience of the 1980s, enters the room, her senses are overwhelmed. She perceives only a huge brownish spot against the flowered wallpaper and, crying out ‘Oh God! Oh God!’, falls into a dead faint. No avant-garde artist of the modern period could ask for a more satisfying public response.

Since the story’s initial publication in 1915, few if any readers of *The Metamorphosis* have wished to recognize Gregor Samsa’s metamorphosed body as an aesthetic form. For Kafka’s early public the bug was simply too repulsive, and was explained away with allegorical notions like ‘alienated labor’ or ‘unconscious self-loathing.’¹ Further, although Günther Anders in an early and quite perceptive essay interpreted Gregor Samsa as a *Luftmensch* and ‘artist’ figure,² and although subsequent critics have seen a parallel between Gregor’s isolated condition and Franz Kafka’s monk-like dedication to his writing,³ readers have been hard put to reconcile this aesthetic dimension with the specificity of Gregor’s outward form. In fact, close scrutiny of the story has led critics to deny that the bug has any reliable visual specificity at all: actual descriptive details are scant and contradictory, and since the story is narrated largely from Gregor’s perspective, his own body tends to disappear from the reader’s view. The opening designation of Gregor as an ‘ungeheure Ungeziefer’ or ‘giant vermin’ is notoriously ambiguous, for *Ungeziefer* refers to a broad range of animal parasites rather than a single type, *ungeheuer* (‘monstrous’) is by definition vague, and the ‘un-’ prefixes in both words double the term’s lack of specificity into a kind of negative infinity. Significantly, when the cleaning lady calls to Gregor with the precise term *Mistkäfer* (dung beetle), he refuses to respond. Thus abstractly or negatively defined, the bug would seem to have no discernible form, and to the reader at least it remains a visual cipher.

This critical tendency to de-emphasize the bug’s status as a visual object of representation reached its most extreme and brilliant limit in Stanley Corngold’s influential essay ‘The Metamorphosis of the Metaphor’.⁴ Drawing on Anders’s insight that Kafka often literalizes metaphors as the basis for his central images and plot lines, Corngold interprets Gregor’s form as primarily linguistic and rhetorical rather than visual. Because the text circumvents the dialectical relationship of metaphor, insisting that Gregor is a bug but without denying him specifically human traits, the monstrous vermin form functions as a ‘mutilated

metaphor, uprooted from familiar language' (59), an 'opaque sign' (56). Anything disturbing about his appearance arises primarily from a disturbing use of rhetorical structure, an 'unclean' mixing of the metaphor's human tenor and its material vehicle:

It appears, then, that the metamorphosis in the Samsa household of man into vermin is unsettling not only because vermin are disturbing, or because the vivid representation of a human 'louse' is disturbing, but because the indeterminate, fluid crossing of a human tenor and a material vehicle is in itself unsettling. (56)

Such interpretations have an indisputable hold on Kafka's story and, I suspect, are ultimately correct. Kafka knew that his story was a kind of literary tease, that it depended on the reader's imagination to visualize what is only suggested by the text. When confronted with his editor's plan to illustrate the bug for the cover of the first edition, his response was unambiguous: 'The insect itself cannot be depicted' (letter of 25 October 1915). He proposed instead the image of a half-opened door with only darkness behind it—the bug itself remains unseen and the reader must perform the same act of imagination that is required by the text in the passage from linguistic sign to mental image. Kafka's suggestion was in fact taken up, and a black-and-white illustration by Ottomar Starke adorned the story's first edition in Kurt Wolff's series *Die weißen Blätter*.

None the less, one cannot help feeling that such critical and authorial strictures have something of a magician's legerdemain—Now you see him, now you don't—and hide as much as they reveal. Although the text is a verbal artefact which expertly subverts the metaphorical function of language, it also requires the reader to make a sustained effort to visualize the bug within a minutely described environment. Moreover, such strictures obscure the fact that the text repeatedly displays Gregor's body as a visual object of unusual power—a scandalous, grotesque object difficult to behold, yes, but one that is attributed with an undeniable aesthetic function, as in the scene when Gregor hangs himself on the wall in front of his mother and sister. Indeed, the basic movement of all three sections of the novella consists in covering and uncovering Gregor's body, like a monster at a fair or a sacred icon.

Accordingly, this essay will attempt to describe Gregor's form in visual and aesthetic terms, even when the text itself leaves these terms vague or obscures their reference. Two avenues of interpretation will be followed: a historical, deliberately digressive approach that compares Kafka's use of the vermin image

to contemporary developments in science and literature; and a textual reading in terms of the problematic of *Verkehr*, clothing, and corporeal gymnastics and on which *The Metamorphosis*, perhaps more crucially than any of Kafka's other writings, depends.

II

Kafka's most famous text has been with us so long that it is easy to forget the audacity of using a human-sized cockroach as the main figure in a literary text. Nothing in the classical literature of animal fables or even in the Romantic literature of the uncanny or the grotesque is quite like *The Metamorphosis*, with its mixing of the monstrous and the everyday, the repulsive and the beautiful.⁵ And yet there is precedent for Kafka's modernist masterpiece in the scientific and aesthetic discourses of the *fin de siècle*. His story is about a metamorphosis from human to animal form, and like all his animal narratives it arises from—and in reaction to—the ubiquitous presence of Darwin's theory of evolution.⁶ The idea of 'metamorphosis' was in the air. Goethe's *Metamorphosis of Plants* and the *Metamorphosis of Animals* were held in high regard in scientific circles as Romantic harbingers of Darwin's own writings. German scientists like Ernst Haeckel and Wilhelm Bölsche propagated Darwin's teachings in Germany, not only in their research but in popular lecture series and *Volksausgaben* for a broad audience; Haeckel held an influential lecture on the evolutionary theories of Goethe, Lamarck, and Darwin in 1882, a year before Kafka's birth. Largely because of Haeckel's efforts, Darwin's evolutionary monism gained increasing currency in German-speaking countries, as all life forms were understood to be united in a great chain of being stretching from single-celled plasma to the highest primates.

Such theorizations found their equivalent in art and literature of the period. The *Jugendstil*, with its proliferation of swirling plant, mineral, and animal forms, espoused a monistic philosophy of an all-permeating life force, of organic change and becoming. Not infrequently, *Jugendstil* artists drew inspiration from contemporary scientific representations, which increasingly emphasized unusual, unknown, exotic, or otherwise bizarre forms of the natural world. Haeckel's *Kunstformen der Natur* (*Art-forms of Nature*, 1899–1903), which included 100 colour illustrations of protozoa, ocean sponges, medusas, coral, tropical birds, flowers, and exotic insects, served as a veritable handbook for the *Jugendstil* movement.⁷ In his foreword he notes that the higher forms of plants and

vertebrate animals that had dominated scholarly and artistic attention until the nineteenth century have given way to ‘strange and marvellous forms’.⁸ Addressing himself explicitly to contemporary artists, he promises that his book will bring these hidden treasures to light, thereby providing them with a ‘rich supply of new and beautiful motifs’.⁹

Haeckel’s work had a twofold importance for literary and visual artists at the turn of the century. First, it offered them spectacular new material—vivid colors, flowing lines, translucent textures, grotesque and fantastic creatures from another realm of experience—that could be used in representation of organic and inorganic forms. It thus helped to enlarge the canon of aesthetically valid subjects, treating what might have been dismissed as ugly, overly stylized, bizarre, or lowly organisms as beautiful aesthetic forms in their own right. On a theoretical level, Haeckel promoted the notion of an originary *Kunsttrieb* or artistic impulse that could be found in all of nature. Attempting to explain the remarkable sensuous beauty, symmetry, and variety of even the most primitive organisms, he posited a ‘soul’ within each cell that constantly struggled for ‘plastic’ definition and self-realization: ‘One can describe the artistic impulses of protists as “plastic cellular instincts”, for they stand on the same rung of the soul’s activity as the well-known instincts of higher, multiple-celled animals and plants’ (12). The will to art not merely as a democratic possibility but as a biological necessity arising from the depths of every living organism—here was a philosophy for turn-of-the-century reformists and educators.

Kafka’s first encounter with these ideas came in the *Gymnasium*. Under the influence of his science teacher Adolf Gottwald, a convinced Darwinist, he read the author of *On the Origin of Species* at age 16. And according to his classmate Hugo Bergmann, he read Haeckel’s *Welträtsel* (*The Riddle of the Universe*, 1899) with ‘unusual enthusiasm’ in the same period.¹⁰ A few years later he would find similar ideas in the literary writings of Hugo von Hofmannsthal and his friend Max Brod. The ornamental exoticism that one finds in their early work, as indeed that of the entire *fin-de-siècle* and *Jugendstil* generation, is sustained and legitimized by their naturalist curiosity in contemporary evolutionary theories linking plant, animal, and human intelligence.¹¹ Brod’s early novellas abound in vegetable and animal exotica whose *correspondance* with the human soul he attempts to convey by an abundance of synaesthetic tropes. The following description from his ‘Carina Island’ (in which he portrays Kafka as a detached, melancholy aesthete) gives us a typical sampling:

It was a forest full of passion through which we strode. In the deep tranquillity and solitude, magnificent magnolia trees put forth their blossoms like large, violet bowls of porcelain. Humming-birds flashed through fragrant symphonies of scarlet and snow-white oceans of flowers, through palagonitic bushes and lilies and begonias. Giant silk-like moths spread their shimmering wings, butterflies showed off their violet and emerald-blue shades of colour. Giant beetles, which looked like precious jewels or like foliage, crept their way through the oily, red soil.¹²

Hofmannsthal also echoes Haeckel's monistic exoticism in his early *Jugendstil* story 'Fairytale of the 672nd Night' (1895), when the main protagonist recognizes in the ornaments of his plush, *fin-de-siècle* furniture 'a magic image of the intertwined wonders of the world'. In these carved ornaments he sees 'the forms of animals and the forms of flowers and the merging of flowers with animals; the dolphins, lions, tulips, pearls and acanthus ... It was a great heritage, the divine work of all generations and species.'¹³ In his Lord Chandos 'Letter' written seven years later, the emphasis on ornamental flora and fauna shifts to less exotic, indeed 'insignificant' creatures; but Haeckel's influence is still evident in the fluid, evanescent passage between them and the protagonist's human consciousness. The text, which Kafka knew and valued, is particularly relevant to *The Metamorphosis*:

In these moments an insignificant creature—a dog, a rat, a beetle, a crippled appletree, a lane winding over the hill, a moss-covered stone—mean more to me than the most beautiful, abandoned mistress of the happiest night ... [Such creatures] can become the vehicle of a divine revelation ... of my flowing over into those creatures, or my feeling that a fluid of life and death, dream and waking, flowed into them for an instant—but from where?¹⁴

Kafka's story is another matter, of course. His beetle does not crawl through the earth of Brod's exotic tropical island but through the drab, petty bourgeois apartment of a European city. And unlike Hofmannsthal, who keeps Chandos's mystical revelation within a human framework, Kafka reverses the camera angle, forcing us to see not so much the insect as the world of higher primates from the insect's perspective. Moreover, Gregor's metamorphosed body does not cater to contemporary aesthetic taste for stylized exotica. Like the cockroach that Kafka mentions in the 'Letter to His Father', the vermin form in *The Metamorphosis* is

meant to sting and bite its audience, to upset traditional aesthetic notions with a scandalous, ‘inhuman’ otherness. Frau Samsa’s reaction—her appeal to ‘God’ as well as her fainting—is again exemplary.

As an assault on conventional bourgeois taste, the novella thus definitely belongs within the canon of Expressionist and avant-garde modernism, rather than in *fin-de-siècle* ‘decadence’ or the *Jugendstil*. Its closest visual counterpart is to be found in the early drawings of Kafka’s Prague contemporary and acquaintance Alfred Kubin, whose allegorical symbolism often relies on a similar grotesque crossing of human and abstract insect-like figures. But like Kubin’s zoological fantasies, Kafka’s story draws on the visual forms promoted by *fin-de-siècle* scientific and literary discourse, on ‘strange and marvellous forms’ from a radically other realm of experience. More crucially, it insists on what one might well call the animal’s ‘humanness’, which emerges most poignantly in his relation to art. Just as Haeckel recognized in single-celled protozoa a human ‘soul’ and a primal *Kunsttrieb*, so does *The Metamorphosis* endow a lowly, potentially repulsive form with a human consciousness and a will toward art. However grotesque and ‘other’ the *Ungeziefer* may appear to the Samsa family, the text’s true subject (as in Kafka’s other animal stories) is the condition of being caught between human and animal forms, caught in the fluid of an evolutionary life force. That Gregor slides down the evolutionary ladder in his quest for artistic self-realization is only one of the ironies behind his bizarre transformation.

III

To describe Gregor’s animal form as it manifests itself in the narrative, one can best begin by noting what it is not: clothing. In Kafka’s novel fragment of 1907, *Wedding Preparations in the Country*, we find an anticipation of Gregor Samsa’s transformation. There Eduard Raban imagines himself split into two distinct selves: a giant beetle who stays in bed while his ‘clothed’ human body is sent into the *Verkehr* of the world, ‘travelling’ to the country to get married:

I don’t even need to go to the country myself, it isn’t necessary. I’ll send my *clothed body* ... For I myself am meanwhile lying in my bed, smoothly covered over with the yellow-brown blanket ... As I lie in bed I assume the shape of a big beetle, a stag beetle or a cockchafer, I think.¹⁵

What is surprising here is that Raban’s grotesque form as a beetle connotes

protection and warmth. He feels no horror, surprise, or shame at his metamorphosis, but rather an odd kind of satisfaction, as if his hard beetle shell were simply one additional layer of protection from whatever menaces him in the outside world. On the other hand his 'clothed body' is sent like a messenger to take part in the 'traffic of clothes', travelling to the country where he will perform the social rituals necessary for his impending marriage. This clothed body is clearly the unessential self: it 'staggers out of the door', a movement that indicates not the body's fear but 'its nothingness' (CS 55). And if it is not certain, as Walter Sokel maintains, that what remains behind in bed is Raban's 'essential', 'naked' self (protected by blanket, beetle shell, and the fetal position of his legs, Raban is everything but naked), it has been removed from the *Verkehr* of society. Raban's beetle self is unclothed and yet covered—'naked' in the sense than an animal is considered naked.

The fiction of *The Metamorphosis*, of course, is to turn Raban's dream into reality. 'It was no dream', a disembodied narrative voice announces at the text's beginning. Here too clothing and *Verkehr* are intertwined. Previously Gregor worked as a travelling salesman, selling 'cloth samples' for a large company; his collection of clothing lies open, like a suitcase, ready to be packed up for another day's journey. His metamorphosis signals first of all a break with this order of reality, with the order of work, travel, clothing, and mortality, as is made clear in Gregor's first extended monologue:

Oh God, he thought, what an exhausting job I've picked on! Traveling about day in, day out. It's much more irritating work than doing the actual business in the office, and on top of that there's the trouble of constant traveling, of worrying about train connections, the bad and irregular meals, casual acquaintances that are always new and never become intimate friends [*ein immer wechselnder, nie andauernder, nie herzlich werdender menschlicher Verkehr*]. (CS 89–90)

Gregor's lament is directed not against work but against the 'travelling' nature of his work, the movement that prevents him from realizing a truly 'affectionate' relation to society, a 'human' *Verkehr*. The irony of this phrase is the rhetorical reversal underlying the entire story, that of an 'animal' who is more human than his human co-protagonists. 'The devil take it all!', Gregor exclaims in a Faustian invocation, and immediately he senses the strangeness of his reptile body—an 'itching up on his belly' which is now covered with small white spots, 'the nature of which he could not understand' (CS 90). This 'pact' with the devil seals

Gregor's break with his human past, removes him from the 'traffic of clothes', and prepares him for his existence as a radically singular, 'animal' being, whose foreign body he must first learn to master.

The most striking counterexample to Gregor's grotesque form is the photograph that hangs in the Samsas' living room, depicting him during his military service as 'a lieutenant, hand on sword, a carefree smile on his face, inviting one to respect his uniform and military bearing' (CS 101). This image of military authority, virility, and happiness depends on the effacement of individual singularity. Gregor wears the uniform that literally and symbolically establishes his participation in a social order whose identity is maintained by a common form of clothing. The 'uniformity' of his military appearance coincides with the nature of his employment as a salesman who shows cloth 'samples' (*Muster*) to his clients. Critics have often taken this word as a pun on *Musterknabe*, as if the text meant to say that Gregor was a 'model child'. He was, but only in the sense of being without any particular identity that would set him above or apart from the others—equivalent and interchangeable, like the cloth samples in his travelling kit. (Or, in an image whose uncanniness gives us a measure of Kafka's ambivalence toward the effacement of individual difference, like the three unnamed, indistinguishable men who later take lodging in the Samsa household.)

Kafka develops further the notion of the uniformization of work and social *Verkehr* through the father, who is forced to take a position as a bank messenger for which he wears a uniform with gold buttons and monogrammed cap. Herr Samsa thus enters the world of commerce as the transmitter of financial messages, a scarcely human vehicle in the circulation of commercial meanings. His uniform secures his identifiability in this network at the same time that it marks him as a prisoner and underling who has sacrificed his personal identity to an abstract order. Branded with the bank's mono-gram and uni-form, Herr Samsa's body functions only as a sign, a bearer of information in the *Verkehr* of the world's meaning; he even eats and sleeps in his uniform, 'as if he were ready for service at any moment and even here only at the beck and call of his superior' (CS 123). As always in Kafka, this traffic signifies something irremediably base and unclean: 'his uniform, which was not brand-new to start with, began to look dirty, despite all the loving care of the mother and sister to keep it clean, and Gregor often spent whole evenings gazing at the many greasy spots on the garment.'

Mother and sister also enter the world of *Verkehr*. Grete takes a job as a

salesgirl and is learning shorthand to work as a secretary, thus serving as the transmitter of money, letters, information—a ‘vehicle’ in social and economic traffic. Frau Samsa helps out by sewing ‘elegant underwear’ for a fashion boutique, working late into the night (CS 123). With this covert reference to the fancy goods sold in his father’s shop, Kafka depicts Gregor’s mother as an unwitting madam *à distance*, mediating the *Verkehr* of elegant clothing, social ritual, and sexual couplings. At the end of the text the notion of traffic is literalized when the Samsas ride a streetcar to the country and envision their daughter’s entrance into the sexual *Verkehr* of marriage: ‘It struck both Mr. and Mrs. Samsa [that their daughter] had bloomed into a pretty girl with a good figure. They grew quieter and half unconsciously exchanged glances of complete agreement, having come to the conclusion that it would soon be time to find a good husband for her’ (CS 139).¹⁶

IV

Gregor’s metamorphosis, then, makes a cut in his life, isolating him from the paternal and social order of work, clothing, business, ‘traffic’. It defines him negatively: against the family’s names he is nameless; against its human uniforms he has his singular animal covering; against its participation in the circulation of social or economic meaning, he remains cloistered in his room, cut off from human discourse. And yet the narrative does not limit itself to a merely negative definition of Gregor’s identity. In opposition to this family ‘traffic’ of clothing, it delineates an alternative, Utopian space of play, distraction, and childlike innocence that is curiously consistent with late nineteenth-century definitions of aesthetic experience. In fact, Gregor’s metamorphosis fulfils the dream of every serious *fin-de-siècle* aesthete: to become not just an artist, but the artwork, the visual icon, itself.

The second paragraph of *The Metamorphosis*, immediately following the account of Gregor’s transformation, describes a picture of a lady dressed in fur that, hanging on the wall opposite him, seems to mirror his newly transformed, animal self:

Above the table ... hung the picture which he had recently cut out of an illustrated magazine and put into a pretty gilt frame. It showed a lady, with a fur cap on and a fur stole, sitting upright and holding out to the spectator a huge fur muff into which the whole of her forearm had vanished! (CS 89)

The picture clearly constitutes an aesthetic moment within the Samsa's petty bourgeois world. As we learn later, Gregor has himself fashioned the 'pretty gilt frame' with his fretwork, a pastime or 'amusement' that is explicitly contrasted with his work as a travelling salesman. 'The boy thinks about nothing but his work', Frau Samsa explains to the chief clerk. 'He just sits there quietly at the table reading a newspaper or looking through railway timetables. The only amusement he gets is doing fretwork. For instance, he spent two or three evenings cutting out a little picture frame; you would be surprised to see how pretty it is; it's hanging in his room' (CS 95–6). Here the mortality of *Verkehr*, evoked through the railway *timetables* and newspapers (*Zeitungen*), is contrasted with Gregor's 'amusement' or distraction (*Zerstreuung*) in making the picture; alienated labour is contrasted with a form of play that results in art, a framed image that is 'beautiful' (*schön*).

Of course, one should be wary of idealizing what is after all a kind of pin-up—an erotic photograph cut out of a magazine that a lonely salesman hangs in his room. And what about the woman's fur clothing? Isn't it part of the same *Verkehr* of clothing, social intercourse, and mortality that defines the Samsa household? Fur was after all the clothing that Adam and Eve put on after being expelled from the Garden, as Kafka noted when he copied this passage from Genesis into his diary.¹⁷ In fact, these furs function as emblems not so much of wealth and social status as of animality, which in this story symbolizes a liberation from specifically human problems of sin, guilt, mortality, even from pain and self-consciousness. This is the basic narrative movement to *The Metamorphosis*: after his initial transformation, Gregor will attempt to realize the promise implicit in this photograph, to merge with his mirror-image, to descend the evolutionary ladder into an animal state, to become the animal-artwork.

As several studies have pointed out, Kafka borrowed the image of the fur-clad lady as well as the basic plot structure for his story from a classic novel of *fin-de-siècle* eroticism, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* (1880).¹⁸ The picture Gregor has cut out of a magazine thus functions as a coded reference to Kafka's own appropriation of Sacher-Masoch's narrative. This is not the place to rehearse the numerous and surprising similarities between the two texts, which include not only the fur clothing, but also uniforms, the name Gregor, and analogous 'punishment fantasies', which, in Sacher-Masoch's text, turn the protagonist metaphorically into a 'dog' or 'worm' grovelling at his mistress' feet. Two points of contact between these texts are however worth stressing. The first

is that in both works fur functions as a metonymy for sexual desire, either in the Freudian sense as a fetish recalling the mother's genitalia and pubic hair, or in the popular sense of 'animal' passion and corporeality.¹⁹ Secondly, in both texts desire is a product of images—paintings, sculptures, photographs, staged erotic encounters—in other words, art. One paradigmatic moment in *Venus in Furs* describes for instance the narrator's desire for a white marble copy of the Venus de Milo, which is draped in fur. The novel also opens with the description of a painting of Venus to which it returns in the closing scene.

From Sacher-Masoch's novel one may hypothesize that masochistic desire is dependent on images because by definition the images preclude fulfilment. In between the opening and closing description of the painting, we witness the main protagonist orchestrate his desire in the guise of masochistic self-abasement, dressing his female partner in a variety of fur costumes, engaging her to act out pre-established scenarios of punishment and humiliation with him and other men, while all the time setting up formal obstacles to the consummation of his desire. In effect, the masochist turns his mistress into an actress, himself into her public. He 'frames' her as art, establishing an inviolable line between his reality and material bondage on the one hand and her aesthetic freedom and power over him on the other. The image is merely a more radical form of this same inviolability, its inaccessibility as image guaranteeing the frustration of desire. The frame is so to speak the masochist's rope and chains.

This same dialectic of image, power, and desire is implicit in Gregor Samsa's unspoken relationship with his 'pretty' picture. Unlike, say, Georg Bendemann in 'The Judgment', Gregor has no mistress or fiancée, only the photograph, which through his own efforts he has inscribed as art, framing it and putting it behind glass. Already 'only' an image, the woman is thus raised to the level of art, put into an ideal space that Gregor can aspire to but never truly enter. And this seems to be the source of its attraction and power. In the story's second section, Gregor's identity is threatened when his sister and mother begin cleaning out his room. He asks himself which object he should choose to rescue, considers (but rejects) his desk, then settles on the image of the woman in fur hanging on the wall. The encounter with art is explicitly erotic, the 'cool' glass which separates Gregor from the image providing the actual 'comfort':

[H]e was struck by the picture of the lady muffled in so much fur and quickly crawled up to it and pressed himself to the glass, which was a good surface to hold on to and comforted his hot belly. This picture at least,

which was entirely hidden beneath him, was going to be removed by nobody. (CS 118)

What is unusual about Kafka's text and distinguishes it from Sacher-Masoch's racier but ultimately more conventional narrative, is that the movement toward 'animality' and masochistic desire does not result in sin and guilt, but in a cleansing of these 'human' remnants from Gregor's past. The animal is innocent. Thus his metamorphosis is akin to a rebirth, to a childlike awakening, to self-absorbed games and play. We are told for instance that Gregor's insect legs 'dance ... as if set free', that he learns to get out of bed by rocking himself to and fro—'the new method was more a game [*Spiel*] than an effort' (94)—and that, despite his grotesque form, he shows no hesitation in offering himself for public viewing. 'He was eager to find out what the others, after all their insistence, would say at the sight of him' (98).²⁰ The sentiment voiced here is more than a comic device: Gregor is in the process of losing his capacity for self-judgement through the eyes of the world, of becoming an unselfconscious child-animal.

This reacquisition of an originary freedom and innocence coincides with Gregor's *Kunsttrieb*, his impulse toward art and self-display. Two moments stand out in this process. The first is the delightful interlude of unselfconscious play that takes place in the novella's second section. Despite the damage inflicted to his body by his father, Gregor enjoys a beatific state of distraction (*Zerstreuung*), innocent of memory, swinging like a gymnast from the ceiling, walking the walls, defying the material constraint of gravity much like the trapeze artists, circus riders, and floating dogs figured in Kafka's other writings. High above the furniture in his room, Gregor can breathe more 'freely':

He especially enjoyed hanging suspended from the ceiling; it was much better than lying on the floor; one could breathe more freely; one's body swung and rocked lightly; and in the almost blissful absorption induced by this suspension it could happen to his own surprise that he let go and fell plump on the floor. Yet he now had his body much better under control than formerly, and even such a big fall did him no harm. (CS 115)

A happy state of distraction, easy breathing, the almost musical rhythm rocking his body—these are all privileged terms in Kafka's vocabulary. Capable of 'falling' from a great height without harming himself, Gregor has achieved a state of innocent grace untroubled by his father's *Schulden*, the financial 'debts'

that are also, in German, the result of moral transgressions. But this 'immortality' is achieved by the 'artist' who has made his body into the vehicle of his art, a vehicle which performs, in these moments of unselfconscious play, as gracefully as the marionettes in Kleist's essay 'Über das Marionettentheater.' If *Luftmensch*, as Günther Anders points out, connotes in German the artist who has no solid footing beneath his feet, Gregor is the *Lufttier*, much like the floating dogs in the later story 'Investigations of a Dog' who are animated by an uncanny, silent music, or the Japanese tumblers Kafka drew in his diary as an image of artistic freedom.²¹ Gregor literally floats above the traffic of human time, his consciousness absorbed by his dancing, though hardly *Jugendstilian*, body.

The second moment occurs in the third section of the novella and brings out the musical implications of Gregor's artistic self-realization. Gregor's sister Grete begins playing the violin for her parents and the lodgers while Gregor lies in his dirty, dark room. Animated by a corporeal *Kunsttrieb* or will to art, oblivious to the material consequences of his action, he creeps toward his sister or rather her 'playing', her *Spiel*:

Gregor's sister began to play; the father and mother, from either side, intently watched the movements of her hands. Gregor, attracted by the playing, ventured to move forward a little until his head was actually inside the living room.... [I]n spite of his condition, no shame deterred him from advancing a little over the spotless floor ... Gregor crawled a little farther forward and lowered his head to the ground so that it might be possible for his eyes to meet hers. Was he an animal, that music moved him so? He felt as if the way were opening before him to the unknown nourishment he craved. (CS 130–1)

Again Kafka's text insists on the ludic, innocent character of this encounter. Despite his animal condition, the filth that his body has accumulated, or even the evidently incestuous nature of his attraction to his sister, 'no shame deter[s] him' on his path toward the 'unknown nourishment' evoked by the music. We should note too the text's insistence on a lived, corporeal experience of the music: the boarders who read the musical notes over Grete's shoulder rather than experience music physically like Gregor are clearly portrayed as philistines. Gregor, the innocent 'child-animal' who wants to 'play' with his sister, has access to the secret of art because his body is itself striving for a weightless, ethereal, musical condition. And this artistic impulse results, for the third and

last time, in the body's self-display in a context of aesthetic performance.

Even the process of dying has an aesthetic, spiritual dimension. Like the initial rejection of clothing, cloth 'samples', and the *Verkehr* of his employment, Gregor's progressive rejection of organic nourishment initiates a movement back to the innocence of childhood or, in biblical terms, to the moment in Eden before the eating of the apple. (The apple that Gregor's father throws at him interrupts this movement and ultimately seems responsible for the son's Christ-like death. But the apple originates with the father, not the innocent child, and as such represents the violent intrusion of the 'traffic' of Gregor's previous life into his aesthetic paradise.) As the memory of his human past fades away, Gregor begins to 'play' with his food like an infant, eventually renouncing it altogether for the pleasures of his home gymnastics: 'he was fast losing any interest he had ever taken in food, so that for mere recreation he had formed the habit of crawling crisscross over the walls and ceiling' (CS 115). This fasting flattens and lightens Gregor's form, removing it from the circulation of human, organic life, 'spiritualizing' it until it is completely empty. Grete, who shows a particular fascination for the corpse, remarks: ' "Just see how thin he was. It's such a long time since he's eaten anything. The food came out again just as it went in." Indeed, Gregor's body was completely flat and dry' (CS 136-7).

The Christian overtones of this death are clear and support the basic narrative of conflict between father and son. Herr Samsa makes the sign of the cross, for example, and Gregor is described as being 'festgenagelt', 'nailed fast' to the floor by the paternal apple bombardment. Yet Gregor is not only a fasting Christ or monk who has withdrawn from the world, but first of all the *fin-de-siècle* aesthete who 'hungers' for music, the highest of the arts in Romantic and Symbolist poetics.²² Within the corpus of Kafka's own writings, Gregor bears an unmistakable affinity with other artist figures. One thinks for instance of Georg Bendemann in 'The Judgment' who performs his gymnastic 'turn' over the bridge but then hangs to the railing 'as a starving man clutches for food'. Or of the famished musical dogs in 'Investigations of a Dog', or the disappearing artist figures of the last stories, 'A Hunger Artist' and 'Josephine the Singer'. But Gregor's metamorphosis into a dancing musical bug is the most astonishing of all Kafka's self-referential literary figures. Emptied of all organic substance, perfectly isolated from the paternal 'traffic of clothes', he dies as a two-dimensional object, as 'flat' and 'dry' as the pages of printed characters on which he is now immortalized.

In the above remarks I have deliberately read Kafka's text against the majority of its critical interpretations, which see in Gregor's metamorphosis a tragedy visited upon an unsuspecting victim that ends with the 'liberation' of the family through his ritualistic sacrifice. On the contrary, I see the family as enslaved and deindividualized by its re-entrance into the *Verkehr* of work, sexuality, and commerce (the realm of 'clothing'), whereas Gregor carries out the project of self-definition, individual autonomy, and freedom implicit in his transformation into a 'giant vermin'. He takes off the 'clothes of the world', to put it in the terms of this study, not to reveal an 'essential self' or to retreat into religious seclusion, but, in line with the *fin-de-siècle* substitution of aesthetics for religion, to put on the grotesque mask of art, to retreat into the self-enclosed world of aesthetic play and freedom symbolized by his animal shell. Whether self-willed or not, a consciously Faustian transgression of human limits or a sudden eruption of repressed desire, Gregor's behaviour in his new form is sustained by a constant *Kunsttrieb*, an unconscious artistic will that prevents him from ever questioning the necessity of his metamorphosis or attempting to reverse it. Indeed, this consistent volition to *display* himself goes hand in hand with his 'monstrosity' (etymologically related to *monstrare*, 'to show'), which chases the chief clerk from the scene, puts the formerly parasitic Samsas to work, and dislodges the boarders, allowing Gregor to devote himself to narcissistic play, distraction, and innocent desire. Whatever the cause of his transformation, its implicit, unspoken *telos* is finally aesthetic: to turn the clothed, human body into a pure, autonomous artwork.

This is the place to stress Peter Cersowsky's insightful remark in his study of Kafka's relations to literary decadence that Gregor's metamorphosis into an animal can be seen as part of the traditional 'melancholic disposition' and thereby linked to the melancholy of the *fin-de-siècle* decadent aesthete. Noting that Bourget had already defined the decadent as the isolated individual 'unfit for the common labor of society', Cersowsky rightly stresses the parallel with Gregor's exclusion from family and society as an 'unproductive' bug. In this sense Gregor is a decadent 'type' like Kafka's other bachelor figures—isolated, self-absorbed, ill adapted to work, melancholy, sexually impotent by definition (as the single example of his 'species'), and therefore the endpoint of the Samsa family line. In essence Gregor's metamorphosis establishes the same opposition between aesthete self and bourgeois family that characterizes Thomas Mann's early novellas (which Kafka greatly admired), with all their connotations of

health and vitality on one side, parasitism, decadence and death on the other. Gregor represents the bizarre end of his 'race', the tired, melancholy decadent who willingly departs from this life to make way for his 'healthy' family.²³

What this interpretation leaves out, however, is the positive, even aggressive countertendency in Kafka's text that insists on Gregor's form as the autonomous artwork. *The Metamorphosis* displays none of Mann's nostalgia for blond and blue-eyed *Bürgerlichkeit*. Indeed, the petty bourgeois environment of the Samsa household—dirty, constricted, animated by a mean will for profit and social conformity—finally provokes the reader's disgust, perhaps the very disgust initially associated with the grotesque bug but which fades away as the story progresses and Gregor's 'humanity' comes to the fore. As we have seen, the text's positive affirmations concern Gregor's form: its childlike aptitude for games, dance, music, and spiritual nourishment. And whereas Gregor's consciousness lags behind the radicality of his aesthetic form (even in death he seems tolerant and forgiving of his family), the body itself proclaims all the aggressive, even jubilant qualities of the avant-garde or modernist artwork: Art as an attack on Life, not just its impotent and nostalgic opponent; Art as the grotesque, abstract, ultimately incomprehensible object that has removed itself from the bourgeois social order.

But not outside the biological order of decay and death. Gregor's blissful state of 'free breathing' and self-absorbed *Zerstreuung* while hanging from the ceiling in his room lasts only a brief while, eventually giving way to a melancholy yearning for an 'unknown nourishment' he has never tasted. And the very refusal of organic nourishment that excludes him from the human, social realm and that augments his ethereal, *Lufttier* nature ultimately leads to his death and disappearance. The animal-artwork is not granted an unnatural physical permanence, but is effaced by the same cycle of life forces that is presumably responsible for its original transformation. On 9 December 1912, two days after finishing what would become his most famous story, Kafka sent Felice Bauer a postcard of Strindberg asking her if she knew his story 'Alone', thus secretly revealing the meaning and aestheticist origins of his own text. 'That is finally what it means to be alone', Strindberg says at the end of his autobiographical narrative in reference to his isolation as an artist. 'To spin oneself into the silk of one's own soul, to mask oneself in one's own cocoon, and wait for the metamorphosis, which never fails to come about.' Kafka spun himself into his own literary cocoon and waited. Yet the metamorphosis that took place in Prague in November 1912 did not produce the strange, beautiful butterfly of

Strindberg's *fin-de-siècle* imagination, but a grotesque, primitive ornament of modernity: the 'monstrous vermin'.

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- † From Mark M. Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg Fin de Siècle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 123–44. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.
1. For an overview of the secondary literature on *The Metamorphosis*, see S. Corngold's *The Commentators' Despair: The Interpretation of Kafka's 'Metamorphosis'* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1973) and P. Beicken's *Franz Kafka: Eine kritische Einführung in die Forschung* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1974), 261–72. One of the earliest interpretations of the story in psychoanalytic terms was by H. Kaiser, whose 'Franz Kafkas Inferno: eine psychologische Deutung seiner Straffantasie' appeared in the official psychoanalytic journal *Imago* in 1931. A large number of critics have taken over Kaiser's notion of a 'punishment fantasy', including H. Tauber, H. D. Luke, C. Neider, W. Sokel. For Marxist readings of the story, see K. Hughes (ed.), *Franz Kafka: An Anthology of Marxist Criticism* (Concord: University Press of New England, 1981).
 2. 'Because Gregor Samsa wishes to live as an artist (i.e. "free as air" [*wie ein Luftmensch*], he is considered in the eyes of the respectable, down-to-earth world, to be a "bit of an insect"; thus, in *The Metamorphosis*, he wakes up as a beetle, whose idea of happiness is to be clinging to the ceiling.' *Franz Kafka*, trans. A. Steter and A. K. Thorlby (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1960), 43.
 3. Corngold offers the suggestive hypothesis that Kafka's experience of writing 'The Judgment' in September 1912, the story which 'came out of [him] like a real birth, covered with filth and slime' (*Diaries 1910–1913*, ed. Max Brod, trans. Joseph Kresh [New York: Schocken Books, 1965], 278), is the implicit biographical meaning of *The Metamorphosis*. See the expanded version of his essay 'The Metamorphosis of the Metaphor', in *Franz Kafka: The Necessity of Form* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988). P. Cersowsky notes interestingly the tradition of metamorphosis into an animal as 'an extreme image of the melancholy disposition', thereby linking Gregor to the melancholy 'decadent type'. See '*Mein ganzes Wesen ist auf Literatur gerichtet*' (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1983), p. 76.
 4. First published in 1970, the essay was reprinted in an expanded version in *The Necessity of Form*, which is the edition quoted here.
 5. In his *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970), Todorov rejects an affiliation with the fantastic, noting that Kafka's text proceeds in an opposite movement: 'Le récit fantastique partait d'une situation parfaitement naturelle pour aboutir au surnaturel, la *Métamorphose* part de l'événement surnaturel pour lui donner, en cours de récit, un air de plus en plus naturel; et la fin de l'histoire est la plus éloignée qui soit du surnaturel' (179).
 6. See Margot Norris's discussion of Darwin and Nietzsche in relation to Kafka in *Beasts of the Modern Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).
 7. See Jörg Mathes, introduction to *Theorie des literarischen Jugendstils* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1984), 32.
 8. Foreword to 1st edn., *Kunstformen der Natur* (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut, 1899).
 9. As it turned out, Haeckel was richly rewarded for his efforts. In his 1913 introduction to *Die Natur als Künstlerin (Nature as Artist)* (Berlin: Vita), he remarks that since the publication of his earlier work he has received numerous pieces of furniture, dishes, cups, and pillows, all 'tastefully embellished with the charming forms of the above-mentioned protists' (12).
 10. As quoted by K. Wagenbach, *Franz Kafka: Eine Biographie seiner Jugend* (Berne: Francke, 1958), 60.
 11. Maurice Maeterlinck, whose writings played a key role in Symbolist and *fin de siècle* literary movements, was an amateur zoologist and botanist who dedicated several works to minute descriptions of ants, bees, and the *intelligence des fleurs*; he felt that their activity revealed a sense of order and beauty, an innate 'artistic instinct'. Other writers, notably Jens Peter Jacobsen (a trained botanist who

translated Darwin into Danish), Joris-Karl Huysmans, and Octave Mirbeau in France, developed similar ideas about natural evolution in their works.

12. 'Die Insel Carina', in *Experimente* (Berlin: Axel Juncker, 1907), 46.
13. 'Das Märchen der 672. Nacht', in J. Mathes (ed.), *Prosa des Jugendstils* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1982), 41–2.
14. 'Ein Brief', as reprinted in U. Karthaus (ed.), *Impressionisms, Symbolismus und Jugendstil* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1977), 148–50, my translation. The above quotations appear in three separate passages but all refer to the same mystical, unutterable experience.
15. *Complete Stories*, ed. Nahum Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 55–6; my emphasis. Subsequent quotations from this volume, CS, are cited parenthetically.
16. Kafka's depiction of the counter-metamorphosis that takes hold of the Samsa family reveals the extent of his ambivalence not only toward bourgeois sexuality and marriage but also toward the bourgeois notion of work. Since the Enlightenment, work in the public sphere had been seen as the key to individual self-definition; for liberal and Marxist philosophers alike, personal autonomy and freedom are guaranteed by one's profession or trade, through which individuals realize their identities and participate in the social collectivity. Kafka is closer to Max Stirner and other anarchist philosophers who see work and any participation in the *Verkehr* of the socio-economic sphere as a threat to individual identity. See especially the chapter entitled 'Mein Verkehr' in Stirner's *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (1845), in which he emphasizes the individual's need to withdraw from the 'traffic' of familial responsibilities.
17. 'And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins [*Röcke von Fellen*], and clothed them.' (Diary entry for 19 June 1916.)
18. Sacher-Masoch's book has recently been reprinted in English with an extensive introduction by Gilles Deleuze (New York: Zone Books, 1989). On the relationship between Sacher-Masoch and Kafka see Ruth Angress, 'Kafka and Sacher-Masoch: A Note on *The Metamorphosis*', *Modern Language Notes* 85 (1970), 745–6; F. Kuna, 'Art as Direct Vision: Kafka and Sacher-Masoch', *Journal of European Studies* (1972), 237–46; and my own 'Kafka and Sacher-Masoch', *Journal of the Kafka Society of America*, 2 (Dec. 1983), 4–19 (repr. in Harold Bloom (ed.), *Franz Kafka's the Metamorphosis*, Modern Critical Interpretations (New York: Chelsea House, 1988)).
19. Freud writes: 'fur and velvet—as has long been suspected—are a fixation of the sight of the pubic hair, which should have been followed by the longed-for sight of the female member.' Cf. 'Fetishism' (1927), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1961), xxi. 147–58. The fetish allows the subject to maintain his fantasy of a female penis, thus sidestepping the threat of castration. This interpretation seems to have validity for Sacher-Masoch's hero, who frequently fantasizes that the furs enclose some hard, erect object (such as a marble statue of Venus) or a source of violent energy. Masoch's emphasis on electricity, his image of the woman in furs as an 'augmented electric battery', seems to suggest that the impersonality of the punishment is a key element in the masochistic experience of pleasure. (The apples that the father bombards Gregor with at the end of the second section roll about as if 'electrisiert'; the machine in 'In the Penal Colony' runs on electric power.) The image of the woman's forearm and fist in the fur muff also corresponds to Freud's notion of the (male) child's fantasy of the female member.
20. This itinerary is essentially the opposite of that travelled by Red Peter in Kafka's later story 'A Report to an Academy', an ape living in blissfully unselfconscious freedom on the 'Gold Coast' who is captured and introduced into the *Verkehr* of human society: he learns to talk, wear trousers, drink schnapps, and fornicate with a trained (i.e. half-human) chimpanzee. By contrast *The Metamorphosis* describes Gregor's progressive acquisition of the freedom in his animal body, thereby returning to the 'Gold Coast' of a childlike, prelapsarian innocence.
21. *Diaries 1910–1913*, 12.
22. Walter Pater's claim in *The Renaissance* that all the arts strive for the 'condition of music' best sums up this tradition. Knut Hamsun's novel *Hunger* (1890) established the connection between fasting and the

dedication to writing for an entire generation of German writers at the turn of the century, including Thomas Mann and Kafka. Mann used the trope in his early story 'Die Hungernden', Kafka most notably in 'A Hunger Artist' and 'Investigations of a Dog', where it is also related to music.

23. See Cersowsky, 'Mein ganzes Wesen', 74–6.

ELIZABETH BOA

Creepy-Crawlies: *The Metamorphosis* and Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*[†]

Like *The Judgment*, *The Metamorphosis* retains a strongly naturalist aspect as a study of a milieu but it too links a crisis in family relations with wider social tensions. A comparison with Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) will serve to draw out the differential impact on a woman and a man of the sexual division of labour under capitalism: whereas the middle-class woman suffers through exclusion from work, the would-be upwardly mobile, petty-bourgeois man suffers from an excess of work. Writing the body is said to be the path to liberation for women, but the body cannot simply be rewritten by an act of will. Implicated in the meanings of the body as Gilman and Kafka write them are the class and sexual culture of their time which produced a double tabooing of female and male bodies. Gilman's story treats directly of writing the body in that her heroine writes about her body; Kafka's more indirectly. In both stories there is generic mixing as the genres of Gothic horror and the *Märchen* disrupt a realist framework in the shocking opening of *The Metamorphosis* and the shocking close of *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Gilman draws on Gothic tales of the uncanny, typically set in crumbling mansion houses. Kafka draws on an older fairy-tale tradition of animal transformation which is not in itself uncanny but becomes so in *The Metamorphosis* through being interwoven with a naturalist milieu study.¹ Gilman's and Kafka's stories may have indirect links in Dostoyevsky's insect metaphors and his doubles or alter egos, and there is a room with horrible yellow wallpaper in *Crime and Punishment*.² Keller's *Die drei gerechten Kammacher* (*The Three Just Comb-Makers*, 1856) has a painted-over, hibernating insect which starts to crawl in the spring. The three lodgers in Kafka's story are reminiscent of Keller's interchangeable comb-makers whom the cruel narrator constantly compares in dehumanizing similes with herrings in a box, pencils, or parasites with suckers. As an uncanny tripling of Gregor Samsa before his transformation, the lodgers reintroduce into the household that bloodless, bourgeois devotion to making money which Keller attacks and which

in Kafka's text at once threaten the archaic patriarchy to which the father lays claim and which alienates the son's humanity. But whereas Kafka certainly knew Keller's story, it is most unlikely that Gilman did. My choice of comparison is determined not by influence, then, but by the common motifs of enclosure in a room and crawling doubles, by generic mixing to uncanny effect, and by the theme of writing about writing through writing the body. Gilman's *Wife/Wallpaper-Woman* is one of Gilbert and Gubar's madwomen locked up in a late nineteenth-century attic; Kafka's story examines what happens when the attic has become the bedroom of a petty-bourgeois man in the early twentieth century.³

During her lifetime Gilman's story was seen simply as the chilling record of a mental breakdown, and only in the 1970s did it take on the status of a feminist classic. It is a first-person narrative by a woman who has recently had a baby and is living with her doctor husband and his sister in a crumbling colonial mansion rented on a short lease. Her low spirits are intensified by her husband's insistence that she should do no work, especially not writing, but spend her time resting in a room at the top of the house, an old nursery with barred windows and horrid yellow wallpaper. The wife gradually comes to perceive the figure of a woman crawling behind the pattern in the wallpaper and shaking it as if trying to get out. In the last section, the woman in the wallpaper has emerged and crawls over the recumbent body of the husband who has fainted on finding his wife crawling around the room: the latent text has become manifest. For convenience, I shall refer to the narrator in her double aspect as respectively the *Wife* and the *Wallpaper-Woman*.

The *Wife* and Gregor are both confined in rooms which shift in meaning within each text and have comparable and contrasting values as between the texts. Initially, the *Wife*'s room has lurid associations with its barred windows and metal rings in the wall, and the stairs, the only means of escape, are blocked off by a gate. At the top of the house, the room confines the notorious madwoman in her attic. It is, however, also a nursery: the bars and gate suggest protection; the rings are perhaps the remnants of apparatus for children's games. The nursery encloses not a child protected by parents, however, but a *Wife/Mother* imprisoned by a *Husband/Father*. Metonymically, the prison/nursery conveys the imprisonment of women in the social roles of *Wife* and *Mother*, the infantilization of women in bourgeois ideology, and patriarchal power asserted by means stretching from sadistic violence through to psychiatric medicine. A historical shift is fleetingly suggested: a middle-class, professional

man rents a crumbling colonial mansion and an older patriarchy of power enforced by violence and based on a slave economy gives way in an ostensibly more enlightened age to mental torture disguised as medical expertise which the Wallpaper-Woman eventually sees through: 'as if I couldn't see through him'.⁴ As a psychic metaphor, the attic room and its inhabitant suggest a woman's body imprisoned in a subjectivity moulded by oppressive social conditioning. The metaphoric value of the room shifts, however, towards the end: the Wife's prison is metamorphosed into the domain of the Wallpaper-Woman who marks her territory by the 'smooch' or smudge on the paper and signals her power by crawling over the husband's body. The room has changed from a prison into a narrating I's room of her own, the realm famously envisaged by Virginia Woolf, where, sealed off from a hostile environment, the woman writer can represent her self in writing. The status of that self is, however, unclear, whether a true self or an unstable changing subjectivity, still shaped by social relations, but about which truth can be told.

Gregor's room shifts from being a room of his own to become a prison. In contrast to the Wife in the nineteenth century, confined in middle-class femininity, denied social intercourse and work, in the early twentieth century Gregor seeks relief from the burdens of petty-bourgeois masculinity: the room is his refuge from oppressive work in a ruthless public sphere. It is *his* room in a way the Wife's is not, for he chose the apartment, he pays the bills, and he locks his door at night, a habit picked up from his travels as a salesman. The Wife is not allowed to lock her door, though the Wallpaper-Woman does and so asserts her privacy as a subject whose body and psyche are no longer open to penetration. On ceasing to pay the bills, however, Gregor immediately loses the power to lock his door, and after the agonizing struggle to unlock it on the first morning, his room is open to endless penetrations, as indeed the whole household always was, for the pecking order inside is affected by earning power outside and outsiders come in via financial transactions between the family and lodgers and the family and the servant. The staircase down from and up to the flat is the umbilical cord attaching it to the surrounding world: at the end, as the three lodgers descend they pass the butcher's boy coming up. As his letters to Felice amply document, meat-eating signified for Kafka, the butcher's grandson, a mode of life he rejected. Thus the butcher's boy proudly carrying his wares *up* the stairs signals the restoration of normality, where earlier the transformation had liberated Gregor from a hateful job and sent the chief clerk, come to fetch him to work, screaming *down* the stairs. Gregor's victory over the chief clerk is

comparable to the Wallpaper-Woman's triumph over the recumbent husband, but it comes early on, not as a triumphant close: *The Metamorphosis* starts where *The Yellow Wallpaper* leaves off and goes on to explore the domain won through transformation. Gregor associates freedom from the timetable of work with femininity, comparing travellers, who unlike him can afford to linger over breakfast, with harem women: the transformation marks if not feminization, then demasculinization. (The orientalist motif strengthens the contempt yet envy which sounds in manly Gregor's thought of men who are like Arab women.) A photograph shows Gregor not so much in an earlier incarnation, for his body is hardly visible, but as a uniform and a posture, of hand on phallic dagger, which demand respect. The break-out of his body from confinement in military or professional clothing marks the end of manliness but brings a new confinement, like that of a woman, which Gregor at first almost enjoys as his sister brings him tempting morsels like harem sweetmeats. Gregor explores his domain, crawling up the walls and across the ceiling to mark his territory, and at first is glad that the furniture is to be removed to leave more space for wandering. Still attached to his humanity, however, he changes his mind and tries to stop the full transformation of the 'Menschenzimmer' (DL 115; 'a regular human bedroom', ES 89)⁵ into an insect domain. (The comical neologism *Menschenzimmer* echoes *Frauenzimmer*, a derogatory metonym for 'woman' drawn from the women's quarters in traditional households, the European equivalent of the harem.) But the family exclude Gregor from human community; he must eat alone in his room and eventually loses his appetite even for insect food. Having lost his social identification as a man, son, brother, and breadwinner, he starves to death in a limbo. The limbo is not empty, however, for his room is by the end cluttered with old bits of furniture discarded by the family as he too is discarded and finally disposed of by the charlady as a piece of rubbish. To be swept out by a working-class domestic on the lowest rung on the patriarchal/class ladder is the ultimate end of manhood, just as sleeping in a maidservant's room is a sign of Kaufmann Block's humiliation in *The Trial*. And perhaps Gregor's room never was a room of his own, for it was in a bed, at the very heart of the private realm where bourgeois man seeks recuperation from alienating work, that the transformation occurred. The division between the public and the private spheres is illusory. As a psychic metaphor, the room suggests a subjectivity vulnerable to social penetration, and as with the wallpaper double, the status of the insect double is unclear: is it Gregor's true self which emerges in resistance to his social subjection or is it simply the revelation of his subjection which comes to a

climax as he miserably succumbs under the continuing thrusts of that penetration?

The room as social metonym and psychic metaphor conveys how material circumstances and social relations help to shape subjectivity. As a woman writing before full legal, political, and economic emancipation, Gilman conveys the imprisonment of a middle-class woman in the domestic sphere; Kafka, a man writing in an age of ruthless competition, underpinned by militaristic and patriarchal ideology with a hint of racism, explores the sufferings of a lower-middle-class man who fails to be manly. The shifting meanings of the rooms reflect the different positions: initially, the room means exclusion from work and society in Gilman's story, refuge from work and society in Kafka's. Ultimately, it means a kind of liberation in Gilman's story as a Woolfian room of one's own, but deadly isolation in Kafka's, an outcome foreshadowed, however, in the deeply ambiguous close of *The Yellow Wallpaper*, whose mad inhabitant will surely be immured as completely as the insect.⁶ Subjective transformation in a private domain is not enough; the self cannot be walled off without going mad or dying, yet accommodation with society produces the pressures which culminate in madness or death. None the less, *The Yellow Wallpaper* is less pessimistic than *The Metamorphosis*, as I shall suggest later when considering the narrative mode of the two stories. At this point, however, I want to turn to gender and crawling.

In Gilman's text society means the male-dominated institutions of marriage, medicine, finance, and actual husbands and doctors. In Kafka's text, it means competitive capitalism and the patriarch who lives on in the mind even as formal father-power was crumbling, though the father here remains a more literal presence than in Kafka's later work. The social powers are gendered as masculine, reflecting actual male dominance in society, but the texts are written from different positions and the rooms have different psychic meanings. Gilman's room is the scene of a denial of idealized motherhood as the Wallpaper-Woman transforms the nursery/prison into a room of her own and rejects the rule of the Husband/Father: infantilized as her husband's dear girl she regresses, an adult woman, to crawling in her nursery like an oversized baby in an ironic assertion of infantilism. Gregor's room is a refuge from masculinity, protecting the insect both from the father and from the paternal role, but thereby also denying access to the object of desire. Gregor's opening posture has all the innocent exhibitionism of a round-tummied infant lying on his back and kicking his little legs, his body not yet a phallic implement but a sensorium to which pleasurable things are done, especially by women. The insect later shows

childlike energy, crawling about eagerly up the walls and across the ceiling like a monster baby in a regression from work-driven adulthood into playful infancy. (Babies or little children as the Other appear not only in Kafka's letters to Felice but also in *The Trial*, where they cling limpet-like to Josef K.'s trousers.) But infantility provokes a wounding re-enactment of the patriarchal prohibitions: these doubly taboo the male body, which must remain unseen and abstract in its sacred aspect or be stigmatized as disgusting and unclean if too blatantly uncovered. The reborn baby-self cannot flourish in the face of such hostility and dies.

Both texts represent changing subjectivity through the motif of doubles.⁷ In *The Yellow Wallpaper* the gradual shift of focus from the Wife to the Wallpaper-Woman marks a change of self-evaluation. The descriptions of the wallpaper combine geometrical shapes, less ordered curvings, anthropomorphic figures and parts of bodies, and vegetable similes, in which the Wife gradually discerns a top pattern of imprisoning bars and a sub-pattern of a crawling woman, suggesting the revelation of something hidden underneath an imprisoning surface. The Wife's earlier emotive words suggest horror and disgust at the shapes in the wallpaper, but later she comes to like watching the emergent image of a crawling female body. The shift of view conveys a shift in perception and feeling. The metamorphosis of the Wife into the Wallpaper-Woman is thus the outcome of a battle over the body and its meanings. A Wife/Mother is confined in a nursery; there are separate beds; the husband has a separate room and he constantly addresses the Wife as if she were a child. These details invoke the Wife as a virginal, desexualized girl. As a Mother too the narrator is treated as a delicate, innocent virgin-mother detached from the bodily processes and the sheer hard work of mothering. Such a femininity was a cult of the affluent middle classes. It recalls the Victorian pleasure in little girls or the cult of the pre-adolescent body in the art nouveau fashion of the 1890s, in Tiffany glass, for example. The shapes in the wallpaper are the adult female body as it might appear to a shameful young virgin: full of 'lame, uncertain curves', 'sprawling', 'flamboyant', 'florid arabesques', 'unheard of contradictions', 'lurid', 'unclean', 'sickly', 'waddling columns of fatuity', 'wallowing', a nauseating smell. Dehumanization is suggested in the animalesque crawling on all fours in the filthy smooch like a slug marking its passage, and in the images of seaweeds and toadstools. As Jean Kennard suggests, the emergence of the crawling Wallpaper-Woman is a defiant assertion of the mature body by way of reverse discourse.⁸ In a Lacanian reading, Mary Jacobus takes the emergence of the Wallpaper-Woman

as an uncanny literal metaphor for the absence that is repressed in the symbolic order of language; the absent repressed here assumes the figure of the castrated female body so that the censor, the narrator's husband Doctor John, 'catches the text, as it were, *in flagrante delicto*'.⁹ But the repression is not, I would argue, a universal effect of phallogentric language, but a historically specific alienation produced by the bourgeois construct of an innocent, asexual femininity which in America was set as true womanhood over against quite different constructs, of black femininity for example, just as the virgin-sister, the ideal other self in Kafka's story, contrasts with the working-class charlady.

Kafka's insect too has nauseating features suggestive not only of infantilism but of a disgusting feminization. On his back, his swelling tummy almost exposed as the bedclothes are slipping off, Gregor is in an animal's position of surrender which, seen anthropomorphically, is also the female position of sexual surrender. In all the detailed description of the body, there is no mention of the normally obtrusive male organ. Indeed because of the tummy, Gregor cannot see the lower part of his body, though it seems peculiarly sensitive to pain when he inadvertently knocks it against the foot of the bed, suggesting an already existing wound or raw surface. Instead of a penis, he has feelers emerging from his head, a ludicrous image of the impotence of the mental as compared with the seat of phallic power, and instead of the white engendering fluid he emits a disgusting brown fluid from his mouth, a hermetic reference perhaps to the logorrhoea of literature. Like the smooch in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the insect here leaves a trail of slime suggesting his slimy creepiness. When the patriarch-father bombards him with apples, the fruit of Eden and sign of the Fall, his body is penetrated like a woman's, but from behind through his back. (Josef K., by contrast, defiantly eats an apple just after his arrest, though his defiance is short-lived.) The hard, armour-like back is a masculine image ambiguous between aggression and defence, but on penetration Gregor is emasculated, and becomes a monster who is neither woman nor man. To Gregor his humanity seems to be co-extensive with his sexuality, and the loss of manhood means the loss of humanity. Hanging in his room is a picture which Gregor has very recently cut out from a magazine and put in a gilded frame. His mother mentions proudly that Gregor, a do-it-yourself amateur of fretwork, had himself made the frame. (Such parental pride in a sign of normal masculinity, like his parents' pride in Georg Bendemann's gymnastics, are incongruously homely details which in gruesome context are at once funny yet uncanny.) First mentioned too prominently and somewhat inexplicably as early as the second paragraph, the picture takes on the status of a

Clue and is indeed a hermetic, jokey allusion to Leopold Sacher-Masoch's story *Venus in Furs* (1870), whose masochistic hero takes on the name Gregor on falling under the spell of his dominatrix, Wanda. (Sacher-Masoch's wife was called Wanda.)¹⁰ The picture shows a woman in a fur hat and wrap and holding up a fur muff, evocative of the furry animality of the female genitalia, like the fur coverings of the heroine of the Grimms' fairy-tale 'Many-Pelts'. When his mother and sister start to clear out the human furniture, rather than his desk or the fretwork tool-cupboard—emblematic of *homo cogitans* and *homo faber*—it is the picture of the furry woman he clings to, spreading his insect body over it: *homo futuens*. The Wallpaper-Woman throws off the Wife's sexual subjection: her crawling over the husband is not desire to reverse the missionary position, for she does not linger but crawls on over; her crawling is an anti-erotic act expressing rejection of another's desire. The insect plastered over the furry woman, by contrast, asserts the right to desire. Thus, where the woman thirsts for work and finds freedom in her room from sexual demands, the man escapes work but loses sexual rights. Gregor's disgust at his own body is mirrored in divided feelings for women: on the one hand animalesque desire for the taboo animalesque female which he defends against the mother and sister who come to take it away; on the other hand love for his mother and idealization of his sister, the sacredly tabooed women of the household towards whom Gregor has hitherto played the role of chivalrous protector. He has projected on the sister his own creative and spiritual ideals. When she plays the violin he is drawn to her, like the animals tamed by Orpheus, and might, like the Frog Prince or the Beast, be redeemed by a virgin's kiss. But incestuous lust not for the spirit but for the furry body are irredeemable: he would pollute the sister who in any case refuses the redemptive kiss. Grete is only too anxious to escape from her idealized role, whether as redemptive sister or musical *alter ego*: however ideal the vocation the brother has in mind, it is *his* vocation for her. Grete chooses instead to train and earn a wage as a shorthand-typist, throwing off too the role of sister/nurse to her afflicted brother as, in the closing words of the story, she stretches her young body. But her typical service job as a typist and the parents' hope of finding her a good husband are sinister signs that the age of economic equality and liberated female sexuality has not yet arrived: the New Woman will be drawn back into the family. None the less, these signs of change are a factor in Gregor's emasculation: as the sister strengthens, the brother weakens.

The contradictory construction of woman in bourgeois patriarchy is a common factor in the two stories: on the one hand the virginal woman enclosed

in the household, to be chivalrously protected or else idealized for her redemptive purity which will save man from alienation and self-division between animal and spirit; on the other hand the animalesque sexual woman and the messy business of childbirth, menstruation, and lactation which nineteenth-century medicine pathologized. Infantilization and idealization alienate women from their own stigmatized bodies which also frighten men, so that male sexuality becomes an ever-repeated rape of innocence or else a shameful lust for something disgusting. (Kafka's letters evince both attitudes in full.) *The Yellow Wallpaper* brings the contradictions out into the open but does not provide a cure.¹¹ The Wallpaper-Woman crawls on over the Husband, but crawling remains intractably an image of powerlessness; the most utopian image is of a woman in the open country creeping as fast as the shadow of a cloud in a high wind, but even here the woman is the creeping shadow, not the cloud on high. The partial psychic liberation of the Wallpaper-Woman is not followed through into social recognition of transformed femininity enabling women to stand upright. The Wallpaper-Woman's victory over the Wife is pyrrhic, for as a social being outside of her room she will be defined as mad. This suggests that individual metamorphosis is not enough; the social meanings of gender must be transformed. *The Metamorphosis* shows a transformed man, semi-feminized in his loss of social status as breadwinner. But the transformed man and all the other characters still see through the normative spectacles of patriarchy: a man who is not masculine is a creep who cannot go forth into the outer world. After the brief illusion of freedom to crawl up walls and over ceilings, Gregor starves to death in an isolation of spirit and body.

Comparison of the two stories suggests that, while subjective change is not sufficient in itself, femininity is more open to movement. Gilman's is the more hopeful text in a number of ways. First, there is the narrator's sense that there are many creeping women and that in creeping on over she has ceased to be a creep. Gregor, by contrast, has no such feeling of potential solidarity and remains isolated and unresisting. Secondly, an undertone of gruesome comedy emerges in *The Yellow Wallpaper* in the question at the end: 'Now tell me, why should that man have fainted?' (YP 36)—a question implying dialogue with a listener (or reader—the text is ambiguous between written diary entries and spoken words) who shares the mentality of the Wallpaper-Woman and can enjoy her sly irony; the Wallpaper-Woman here almost moves up to an authorial level, her voice transgressing the limits of the text to pass into the world of reading women. Thus where Gregor loses his human voice, first-person narration allows

the emergent Wallpaper-Woman finally to find a voice and perhaps even to write. Early on, the written 'I' emerges against the 'we' referring to Husband and Wife: while 'we' are asleep, 'I' watches the paper (YP 25). In the last section 'I' oscillates rapidly between the Wallpaper-Woman and the Wife, but remains a narrating subject. Transformation is thus possible without total loss of identity, which here has the double aspect of a body and a written 'I' who, after the fluctuations, achieves at the very end the narrative mastery of a stable epic preterite. Gregor, by contrast, cannot address a reader, since he cannot rise from his diegetic level up into the level of the masterly narrator: we smile with the Wallpaper-Woman; we are forced, unwillingly perhaps, to laugh at Gregor, who is incapable of irony. *The Metamorphosis* is if anything a funnier story, but the irony at Gregor's expense is either at the level of the third-person narrator or is authorial, and Gregor remains the object of third-person narration by a covert, cruelly mocking narrator. Thirdly, the Wife seeks self-expression through her writing. In bringing her *alter ego* into the light of day she makes the latent manifest: writing is a therapy which liberates from the sanity of the Wife, albeit only into madness of the Wallpaper-Woman, but for the reader there is the pleasure of a kind of victory. In *The Metamorphosis* Gregor projects his aspirations towards creative self-expression on to his musical sister, himself pursuing only a safely masculine handicraft. Kafka regularly embodied artists as female or at least unmanly. Artistic sensibility was not perceived as a masculine attribute within the nationalistic culture which put young men into military uniform—intellectuals, especially Jewish intellectuals, were decadent and the very antithesis of manliness. If Gregor is a prototype writer—intellectual, then, on the cruelly ironic logic of the text, his self-perception of himself as an insect is a self-subjection to patriarchal definition and hence a yet further sign of insecthood.

But there is little to support the thesis that Gregor Samsa in himself is a potential writer; the only writing is of letters by the three other members of the family after his death. If a potential writer is present in Kafka's text, then he has suffered a sadomasochistic split into a covert, deadpan, third-person narrator—observer and his object, the insect. Kafka would later comment on such self-division in a letter to Milena (GM 281; EM 168).¹² The division also creates a split view of the family whom Gregor loves, but who scarcely emerge as lovable from their textual presentation, so that the insect's love seems a wimpish failure of manliness, and yet that love is also the sign of his humanity which surely causes most readers to side with the insect against the narrator.¹³ And so we

readers are driven back and forth; even those of us inclined to sympathize with Grete's emancipation from servile sisterhood cannot prevent a pang of pity for the brother and a certain fear of the narrator's coldly observing eye. The endless reflections of irony back and forth between characters and narrator in *The Metamorphosis* have made it one of the most endlessly intriguing texts of the century. The prime source of its power is that body. What a narrator once conveyed discreetly and discretely in similes—Keller's comb-makers lie in bed together like herrings in a tin—has descended from the narrator's level to intrude blatantly into the story in a transgressively naturalistic elaboration of a metaphor. In contrast to Gilman's protagonist who moves from denial of bodily form towards self-acceptance and bodily assertion, Gregor moves from initial exhibitionism to hiding shamefully away under the sofa. It is the narrator who keeps drawing forth and exhibiting his body to the reader's fascinated gaze so that it becomes as iconic as the Gorgon's head held high by Perseus. The iconically heightened insect body becomes in this *antimärchen* an anti-phallus of great literary potency. Kafka's dislike of the last section may well be because that source of textual power has, down below in the story, been swept away. The choice of a charlady as the ultimate uncomprehending enemy of the male subject in his travail might well offend readers inclined to sympathize not just with sister/secretaries but also with charladies. Yet, as Jörg Schubiger comments, the charlady is the only human being who addresses the insect directly without fear or disgust: a member of the lower orders, she is less shame-ridden than the family and used to dealing with dirt.¹⁴ In returning the dusty insect to dust the charlady's act conveys with disarming wryness an authorial acknowledgement of limits set on writerly self-aggrandizement. If it is true that writing as a theme is divided in *The Metamorphosis* between the narrator and the body he writes about (neither element in itself identifiable with Kafka), then it is quite false to set social-critical readings which concentrate on the milieu against readings which stress self-reflective writing about writing: the two are inextricably intertwined and mutually determinant, not least the gender and class discourses which add such resonance to the image of a dried-out, ex-male, ex-middle-class insect being swept out by a charlady, leaving a bodiless narrator, his mastery fading, to conclude his tale with a family outing. Writing is a practice which occurs in time and place by embodied social beings who live in households and have sisters or husbands. If writing is cut off from the social body, then the superficial banality of quotidian life will remain unprobed and all that remains will be the silence of a dead insect. If it is a reflection on writing, then *The Metamorphosis* expresses

not a turning away from the outer world towards narcissistic self-absorption; rather it demonstrates how outer and inner worlds interpenetrate. To explore the self is to explore the world, but as the long struggle which the letters to Felice document, that exploration did entail a kind of cutting off of the writer from his body and from other people, as *The Metamorphosis* also acknowledges.

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- † From Elizabeth Boa, *Kafka: Gender, Class, and Race in the Letters and Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 120–33. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.
1. For an early reading of Kafka's stories as *Antimärchen* which compares *The Metamorphosis* with *Beauty and the Beast* see Clemens Heselhans, 'Kafkas Erzählformen', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift*, 26 (1952), 351–76.
 2. See Ralph E. Matlaw, 'Recurrent Imagery in Dostoevskij', *Harvard Slavic Studies*, 3 (1957), 201–25, on insect imagery; and Jacques Catteau, *Dostoyevsky and the Process of Literary Creation* (Cambridge, 1989), 408–11, on 'the hated sign of yellow' in Dostoyevsky. I am grateful to Malcolm Jones for drawing my attention to these publications.
 3. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, Conn., 1984), 89–92.
 4. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), published with an afterword by Elaine R. Hedges (London, 1973), 32. Subsequent quotations from this volume, YP, are cited parenthetically. [Ed.]
 5. DL: *Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, ed. Hans-Gerd Koch, Wolf Kittler and Gerhard Neumann (Frankfurt am Main, 1994); ES: *The Collected Stories of Franz Kafka*, ed. Nahum Glatzer (Harmondsworth, 1988). [Ed.]
 6. The double aspect of a room of one's own as signifying freedom but also imprisonment reappears in Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina* (1971), whose heroine, a reader of Kafka, is finally immured.
 7. Karl Miller, *Doubles: Studies in Literary History* (Oxford, 1985), associates the prevalence of doubles in post-Romantic literature with the stresses of rapid social change and the frustration of groups to whom mobility is denied.
 8. Jean E. Kennard, 'Convention Coverage or How to Read your Own Life', *New Literary History*, 13 (1981/2), 69–88.
 9. Mary Jacobus, 'An Unnecessary Maze of Sign-Reading', in id., *Reading Women: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (London, 1986), 229–48.
 10. Peter B. Waldeck, 'Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* and *Ein Hungerkünstler* as influenced by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch', *Monatshefte*, 64 (1972), 147–52.
 11. Elaine R. Hedges, afterword in Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, 37–63, sees only defeat and like Annette Koldony, 'A Map for Rereading: Or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts', *New Literary History*, 11 (1979/80), 451–67, stresses the negative aspect of madness.
 12. GM: *Briefe an Milena*, ed. Jürgen Born and Michael Müller (Frankfurt am Main, 1986); EM: *Letters to Milena*, ed. Willy Haas, trans. Tania and James Stern (Harmondsworth, 1983). [Ed.]
 13. For an attack on Kafka's writing in general as such a failure of manliness see Edmund Wilson, 'A Dissenting Opinion on Kafka', in Ronald Gray (ed.), *Kafka: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1962), 91–8.
 14. Jürg Schubiger, *Franz Kafka, Die Verwandlung: Eine Interpretation* (Zurich, 1969), 50.

CAROLIN DUTTLINGER

From Photographic Metamorphoses[†]

“The Ape of My Parents”: Socialization as Deformation

Photographs in *Der Verschollene* [“The Man Who Disappeared,” also known as “Amerika”] frame Karl’s journey of social decline. In the European family portrait, his dual exposure to the gaze of the parents and that of the camera prefigures his increasing subjection to, and expulsion by, authoritarian structures. Karl’s later adoption of the name ‘Negro’ replays this dynamic in racial terms as the subtle coercion of the family portrait tacitly gives way to the brutality of Holitscher’s lynching scene. In *Die Verwandlung* the twin themes of familial power structures and social exclusion are once again explored through the photographic lens; here, however, the theme of racial otherness is recast in evolutionary terms, as a regressive flight from human identity as such. However, the association between photography and transformation is not limited to the story itself but emerges from Kafka’s personal engagement with his childhood portraits. On 28 November 1912, he writes to Felice Bauer:

Wie alt ich hier bin, weiß ich gar nicht. Damals gehörte ich wohl noch vollständig mir an und es scheint mir sehr behaglich gewesen zu sein. Als Erstgeborener bin ich viel fotografiert worden und es gibt also eine große Reihenfolge von Verwandlungen. Von jetzt an wird es in jedem Bild ärger, Du wirst es ja sehn. Gleich im nächsten Bild trete ich schon als Affe meiner Eltern auf.¹

I don’t know how old I am in this one. At that time I think I still belonged completely to myself, and I seem to have been very comfortable with it. As the eldest, I was constantly being photographed and so there exists a long succession of transformations. From now on it gets worse in every picture, but you’ll see. In the very next one I already appear as the ape of my parents.²

By ‘re-reading’ several of his childhood photographs from an adult perspective, Kafka integrates these images into a narrative sequence, investing them with a quasi-filmic continuity. Importantly, however, socialization is here not understood in Rousseauist terms as the realization of the child’s natural potential; rather, it is figured as a deforming and conditioning process based on the child’s imitation of the parental model.



Kafka as a baby, c. 1884.

Kafka contrasts an early image which shows him in a state of comfortable oblivion with the subsequent loss of innocence which is likewise documented photographically. In this respect, his comments follow a well-worn nostalgic tradition; as Anne Higonnet puts it, childhood photographs ‘give testimony to an imaginary time when we were perfect and innocent, when we were, we would like to believe, our original and therefore real selves. Any fall from grace can be measured against the child snapshot standard.’³ At the same time, Kafka’s use of modifying formulations such as ‘I think’ and ‘I seem’ suggest that the ‘comfortable’ state which he discerns in his earliest photograph might in fact be the result of a retrospective projection, the attempt to delineate an idyllic early state from the subsequent process of decline. Yet this approach is not without inherent contradictions. Although Kafka constructs the first picture as distinct from all the subsequent images, this ‘before-and-after’ opposition already subsumes the first image into the later development. The initial, idealized state thus becomes visible only against the backdrop of later decline.

Kafka’s central concern becomes apparent only in his engagement with these later photographs. Here he discerns a development which he describes, in vague but evocative terms, as ‘a long succession of transformations’. Even in the

following photograph, Kafka finds evidence for this process; this portrait depicts the child not as a self-contained, comfortable individual but as an altogether different figure, namely as ‘the ape of my parents’. This formulation encapsulates Kafka’s fundamental critique of photographic portraiture which underpins his literary engagement with the medium. By casting himself as an ape, Kafka comments on the mechanisms of social coercion inherent in photographic portraiture, a genre which inserts the individual sitter into a predetermined array of gestures, poses, and backdrops. Although we cannot be sure that Kafka is here commenting on the same image as Benjamin twenty years later, he refers to the same phenomenon: the studio portrait’s erosion of individuality.

Kafka thus describes a fundamental principle of socialization—the child’s imitation of adult behaviour—to which his animal metaphor gives a particular twist. The ontogenetic model of socialization is here expressed in phylogenetic terms, associating personal acculturation with an inverted version of Darwinian evolution. The child–ape metaphor suggests that the emulation of adult values and behaviours is achieved only at the cost of a figurative regression to an earlier evolutionary stage. However, this image also raises more complex questions about agency; the ape is not only anterior to human society in biological terms, but also metaphorically secondary to it, in its role as imitator. This ambiguity is mirrored in Kafka’s genitive construction; as ape ‘of’ his parents, Kafka is both his parents’ possession—a passive screen onto which they can project their ideals and aspirations—and an active agent replicating the parental model.

While photography provides a record of this development, Kafka’s conclusion, ‘*and so there exists a long succession of transformations*’ (my emphasis), attributes a causal role to the medium in this process. The carefully staged studio photograph is situated on the interface between realist representation and imaginary construction, and as such actively contributes to the imposition of normative models of identity.⁴ * * * The child, and in particular the first-born son, provides a privileged screen for the projection of parental ideals and social norms—a mechanism which gains particular significance for a Jewish family seeking assimilation into the dominant Gentile culture. Kafka’s use of the ape as a figure of human socialization is of course reminiscent of his later story ‘Ein Bericht für eine Akademie’ (‘A Report to an Academy’, 1917). Its simian protagonist Rotpeter develops, like the child Kafka, into a fully acculturated subject by mimicking human behaviour.⁵ Yet while the ape’s transformation has been read as a satire on Jewish assimilation,⁶ it is difficult to

tell to what extent the ape's performance is one of uncritical imitation or self-conscious parody. Kafka's letter about his own childhood picture raises similar questions. His preoccupation with the ape as a model of socialization is uncannily reminiscent of the use of Darwinian theories in turn-of-the-century anti-Semitic discourse which saw the Jew as a buffer between man and ape.⁷

Yet if Kafka seems to echo such anti-Semitic stereotypes, he does not do so uncritically. The ape as a model of socialization is tied up with another element which subverts a straightforward process of assimilation. This is the notion of performance which is central to the adoption of predetermined models of identity⁸ and which links Rotpeter's report—itself a parodic performance of academic discourse—and Kafka's account of his childhood photographs. His use of the verb *aufreten* invests the image with a theatrical dimension, again raising questions about the individual's complicity with his own subordination.

As we have seen, the turn-of-the-century photographic studio provides a privileged terrain for the theatrical construction of bourgeois identity. Yet if photography provides a platform for such prescriptive mechanisms, it can also act as a springboard for resistance. The viewing of studio photographs can raise awareness of their de-individualizing, formulaic character, and childhood photographs in particular can provide a vehicle of critique. Children often make reluctant sitters, and the sight of them posing in stuffy costumes in kitsch surroundings exposes the humiliating and ridiculous character of this photographic masquerade.⁹ The child as ape parodies parental authority by investing notions of lineage, genealogy, and socialization with a regressive character which counteracts and distorts the transition of identity constructions from one generation onto the next. In this respect, Kafka's account prefigures Judith Butler's concept of gender performance and its destabilizing effect on normative, naturalized concepts of identity. As Butler argues,

The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-forming or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction.¹⁰

The child's photographic mimicry is not just a passive imitation of pre-existing models but a resignified performance which parodies its original and exposes the arbitrariness of such constructions. Yet in contrast to Butler's notion that there is no identity prior to its performative construction, Kafka maintains a distinction between the deforming effect of socialization and a previous, self-contained state

which too is recorded in the photographic medium.¹¹ In his account, then, photography is a medium which depicts not only the deforming mechanisms of socialization but also their opposite, the child's pre-cultural self.

The fact that Kafka figures the process of socialization in terms of a metamorphosis from man to animal creates a striking parallel between his letter and his story. Kafka wrote this letter while he was working on *Die Verwandlung*,¹² and this temporal proximity, as well as the recurrence of the motif of transformation, calls for a closer analysis of the links between letter and literary text. While it is impossible to determine whether his letter was inspired by his fictional work or vice versa, the links between the two are far-reaching.

Die Verwandlung: *Uniformity and Monstrosity*

A comparison between *Die Verwandlung* and Kafka's letter reveals both parallels and differences. Both texts describe the transformation of a human being into an animal, and in both cases the subject of this process is a son whose existence is determined by parental demands and desires.¹³ Yet while Kafka's photographic transformation is the result of his assimilatory adoption of the parental model, Gregor's metamorphosis entails his exclusion from the family and from human society more generally. His transformation is immediate and irreversible, whereas Kafka's photographic metamorphosis is a gradual process which unfolds over the course of several pictures. In evolutionary terms, the step from human being to insect is considerably larger than that from man to ape, and Gregor's transformation can thus be seen as a radical withdrawal from dominant culture and its normative models of identity. The ape, in contrast, is a more ambiguous figure whose performance is situated between sameness and otherness, mimicry and parodic imitation.

Despite these differences, Gregor's transformation is, like that of the child Kafka, framed by images, and his fate is equally associated with the transformative power of photography. The one remnant of his human existence is a photograph which stands in stark contrast to both his animal self and his human existence as an exploited salesman. This portrait is strategically placed opposite the door through which Gregor first emerges, revealing his new body to his family:

Gregor trat nun gar nicht in das Zimmer, sondern lehnte sich von innen an den festgeriegelten Türflügel, so daß sein Leib nur zur Hälfte und darüber der seitlich geneigte Kopf zu sehen war, mit dem er zu den anderen

hinüberlugte.... Gerade an der gegenüber liegenden Wand hing eine Photographie Gregors aus seiner Militärzeit, die ihn als Leutnant darstellte, wie er, die Hand am Degen, sorglos lächelnd, Respekt für seine Haltung und Uniform verlangte.¹⁴

Gregor did not go now into the living room, but leaned against the inside of the firmly shut wing of the door, so that only half of his body was visible and his head above it bending sideways to look at the others.... Right opposite Gregor on the wall hung a photograph of himself in military service, as a lieutenant, hand on sword, a carefree smile on his face, demanding respect for his uniform and posture.¹⁵

This juxtaposition of Gregor's two framed bodies highlights the radical nature of his transformation and his concomitant loss of control and authority. While his animal body is partially hidden behind the door, his photographic self projects an air of presence and determination. This portrait dates from Gregor's military service which presumably preceded his current position as a salesman; indeed, his posture and expression command a respect which he lacks in his civilian existence. The soldier's confident, carefree appearance is underscored by his sword and uniform, the insignia of male power.¹⁶ The manuscript highlights the impact of this charismatic image on the observer; it describes how Gregor 'lächelnd dem Beschauer Respekt für seine Haltung und Uniform abverlangte'¹⁷ ['smilingly exacted respect for his posture and uniform from the observer'].

While the photograph thus illustrates the empowering effect of Gregor's military service, it also gestures towards the possible downsides of such an existence. After all, the army is characterized by the same hierarchical, de-individualizing structures which also underpin Gregor's salesman existence. Indeed, while his uniform and pose draw on a recognizable semiotic framework, they also highlight the conformist character of such self-displays. It thus remains ambiguous whether Gregor's outward confidence corresponds to a genuine inner reality or whether it is merely a facade adopted for the camera. In this respect, Gregor's photograph is reminiscent of the portrait of the young soldier which exercises such an attraction on Karl Rossmann in *Der Verschollene*. In both cases, the sitter's military attire conveys an alluring air of confidence and self-respect; yet as Karl comes to realize, the imitation of this photographic ideal does not yield the desired result as it merely uncovers the deceptive character of such displays of masculinity. A comparable sense of disillusionment underpins *Die Verwandlung*. Although the protagonist is himself the sitter of such a

commanding portrait, this display of male authority bears no resemblance to his day-to-day existence. What is more, the formulaic character of this picture contains the seeds of its subsequent subversion when Gregor, the model son, is recast as society's monstrous other.

This mechanism is alluded to in the opening scene where Gregor's gaze rests first on his own body and then on the 'Musterkollektion von Tuchwaren' (D 115) ['collection of cloth samples' (ES 89)] on the table. As Andrew Webber argues, the conjunction of Gregor's animal body with the display samples reveals the text's underlying logic, in that 'the parading of models always involves its inverse, the parading of monstrosity, and Kafka's text suggests that this is the logic of commodity culture, indeed arguably of the modern condition as such'.¹⁸ Just as the child Kafka, adopting the model of his parents, emerges as his parents' ape, Gregor's performance as model son and soldier prefigures his transformation into the monstrous other of this ideal. In both cases, the photographic portrait and its representational conventions do not merely implement normative identity but act as the harbinger of the sitter's deviation from this norm.

Fetishism and Display

Another example of this link between exemplarity and monstrosity is provided by the text's second portrait, the magazine picture of a woman dressed in furs which adorns the wall of Gregor's bedroom. Following his own body and the textile samples, this image is the third sight which catches Gregor's eye after he wakes up:

Über dem Tisch ... hing das Bild, das er vor kurzem aus einer illustrierten Zeitschrift ausgeschnitten und in einem hübschen, vergoldeten Rahmen untergebracht hatte. Es stellte eine Dame dar, die, mit einem Pelzhut und einer Pelzboa versehen, aufrecht dasaß und einen schweren Pelzmuff, in dem ihr ganzer Unterarm verschwunden war, dem Beschauer entgegenhob. (D 115–16)

Above the table ... hung the picture which he had recently cut out of an illustrated magazine and put into a pretty gilt frame. It showed a lady, with a fur cap on and a fur stole, sitting upright and holding out to the observer a huge fur muff into which the whole of her forearm has vanished. (ES 89)

As in the case of the soldier photograph, the narrative focuses on the sitter's

posture and attire, highlighting their central role in photographic identity construction. The lady's upright pose and raised arm are, as various critics have noted, rather intimidating; Walter Sokel, for instance, interprets them as a 'hostile gesture', a 'posture of rejection and defensiveness', concluding that Gregor 'has hung the unapproachability of woman as an emblem in his room'.¹⁹ Yet while the magazine image thus acts as a female equivalent to the posed virility of Gregor's portrait, it is even harder to pin down and categorize.

The picture's role within the text is complicated by a number of open questions and ambiguities which concern both its content and its representational status. Although many critics take the picture to be a photograph,²⁰ Kafka uses only the non-specific term *Bild*, which he elsewhere employs in both photographic and non-photographic contexts. The fact that in the story he uses the term *Photographie* in relation to the soldier portrait suggests a deliberate distinction between the two images. That said, the picture is cut out of an illustrated magazine and thus shares with Gregor's photograph its mechanically reproduced character. The gilded frame, in turn, a stock element of traditional art and its petit-bourgeois appropriation, invests the magazine image with an aura of uniqueness and respectability.

The picture's content adds to its ambiguous status between high art and mass culture. The woman dressed in fur forms part of the established pictorial iconography of the femme fatale, with examples ranging from Rubens and Titian to the late nineteenth-century artist Franz von Stuck;²¹ as we shall see, Sacher-Masoch's *Venus im Pelz*, a vital intertext for Kafka's story, also inscribes itself into this art-historical tradition. At the same time, however, the picture can also be traced to the realm of popular culture; in 1912, fur was at the height of fashion, and photographs of models sporting fur coats, muffs, stoles, and hats were a stock feature of fashion magazines. Given his father's haberdashery business and his personal interest in fashion, Kafka would certainly have been aware of this trend and its photographic manifestations. A photograph from the December issue of *Elegante Welt* (*Elegant World*) bears striking similarities to the picture described in *Die Verwandlung*.²² Importantly, however, Kafka's text does not specify the origin of the picture, thus increasing its multivalence and ambiguity; although its assemblage of fur items points in the direction of a fashion image designed, like Gregor's cloth samples, for the display of commodity items, its materialism is undercut by an erotic undertone which points in the direction of pornography. Thus there are two forms of fetishism at play here, as the picture's commodity fetishism fuels Gregor's private, erotic

fixation.

This fetishistic ambiguity is crucial for the story. Curiously, despite its erotic undertones, Gregor does not keep the picture secret from his parents; on the contrary, his mother even proudly refers to it in her conversation with the chief clerk, describing the frame which Gregor has made for it in his free time (D 126–7/ES 96). As proof of Gregor's harmless pastime activities, the image might at first sight appear comically inappropriate; in fact, however, the mother's comment touches on a more insidious mechanism of sublimation. As fashion image, the image partakes in the sphere of commerce, travel, and exchange which determine Gregor's working life; as pornographic pin-up, in contrast, it provides an outlet for his sexual drives which might otherwise be channelled into a relationship, thus assuring his continued dedication as the family's breadwinner.²³

Even before Gregor's transformation, then, the picture has a highly ambivalent status, as is suggested by the frame in whose creation he has invested so much effort.²⁴ If the function of a picture frame is to demarcate the boundary between the work of art and its context, then Gregor's construction of the gilded frame marks an attempt to dissociate the image from its original, mass-produced context, that is, from the realm of commodification which also underpins his own professional life. However, the function and effect of the frame are ambiguous; while it establishes a boundary between viewer and image, it also heightens the picture's auratic allure. A similar ambivalence applies to the process of its construction which takes place in the living room, under the watchful eyes of Gregor's parents, thus forming part of his externally regulated existence. That said, the construction of the frame is an expression (albeit modest) of Gregor's creative potential and thus marks an escape from his instrumentalized, regimented existence; indeed, the making of the frame is described as a 'Zerstreuung' (D 126) ['distraction' (ES 96)] from his regular activities, the reading of the newspaper and the studying of railway timetables, both of which partake of the sphere of commerce and traffic.²⁵

The frame is thus a complex symbol within the text, as it both establishes and problematizes the distinctions between image and context, high and mass culture, work and leisure. * * *

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In its use of photography as theme and self-reflexive narrative structure, *Die Verwandlung* both mirrors and reverses Kafka's letter on his childhood

photographs. In Kafka's personal account, the child sitter is photographically transformed into his parents' ape; yet in *Die Verwandlung* this model is diversified into a more ambiguous 'succession of transformations'. Gregor's metamorphosis marks his deviation from his role as model son; yet his own appropriation of the monstrous magazine photograph triggers in turn the responses of father and sister, in whose displays of authority these two images come to life. As Kafka's story demonstrates, photographs shape the identity not only of the sitter but also of those who look at them. Yet whereas in Kafka's letter, the son is forced to emulate the parental model, in *Die Verwandlung* it is the father who apes his son's portrait and who is thereby drawn into its deceptive double bind of authority and subjugation. As the photographic performances of father *and* son demonstrate, photographic models of identity remain ultimately ambivalent, as their aura of power and authority is undercut by their inherent theatricality.

† From Carolin Duttlinger, *Kafka and Photography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 101–13, 124. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.

1. *Briefe 1900–1912*, ed. Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1999), 280. Subsequent references to this volume, B1, are cited parenthetically. [Ed.]
2. *Letters to Felice*, ed. Erich Heller and Jürgen Born, trans. James Stern and Elisabeth Duckworth (London: Secker and Warburg, 1974). Subsequent references to this volume, EF, are cited parenthetically. [Ed.]
3. Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 95.
4. Bernd Busch, *Belichtete Welt: Eine Wahrnehmungsgeschichte der Photographie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1995), 307.
5. Gerhard Neumann draws attention to the parallels between 'Ein Bericht für eine Akademie' and Kafka's letter, arguing that in the latter Kafka diagnoses his own failed socialization by associating 'the behavioural deficiencies of the child with those of the mimicking animal' ('"Ein Bericht für eine Akademie": Erwägungen zum "Mimesis"-Charakter Kafkascher Texte', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift*, 49 (1975), 166–83: 182).
6. Ritchie Robertson, *Kafka: Judaism, Politics, and Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1985), 164–71.
7. George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 143. A very different approach was pursued by Charles Darwin, in whose name such claims were often made. In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), Darwin used photographic plates not only to illustrate the continuities between humans and animals but also to counter theories about the superiority of the 'white race'. The photographic experiments of Darwin's cousin Francis Galton, in contrast, were aimed not at the extrapolation of connections and similarities but at the establishment of clear-cut eugenicist divisions along the lines of class and race. See Peter Hamilton and Roger Hargreaves, *The Beautiful and the Damned: The Creation of Identity in Nineteenth Century Photography* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2001), 70, 74–7.
8. Margot Norris argues that Kafka in 'Ein Bericht für eine Akademie' 'directly links animal mimicry and theatrical performance as evolutionary strategies in the struggle for survival' ('Darwin, Nietzsche,

- Kafka, and the Problem of Mimesis', *Modern Language Notes*, 95 (1980), 1232–53: 1233).
9. The same tendency underlies, in a radicalized form, the photographs of apes posing as humans in Carl Hagenbeck's memoirs which served Kafka as an inspiration for 'Ein Bericht für eine Akademie' (Hartmut Binder, *Kafka: Der Schaffensprozeß* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1983), 295–6).
 10. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 141.
 11. According to Butler, such a state 'before the law' of acculturation would of course be illusory, a retrospective construct.
 12. Kafka began work on *Die Verwandlung* on 17 November 1912, at a time when he encountered difficulties with his main project *Der Verschollene* and after a period of silence from Felice Bauer. He completed the text on 6 December.
 13. Gregor is forced to remain in his current, subjugated position as a salesman because of his parents' debt to his employer.
 14. *Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, ed. Wolf Kittler, Hans-Gerd Koch, and Gerhard Neumann (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1994), 134–5. Subsequent quotations from and references to this volume, D, are cited parenthetically. [Ed.]
 15. *The Collected Short Stories of Franz Kafka*, ed. Nahum Glatzer (London: Penguin, 1988), 100–1. Subsequent quotations from and references to this volume, ES, are cited parenthetically. [Ed.]
 16. In an earlier version, Gregor's rank is described as that of a 'Reserveleutnant' (DA 212) ['a reserve lieutenant'], a variant which extends his military service into his current existence.
 17. *Drucke zu Lebzeiten: Apparatband*, ed. Wolf Kittler, Hans-Gerd Koch, and Gerhard Neumann (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1996), 212. Subsequent quotations from and references to this volume, DA, are cited parenthetically. [Ed.]
 18. Andrew Webber, 'Kafka, *Die Verwandlung*', in Peter Hutchinson (ed.), *Landmarks in German Short Prose* (Oxford: Lang, 2003), 175–90: 183. Mark Anderson makes a similar point about the link between *monstrare* and 'monstrosity' in *Kafka's Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg 'Fin-de-Siècle'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, repr. 2002), 142.
 19. Walter H. Sokel, *Franz Kafka: Tragik und Ironie. Zur Struktur seiner Kunst* (Munich: Langen Müller, 1964), 94.
 20. See, for instance, Ruth Angress, 'Kafka and Sacher-Masoch: A Note on *The Metamorphosis*', *Modern Language Notes*, 85 (1970), 745–6; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan, fore. Réda Bensmaïa (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 47, and Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes*, 135–6.
 21. Frank Möbus, *Sünden-Fälle: Die Geschlechtlichkeit in Erzählungen Franz Kafkas* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1994), 79.
 22. The picture was first reprinted in Möbus, *Sünden-Fälle*, 85.
 23. Ironically, the use of photographs as fetishistic substitutes for physical closeness is a central feature of Kafka's correspondence with Felice Bauer. Indeed, it is during his work on *Die Verwandlung* that Kafka and Felice begin to exchange their first pictures, and Kafka's response echoes the situation of his protagonist. When he receives the first photograph of Felice on 25 November 1912, Kafka is about to go on a business trip and takes the photograph with him as a travel companion (B1 267/EF 65). And while Kafka's account of his strenuous train journey and the lonely stay in a hotel echoes Gregor's complaints about his salesman existence, Felice's photograph makes this ordeal easier to bear, especially as it is placed, like Gregor's magazine image, within sight of Kafka's bed (B1 271/EF 67). Both Felice's picture and the magazine photograph thus complement their owners' unstable, travelling lifestyles and act as substitutes for personal relationships. The fact that Felice's photograph is a childhood portrait underlines its sublimatory character.
 24. In an earlier version, he merely buys it (DA 192).
 25. Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes*, 135.

KÁRI DRISCOLL

(A) Is for Animal: Speech and Voice in Ovid and Kafka[†]

L'animal que je suis, parle-t-il?
—Jacques Derrida

I. Logos and Phonē

As a literary form, the “metamorphosis” is dedicated primarily to the impermanence of form. It is a genre in which the stability of the boundaries between different genera is consistently called into question, prime among them being the boundary between human and animal. At least since Aristotle, man has been defined as the *zoon logon echon*, the only animal possessing language [*logos*]. Language thus constitutes a unique supplement to the mere voice [*phonē*], which man shares with all living creatures.¹ It is therefore not surprising that the human voice, rather than language or speech per se, should frequently play a pivotal role not only in establishing the strict distinction between humans and animals, but also in undermining it, as in the metamorphosis. For while speech, as the unique property of the *zoon logon echon*, serves as a guarantee of the humanity of the speaker, the human voice is in constant danger of being mistaken for an animal voice (and vice versa), and thus invalidating the strict separation of human and animal.

Thus, in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the transformation of the subject is often marked by a change in his or her voice. The hunter Actaeon, for example, who, as punishment for having accidentally glimpsed the naked goddess Diana while bathing, is transformed into a stag, does not at first understand what is happening to him: as he flees the scene, he is struck by his newfound speed, but does not otherwise perceive the corporeal transformation he has undergone. The metamorphosis is recognized as such only when he attempts to speak, which, significantly, he does at the sight of his reflection:

Actaeon fled,
Royal Actaeon, and marvelled in his flight
At his new leaping speed, but, when he saw
His head and antlers mirrored in a stream,
He tried to say “Alas!”—but no words [*vox nulla*] came;
He groaned—that was his voice [*vox illa fuit*]; the tears rolled down

On cheeks not his—all changed except his mind.²

When he tries to voice his distress, his voice fails him: “*vox nulla secuta est*” (lit. no voice followed). His voice is no longer equipped to utter even a simple exclamation (“Alas!”); instead, it produces only an inarticulate groan. Yet this too is a voice: “*vox illa fuit*.” The essence of Actaeon’s metamorphosis lies in the tension between these two voices, which we might describe using the classical distinction between *vox articulata* and *vox confusa*. The difference between the two hinges not on an a priori distinction between rational and irrational speech, or even between human and animal, but rather on whether or not an utterance is scriptable: while the former may be divided into syllables and thus transformed into written language, the latter is immediate and hence cannot be written down.³ It is important to note that while man is typically the only creature whose voice may be considered to be *articulata*, the human voice can equally be labeled *confusa*: as the great Enlightenment philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder noted at the beginning of his *Treatise on the Origin of Language*: “All violent sensations of [man’s] body [...] and all strong passions of his soul immediately express themselves directly in cries, in sounds, in wild, inarticulate noises. A suffering animal, as much as the hero Philoctetes, when overcome with pain, will whine!, will groan!”⁴ In the wake of his metamorphosis, the hero Actaeon is stranded between these two poles: when his hounds at last overpower him, “He gave a wailing scream,|Not human, yet a sound no stag could voice” (Ovid III: 237–39). Just what is this sound that is neither human nor animal?

Having pronounced her curse upon Actaeon, Diana spitefully adds: “ ‘Now tell|You saw me here naked without my clothes,|If you can tell at all!’ ” (III: 192–93). Thus, his metamorphosis is explicitly marked as an effacement of speech, a prohibition against storytelling. And indeed, when his hounds have closed in on him, he longs to shout, “ ‘I am Actaeon, look, I am your master!’ ” But: “Words failed his will; their baying filled the sky” (III: 230–31). Stripped of his *vox articulata*, Actaeon is unable to assert his mastery over his hounds—and hence his human sovereignty—and his identity is lost amid the general confusion of animal voices. Actaeon’s complete loss of self is underlined in the poem by the fact that immediately before this moment Ovid provides a lengthy catalogue of the hounds in the pack: between Blackfoot, the first, and Barker (“noisy bitch” [*acutae vocis*, lit. “of piercing voice”]), the last, we learn the names of a further *thirty* individual dogs, often including their provenance and

distinguishing features, over the space of twenty lines—almost a fifth of the entire narrative. To add insult to injury, the poet cuts short his enumeration on the grounds that it would take too long to name them all. The list of names is thus potentially infinite; Actaeon alone now has no name, and is torn mercilessly limb from limb.

He gave a wailing scream,
Not human, yet a sound no stag could voice,
And filled with anguished cries the mountainside
He knew so well; then, suppliant on his knees,
Turned his head silently from side to side,
Like arms that turned and pleaded. (III: 237–41)

His gestures cannot be “heard” above the din of the noisy hounds and the shouts of his former fellow huntsmen, and he submits, silently, to his death. Arguably, it is at this moment that the metamorphosis is complete. He turns *his* head (when before his tears had rolled down “cheeks not his”) from side to side, in imitation, almost, of a human gesture.

II. The “Rustle” of Language

In Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* it is also the voice that marks the transformation as complete. Gregor Samsa attempts to speak—to assert his presence as a human subject—but because of his voice he is perceived not as a human being but rather as an animal. When he awakes in his “proper human room”⁵ to find himself transformed into a “monstrous insect” (3), Gregor is astonishingly calm in the face of his new physical state. Similarly to Actaeon, his mind is unchanged even as his body is completely altered. But unlike Actaeon, Gregor does not at any point encounter his reflection, and it is not until he hears himself speak that he feels alienated from himself. Without a mirror stage to generate a sense of self (and of the self as other), it is Gregor’s voice that alerts him to the discrepancy between his felt identity and his actual physical form.

The experience of hearing oneself speak has traditionally been regarded as entirely immediate, as so-called “pure auto-affection,”⁶ yet, as Jacques Derrida has shown, it is nevertheless predicated on a minimal distinction between speaker and hearer, a barely perceptible hiatus that transforms the experience of the self into the experience of an other. The *phonē* bridges the gap between *logos*

and *physis*, between language and body. Thus, the intrinsic and yet constantly disavowed alterity of the self is inscribed already in the nature of the voice as at once coincident with and yet not reducible to language. Language is merely the semantic part of an utterance, the *articulate* part, which may be taken down in writing and thus translated from presence into absence, from sound into silence. But the voice also contains a purely vocal, noniterative component, which continually eludes *logos*, and which can therefore never truly be circumscribed by thought or language. This is the *physical* part of the voice, or, if you prefer: the *animal part*. And this animal voice—which is also *our* voice—exists perennially on the edge of *logos*.

In an early essay, Giorgio Agamben notes that “[w]e can only think, in language, because language is and yet is not our voice.”⁷ It is this irreducible disparity, he writes, that gives rise to thought: “We think [...] because, finally, we hope to find our voice in language. Long ago—we are told—our voice was inscribed in language. The search for this voice in language is thought” (107). Agamben describes going for a walk through the woods at night and being surprised at the infinite variety of animal voices. With every step he hears “the rustle of invisible animals” in the undergrowth on either side of the path he is following. This evening walk becomes a metaphor for the relationship of language to thought. The path consists of words, but they are not important: what really matters “is the indistinct patter that we sometimes hear moving to the side [...]. The animal in flight that we seem to hear rustling away in our words is—we are told—our own voice” (107).

For Roland Barthes, too, rustling is a “limit-noise,” always ungraspable by rational discourse and yet not entirely beyond “a horizon of meaning.”⁸ Barthes associates the sound of “rustling” with a machine that is working so perfectly that it is all but imperceptible (it is only when the machine breaks down and begins to stutter that we become aware of it). Hence rustling, as Barthes conceives of it, is “an impossible noise,” because it is “the noise of what, functioning to perfection, has no noise” (76–78). With regard to language, rustling is, crucially, tied to the body and above all the voice, as a form of speech that is “exempt” from meaning, and hence liberated from the violence of signification (79). Meaning and signification, then, would constitute a kind of stuttering or disturbance in the smooth functioning of the machine of language. Conversely, this a-signifying rustle, grounded as it is in the physicality of the speaker and the specific “grain” of the voice, represents a threat to the supremacy of *logos* over *phonē*. The fact that such “rustling” is essentially

unintelligible *as* meaning, and yet does not lie *beyond* a horizon of (possible) meaning, ties it to the designation of *vox confusa*, which does not deny any and all potential meaning to an utterance outright, but rather specifies simply that it remains unscriptible and hence unintelligible to our existing modes of linguistic recording.⁹ Such an attitude is the antithesis of strict logocentrism, which views all components of an utterance besides *logos* as fundamentally insignificant. The “rustle” of language necessarily suspends all narrative, because it is radically synchronous and thus disrupts the diachronic, sequential nature of the sentence. This is why Barthes begins his essay with a remark concerning the impossibility of erasing a spoken utterance, except by adding to it—by saying, “I take that back,” for instance. “Rustling,” by contrast, would be a form of erasure that escapes the necessary sequentiality or contiguity of speech and introduces a synchronous “white noise” that subtracts rather than adding its erasure.

This indefinable, rustling threat to sense is omnipresent in Kafka.¹⁰ Most prominently, of course, in his late story “The Burrow,” in which the animal protagonist becomes aware of a faint, insistent hissing sound, “audible only after long pauses,”¹¹ the origin of which is impossible to establish, for it is, as the creature asserts, in truth “nothing” [*ein Nichts*]; it is, in other words, “the noise of an absence of noise” (Barthes 78), the sound of silence, as it were. Most importantly, while the burrowing narrator initially conceives of this hissing or rustling as a threat coming from outside its burrow—which, insofar as it can be read as a linguistic construct, a “burrow of writing,”¹² would mean that it must originate *outside* language—it gradually becomes clear that its origin in fact lies *inside* language, that it subtends the narrative, and ultimately consumes it.¹³

In *The Metamorphosis*, this rustling threat to sense is explicitly tied to the voice. Early in the text, when Gregor Samsa is still in bed pondering his strange predicament, there comes “a timid knock at the door”:

“Gregor,” the voice called—it was his mother—“it’s a quarter to seven. Didn’t you want to catch your train?” That gentle voice! Gregor flinched when he heard his own in response: it was unmistakably his old voice, but now it had been infiltrated as if from below by a tortured peeping sound that was impossible to suppress—leaving each word intact, comprehensible, but only for an instant before so completely annihilating it as it continued to reverberate that a person could not tell for sure whether his ears were deceiving him.

While the English translation has “the voice called,” the German original uses

the impersonal pronoun “es” (“it”),¹⁴ which is repeated after the dash (“it was his mother”), creating a striking chiasmus that seems designed to emphatically depersonalize the mother: “ ‘Gregor’, rief es—es war die Mutter.” “I,” famously, “is another,”¹⁵ but in this scene “it” appears to be his mother. “It” also has a “gentle voice”—or rather: it is the voice. The spatial division between Gregor and his mother is rendered typographically by the dash, on either side of which hovers an “es,” as if to visualize the division in the voice itself between inside and outside, self and other. This division forcefully asserts itself the moment Gregor attempts to respond and becomes aware of the “tortured peeping” sound subtending his human voice, rendering his words incomprehensible “as it continued to reverberate.” At the moment of their utterance—which is to say, as Gregor hears himself speaking them—his words are still understandable, only later (the German here is *Nachklang*, literally: “after-sound” or “re-sonance”) do they become garbled beyond recognition. Gregor’s voice, in other words, is in the process of being transformed into a *vox confusa*—a purely immediate voice, which therefore cannot signify, nor can it subsequently be taken down in writing. The moment of hearing-oneself-speak expands, and in retrospect, as it were, the alterity of his own voice gains the upper hand—the signal-to-noise ratio worsens until not a single word reaches the recipients on the other side of the door (beyond the dash).

Not until the office manager arrives in order to find out what has become of Gregor does he attempt to speak again. He pours forth a long, desperate stream of words in which he frantically tries to reassure the manager that he has just suffered a “slight indisposition” (10) nothing too severe, and that he is already feeling quite well again, will take the later train, etc. Meanwhile, he succeeds with some difficulty in rolling off the bed and landing on his many little legs. “And having thus attained control over himself, he fell silent” (11). His words now seem “clearer than in the past” to him, “perhaps because his ear had grown accustomed to their sound” (12). In other words, he no longer perceives the “tortured peeping” in his voice, but on the other side of the door that is all that is left: “ ‘Did you understand a single word?’ [...] ‘That was an animal’s voice,’ the general manager said, speaking in noticeably subdued tones compared to the cries of Gregor’s mother” (11). The manager’s statement proves to have illocutionary force: on the basis of the sound of his voice, Gregor has been declared an animal, and thus excluded from the human sphere, precisely because not “a single word” of his speech can be understood. Gregor’s voice is thus an animal’s voice, a *phonē* devoid of *logos*.¹⁶ The Aristotelian definition of the

human as the *zoon logon echon* is based first and foremost on the human capacity to draw distinctions, between good and bad, just and unjust, and so on. The faculty of *logos* carries with it the prerogative to distinguish between oneself and the other and thus to establish a clearly defined self. Indeed, as Juliane Prade observes, “it is this very ability to draw distinctions—and not some a priori distinction—that, for Aristotle, constitutes the difference between humans and other beings.”¹⁷ Hence the manager’s designation of Gregor’s voice as “an animal’s voice” is not only performative but also autotelic: *logos* defends its own authority by marking the other as not-*logos* (*a-logon*), thus reaffirming the strict boundary between human and animal.

Meanwhile, now demoted to the status of a *zoon a-logon*, Gregor gradually loses his own ability to draw distinctions and make decisions. Now that his family is worried about him, he feels “drawn once more into the circle of humankind” (12) and “was expecting both the doctor and the locksmith—without properly differentiating [*scheiden*] between the two—to perform magnificent, astounding feats.” “So as to have as intelligible a voice as possible for the crucial [*entscheidenden*] discussions that lay ahead,” Gregor clears his throat, taking pains to do so as quietly as possible, “since even this sound might differ from human throat-clearing, which he no longer trusted himself to judge [*entscheiden*]” (12). Even when his mother came to knock on his door, he had not been “managing to make up his mind to leave the bed” (5), and, crucially, the manager rings the doorbell—in the German, it is again an anonymous “es” that does so—at precisely the moment when Gregor must “make up his mind and take the plunge [*sich entscheiden*]” (8). The manager’s arrival interrupts this decision, and the sentence breaks off without specifying *what* exactly he has to decide. Given what we know about Gregor’s situation, and the reference to the time (“for a quarter after seven was only five minutes away”), it seems clear that he must decide whether or not to get out of bed and go to work, but in fact it is his ability to make a decision *at all* that is at stake here.¹⁸ He must make a decision whether to be a human or an animal. The fact that he never makes a decision is sufficient grounds to abrogate his status as a human being.

III. Metaphor and Metamorphosis

Gregor’s indecisiveness is reflected in the indeterminacy of his species. To be sure, the charwoman calls him “you old dung beetle” (36), although Gregor does not respond to such forms of address, and Kafka himself uses the word “insect”

to describe Gregor in his letters and diaries, but the language of the story itself is consistently vague in this regard: he awakes to find himself transformed into an indefinite, “monstrous insect” with “many” (rather than, say, six) little legs, a back “hard, like a carapace,” and a “curved brown belly segmented by rigid arches” (3). On the basis of these scant anatomical details, Vladimir Nabokov, who, in addition to being a novelist and professor of literature, was of course also a passionate lepidopterist, claimed to have been able to identify Gregor’s species, and lambasted critics and translators for their imprecision in labeling him a “cockroach” or a “dung beetle,” when in fact he is “merely a big beetle,” about the size of a dog, with a hard rounded back “suggestive of wing cases.” “Curiously enough,” he adds, “Gregor the beetle never found out that he had wings under the hard covering of his back.”¹⁹ If he had, he could simply have flown out the open window, to freedom, and the story would have ended quite differently. Now, it is doubtful that Nabokov was being entirely serious in proposing this strict classification, but in any event the scientific precision of his taxonomy renders the consistent ambiguity and indeterminacy of Kafka’s language all the more starkly apparent. Kafka famously wrote a letter to his editor forbidding him in no uncertain terms to place an illustration of the “insect” on the cover of the first edition of the story: “The insect itself cannot be depicted. It cannot even be shown from a distance.”²⁰ Evidently, while it may be true that “neither Gregor nor Kafka saw that beetle any too clearly” (Nabokov 260), it was equally important that the reader be prohibited from seeing it as well. In other words, this indeterminacy is not a bug: it’s a feature.

According to one of the classic interpretations of *The Metamorphosis*, put forward by Günther Anders as early as 1947, it is not Gregor, but rather language itself that undergoes a transformation in the story. Anders argues that Kafka “draws from the resources at hand, the figurative character of language. He takes metaphors at their word.”²¹ This notion was taken up by Walter Sokel, who sees Gregor’s metamorphosis as the result of a “literalization” of a metaphor: “Kafka drops the word ‘like’,” so instead of simply being *like* a monstrous vermin he instead awakes to find himself *literally* transformed into a vermin.

With this metamorphosis, Kafka reverses the original act of metamorphosis carried out by thought when it forms metaphor; for metaphor is always “metamorphosis.” Kafka transforms metaphor back into his fictional reality, and this counter-metamorphosis becomes the starting point for his tale.²²

In his equally famous essay on the “metamorphosis of the metaphor,” Stanley

Corngold wonders what it would mean to “literalize” a metaphor, which after all exists precisely in the tension between two meanings. If you take a metaphor out of context, or “at its word,” it will cease to be a metaphor and instead become a name. Corngold draws on I. A. Richards’s terminology, whereby a metaphor consists of a *tenor* (A)—i.e., the basic element, the thing designated—and a *vehicle* (B): i.e., “that thing *as* which the tenor is designated.” The irreducible tension between these two elements constitutes the metaphoricity of the metaphor. It is important to note that the metaphor works by appealing only to those specific characteristics of the *vehicle* that suit the *tenor* or the situation in question. To take the standard example: Achilles is a lion only insofar as he is strong and fearless in battle—not because he has a sandy coat and an impressive dark brown mane. But if one were to take the metaphor “literally,” that would mean transferring *all* of the vehicle’s attributes onto the *tenor*, in other words to transform (A) so completely into (B) that Achilles would be entirely replaced by an *actual lion*. If that were to happen, the constitutive tension between the tenor and the vehicle would have been resolved, and the metaphoric—as well as the metamorphic—nature of the image would disappear. At the beginning of Kafka’s story, however, we do not find an *actual*, clearly defined insect lying in Gregor Samsa’s bed, but rather a “monstrous insect,” or, more precisely, we find Gregor Samsa who has been “transformed into some sort of monstrous insect.” A monster, in other words, neither fish nor fowl. It is impossible to establish his exact *species* (a term that, importantly, derives from the verb *specere*, to look). It may be that Kafka draws on the “figurative character of language,” but the figures he draws are ambiguous and elusive, and we cannot see them clearly, not even “from a distance.”

“We must stop before the metamorphosis is complete,” Corngold writes, “if the metaphor is to be preserved and (A) is to remain unlike (B)” (98). There has to be an irreducible remainder, some unassimilable trace of alterity, that renders not only the *vehicle* but also the *tenor* unstable. Just as the sound uttered by Actaeon in his extreme moment is “[n]ot human, yet a sound no stag could voice,” metaphor and metamorphosis are liminal phenomena, existing in the gray area between two states, always indeterminate and hence a threat to the strict distinctions called for by *logos*. This irreducible trace that is left over and allows the metamorphosis to be recognized as such gestures toward the inherent instability and impermanence of these seemingly solid forms.

IV. Signifying Nothing

In Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, the division between Gregor's room and the rest of the house is rendered typographically, as I suggested earlier, by means of a dash, on either side of which hovers an "es." While this barrier effectively blocks the sight of and physical contact with this space of animality, it remains permeable to the voice, and indeed, when the family and the office manager are assembled on either side of Gregor's room, unable to enter, we read that his mother and sister Grete "were communicating [*verständigten sich*] through Gregor's room" (11). That is to say, their speech passes through this zone of distorted, inarticulate nonspeech, which, by virtue of the peculiar layout of the Samsa house, is not on the "margins" of *logos*, but rather is a central space surrounded and traversed by it. Nor do the voices on either side of Gregor's room remain unaffected by their trajectory through this a-signifying space. The mother's voice in particular undergoes significant modulations over the course of the text, far more than that of any other character, except perhaps Gregor's. After the initial reference to her "gentle voice," most of what she says takes the form of cries of anguish and despair ("Oh God, oh God!") uttered with a "hoarse, shrieking voice" [*mit schreiender, rauher Stimme*] (29).

The floating, depersonalized "it," which haunts the text from the moment Gregor's mother knocks on his door, is hinted at even earlier in a reference to the manager's obsequious errand boy as a "creature [...] devoid of backbone or wit" (5). In German, the sentence begins with the neuter pronoun "Es": "Es war eine Kreatur des Chefs." In his gloss on this remark, Corngold notes that the pronoun *es* and the word *Kreatur* "introduce an atmosphere of animality—of displaced animality, for it is Gregor, after all, who is the animal" (5n6). Undoubtedly, but I would argue that animality is not simply being "displaced" here from Gregor onto others, but rather that, from the outset, the language of *The Metamorphosis* reveals the categories of human and animal to be arbitrary and inherently unstable (this, more than anything, is what links Kafka's text to the tradition of the literary metamorphosis). The only difference is that while the errand boy is, presumably, only metaphorically a mindless invertebrate, Gregor finds himself *literally* transformed into some kind of insect.

The designation of the messenger as an "it" not only echoes the impersonal "es" used with reference to both the mother and the office manager, but also foreshadows Grete's speech at the end of the story, in which she "demotes" Gregor from the personalized, human "he" to the impersonal, animal "it." This is the second time Gregor is animalized in this way, and on both occasions the mother's reactions provide a striking counterpoint to the unequivocal

pronouncements that strip Gregor of his humanity. The first is the manager's designation of Gregor's voice as an animal voice, a verdict spoken in "noticeably subdued tones compared to the cries of Gregor's mother" (11). Following the manager's ignominious retreat, during which his capacity for vocal expression is reduced to a single "cry of horror" (16), which "resounded through the stairwell," Grete eventually assumes the role of the voice of reason, and hence of *logos*. She refuses to refer to that "creature" [*Untier*, literally, the "unanimal"] as her brother, and emphatically insists that they must "get rid of it" (41).

"She is right a thousand times over," Gregor's father murmured under his breath. His mother, still incapable of breathing freely, began to cough dully into her lifted hand, a lunatic expression in her eyes. [...] "We have to try to get rid of it," his sister said, addressing her words exclusively to Gregor's father this time, for his mother was coughing too hard to hear anything. (41)

Gregor's mother suffers from asthma, and spends "every second day gasping for breath on the sofa beside the open window" (23). Her incessant coughing may still, in contrast to Gregor's, be identifiable as *human* coughing, but it is manifestly *inarticulate*, and thus does not fall within the domain of *logos*. Indeed, throughout the text her raw and inarticulate utterances reveal her to be incompatible with rational discourse of the sort Grete now comes to embody. Coughing almost invariably plays a vaguely threatening role in Kafka's texts, perhaps because it also announces a proximity to animality. The coarse laughter of the sailors in the *Report to an Academy* (1917), for instance, is "always mixed with a dangerous-sounding cough that did not, in fact, mean anything,"²³ and the narrator of the *Memoirs of the Kalda Railway* (1914) develops a debilitating "wolf's cough" which is accompanied by an unbearable animal-like howling.²⁴ This cough uncannily prefigures Kafka's own tuberculosis, which he would contract three years later, and the indomitable cough associated with it, which, according to Max Brod, he used to refer to as "the animal."

In all of these cases, the cough hovers indeterminately between human and animal, *vox articulata* and *vox confusa*. The same is of course true of Gregor's tentative cough, which, like Actaeon's doleful braying, might not sound human, yet is certainly a sound no insect could voice. The cough belongs to the group of "rustling" sounds that pervade Kafka's narratives and threaten to drown them out, and which moreover serve to undermine the binary oppositions which rational discourse strictly reinforces. The mother's incessant coughing, the father's intolerable hissing, the manager's cry of horror—all of these inarticulate

sounds come from the other side of the dash, as it were, which is to say: from the side of *logos*. The hissing in particular “sounds dangerous but means nothing,” but the danger lies precisely in its lack of meaning, in the fact that it does not signify, or that it, indeed, signifies “nothing.” These too are metamorphoses of the voice; perhaps the story’s title does not refer, exclusively at least, to Gregor’s metamorphosis. It is not just he, after all, who is an animal.

† From Kári Driscoll, “‘Das war eine Tierstimme’: Metamorphosen der Stimme bei Ovid und Kafka,” *Tierstudien* 4 (2013): 25–35. Revised and translated by the author. Reprinted by permission of the author.

1. See Aristotle, *Politics*, with an English translation by H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959) 10–11 (1253a10).
2. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, translated by A. D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 57. Book III, lines 198–203 (henceforth cited parenthetically in the text).
3. “All voices are either distinct [*articulata*] or indistinct [*confusa*]: the human voice is distinct, and animal indistinct. A distinct voice is one that can be written, such as A or E; an indistinct voice is one that cannot be written, such as the moaning of the sick or the voices of the birds and beasts.” Thomas of Cantimpré, *Liber de natura rerum* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973) 26, quoted in Karl Steel, “Centaur, Satyr, and Cynocephali: Medieval Scholarly Teratology and the Question of the Human,” *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, edited by Asa Simon Mittman and Peter Dendle (Burlington: Ashgate 2011) 271n59.
4. Johann Gottfried Herder, “Treatise on the Origin of Language (1772),” *Philosophical Writings*, translated and edited by Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 65. Herder is echoing Aristotle here, who in ascribing the specific faculty of *logos* to the human, notes that “[t]he mere voice [...] can indicate pain and pleasure, and therefore is possessed by the other animals as well (for their nature has been developed so far as to have sensations of what is painful and pleasant and then signify those sensations to one another)” (*Politics* 1253a10 [p. 11]). An obvious corollary to this is that we *humans* too may express pain or pleasure by means of our inarticulate “mere voice” rather than by articulate speech.
5. Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis: A Norton Critical Edition*: translated by Susan Bernofsky (New York: Norton, 2015). See [here](#). Subsequent parenthetical citations for quotations from *The Metamorphosis* refer to this Norton Critical Edition.
6. Jacques Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, translated by Leonard Lawlor (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011) 68.
7. Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, translated by Karen E. Pinkus with Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) 107.
8. Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, translated by Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989) 76–79.
9. Cf. Karl Steel’s discussion of the distinction between *vox articulata* and *vox confusa*: “Such definitions focus not on the vocal content but on the tools for recording voices. They imply not that snakes lack language, but that human understanding has failed them; that any animal, any creature [...] might be understood by humans as well, if only humans could develop the capacity to construe or to transcribe its voice properly” (272).
10. We find it in Odradek’s uncanny lungless laugh, which sounds “like the rustling of falling leaves”; in Josefine’s singing, which is more akin to “piping” or “whistling”; in the cry of the jackdaws in “An Old Manuscript”; and in the howling of the “wolf’s cough” in “Memoirs of the Kalda Railway.”

- Gerhard Kurz lists several others, including the hivelike drone of the court in the fragment “Advocates” and the rustling of the voices from the grave in “The Warden of the Tomb.” See Gerhard Kurz, “The Rustling of Stillness. Approaches to Kafka’s *The Burrow*,” in *Kafka’s Selected Stories*, edited by Stanley Corngold, translated by Eric Patton (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007) 333–55 (346).
11. Franz Kafka, “The Burrow,” in *Kafka’s Selected Stories*, 162–89 (181).
 12. Stanley Corngold, *Franz Kafka: The Necessity of Form* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988) 283.
 13. Like so many of Kafka’s stories, “The Burrow” is unfinished. In fact, it ends on a dangling article, “das” [*the*]. Burkhard Müller offers what is to my mind a particularly intriguing interpretation of this abrupt ending, when he suggests that this final word—or more precisely the final letter, “s”—is in fact the ominous hissing sound that has *been threatening* to consume the text all along and eradicate all meaning, until all that is left is this lingering unvoiced sibilant, fading away to nothing. See Burkhard Müller, “Consolation in Your Neighbor’s Fur: On Kafka’s Animal Parables,” *Kafka’s Creatures: Animals, Hybrids, and Other Fantastic Beings*, edited by Marc Lucht and Donna Yarri (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010) 101–117.
 14. The same is true of the “timid knock at the door,” which, in the English, Gregor hears, while in the original German it is again this impersonal “es” that knocks (in German “it” can knock, just as “it” rains in English).
 15. The awareness of the alterity of the self, famously encapsulated in the French symbolist poet Arthur Rimbaud’s formulation “je est un autre [I is another],” may in some respects be regarded as the defining characteristic of European literature around 1900. Not long after Rimbaud, the prominent German physicist Ernst Mach pronounced the I “unsalvageable” [*unrettbar*], a diagnosis that became something of a credo among German-speaking modernists, in particular the Viennese writer and critic Hermann Bahr, who interpreted it in relation to Darwin’s theory of evolution and its consequences for humanity’s self-conception. Cf. Ursula Renner, “ ‘Jetzt aber war der Mensch auch ein Tier geworden’: Verwandlungsgeschichten um 1900,” *Hofmannsthal-Jahrbuch* 19 (2011) 357–99.
 16. The Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero describes the history of Western logocentrism as a deliberate process of “devocalization” of *logos*, whereby the *phonē* comes to be regarded as a mere integument for rational meaning, rather than as an integral part of expression. The discourse of *logos* can thus present itself as entirely abstract and rational only by severing the bond to the voice, which is forever tied to the body—is indeed an *expression* of the (animal, feminine) body, while meaning is the precinct of the human (and, implicitly, male) rational mind. See Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, translated and with an introduction by Paul A. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), particularly 33–41.
 17. Juliane Prade, “Am Rand des *logos*. Philosophische und literarische Konzepte von Animalität,” *Funktionen von Kunst*, edited by Daniel M. Feige, Tilmann Köppe, and Gesa zur Nieden (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009) 87–102 (90). My translation.
 18. This is even clearer in the German, where “to decide” is a reflexive verb [*sich entscheiden*], and thus connotes much more strongly the sense of deciding *oneself*.
 19. Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, edited by Fredson Bowers (New York: Harcourt, 1980) 259.
 20. Letter dated 25 October 1915 to Georg Heinrich Meyer, acting director of the Kurt Wolff Verlag, in *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors*, translated by Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1977) 115.
 21. Günther Anders, *Kafka, pro und contra. Die Prozeß-Unterlagen* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1951) 40. Qtd. in Stanley Corngold, “Kafka’s *Die Verwandlung*: Metamorphosis of the Metaphor,” *Mosaic* 3.4 (1970) 91–106 (93).
 22. Walter H. Sokel, *Franz Kafka* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966) 5.
 23. Franz Kafka, “A Report to an Academy,” in *Kafka’s Selected Stories*, 76–84 (80).
 24. Franz Kafka, “Memoirs of the Kalda Railway,” in *Diaries 1900–1924*, translated by Martin Greenberg with the cooperation of Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1988) 303–313. Cf. Kári

DAN MIRON

[A Few Raisins and Almonds][†]

Kafka, as is well known, knew Judaism in his childhood and early youth only through the ritual of the synagogue or rather “temple” (for the synagogue he knew was that of the assimilated, Germanized, middle-class Jewish society), from which he recoiled since it struck him as hollow, formalistic, and devoid of any experiential content. This recoiling had much to do with his ambivalent relationship with his father—to him, the representative of this ossified Judaism and the one who demanded loyalty to it. In his late twenties, however, he was brought back to adult awareness of his Jewishness as a person and artist by the Zionism of the circle of Prague Jewish German writers and intellectuals to which he became attached, particularly by that of his closest friends, [Max] Brod and Felix Weltsch, and at the same time by his encounter with the Yiddish theater and through it, also with Yiddish and its literature. Whereas the first of these two developments occurred when he launched his career as a writer in the second half of the first decade of the twentieth century, the second took place as he stood on the verge of finding his true literary voice, just before the superbly creative year (1912), in which he wrote “The Judgment,” *The Metamorphosis*, and most of the existing segments of the unfinished novel *The Man Who Went Missing* (incorrectly labeled by Brod *America*). It has become almost a truism to connect this portentous awakening to literary greatness with this double and inherently conflictive encounter (Zionism/Yiddish), as well as with the author’s seriously established love relationship with his Jewish fiancée-to-become, Felice Bauer (Kafka’s earlier love affairs had been short summer dalliances). Felice was a Hebrew-learner and a Zionist (with Kafka supporting and even prodding her onward in her activities as a Zionist), and both made a decision—in the first evening of their acquaintance (in the apartment of Brod’s parents)—to travel together to Palestine, for a visit, and perhaps also as preparation for a future *aliya* (immigration in the laudatory Zionist parlance; the word actually means elevation, upward movement). At the same time, Kafka immersed himself—for a few months—in his fascination with the Yiddish theater and the Yiddish language. As mentioned previously, there was a discrepancy, in fact, a real

contradiction, between these two forms of Jewish self-awareness—Zionism, Hebrew, and Palestine on the one hand, and Yiddish theater and literature, on the other hand; a contradiction Kafka seemed—but only seemed—unaware of.

His love affair with Yiddish started quite abruptly in early autumn 1911 when a traveling troupe of Yiddish actors came from the provincial Galician capital of Lemberg (nowadays Lviv) and settled in Prague for the autumn and part of the winter of 1912. It was an infatuation, and nothing less than bizarre, although Kafka's biographers, particularly the German ones (Wagenbach, Stach, André Peter Alt) would hardly call it that (for fear of sounding anti-Semitic?). This particular Yiddish-Galician ensemble was not the first one to court the interest of Prague Jews. A year earlier another ensemble had appeared, most probably as non-professional as the current one. But then, for whatever reason, Kafka did not catch the bug. Although he had attended some of the shows the ensemble had staged, he did not deign as much as to mention them in his diary. Now he did not let an evening go without frequenting the Savoy, a second-rate hotel-restaurant, on the tiny stage of which the troupe performed its repertoire, which was the stock-in-trade of such wandering Yiddish troupes (who called themselves Jewish-German and spoke, on stage, a quasi-Germanized Yiddish): operettas by Goldfaden; "shocking" melodramas of betrayal, villainy, murder, and, of course, of ill-starred pure-hearted lovers; which were either slipshod adaptations of European and American boulevard dramas or original concoctions by three-penny "dramaturges" (such as Yosef Latayner, Khaykl Hurwitz, Zigmunt Faynman, Moyshe Richter, and their ilk), who supplied the Yiddish theaters of Manhattan's Lower East Side and London's Whitechapel or wandering Yiddish troupes in Poland with grist for their mills. Or they would put on the somewhat better fare penned by Goldfaden, the so-called father of the Yiddish theater, the author and composer of Yiddish operettas such as *Shulamith* and *The Witch*, and Ya'akov Gordin, the chief literary playwright of the New York Yiddish stage at the turn of the nineteenth century and the author of serious melodramas, among them domesticated "Jewish" versions of *King Lear* and *Faust*. The elegant (he was always a meticulous and brisk dresser; indeed as the American Kafka expert Mark Anderson has shown, a veritable "dandy" in his own way) and highly critical Kafka, who never missed a premiere of an Arthur Schnitzler play, but systematically found the products of the acclaimed Viennese playwright flat and unsatisfactory, was spellbound. He watched again and again the rather inane dramas played in the Savoy by semi-professional actors in a language he only half understood. Late at night, not before he had spent some time with the actors,

particularly with Manya Tshizhik (to whom he played the role of a theatrical admirer and a prospective lover), and more importantly, with the young male “star” Yitskhak Levy, he would go home and spend hours recording in his diary with his habitual attention to the slightest detail and in dreadful seriousness the plots of the nondescript dramas, which he learned by heart. He twice watched Goldfaden’s “historical” operetta *Shulamith* (it was actually “a real opera and not a mere operetta,” he indignantly insisted), and no doubt hummed to himself the “hit” lyric of the play, “*In beys hamikdesh in a vinkele kheyder*” [“In the Jerusalemite temple, in a far off chamber”], known better by its mellifluous refrain as “*rozhikalekh un mandlen*” [little raisins and almonds]), which Manya Tshizhik, playing the role of a girl who went crazy because she was deserted by her lover who had married somebody else, responding to protracted applause, sang three or four times as an encore. He would remember at least the refrain so well, that when writing *The Metamorphosis* about ten months later, he would make Gregor Samsa’s sister offer her brother, a young travel agent who had morphed into a “monstrous vermin,” a dinner fit for an insect, consisting of half-rotten vegetables, a piece of moldy cheese, some left-over sauce, but also “*ein paar Rosinen und Mandeln*” (a few raisins and almonds). Why were the raisins and almonds, quite unnecessarily, thrown into the unappealing menu (of course, Gregor pushed them aside, so that their smell would not interfere with his real enjoyment of the rancid leftovers)? Probably because the author wanted to send a secret message to his Jewish friends, who had watched *Shulamith* with him, and were the only ones who could understand the Jewish hint or joke.

Kafka was clearly fascinated with the Jewish—or rather Yiddish—body he saw displayed on the little stage: ugly, funny, attractive in its repulsiveness. He was both attracted and repelled by the charms of frumpy Jewish bohemianism. On the one hand, he “courted” Manya Tshizhik and perhaps was also drawn to Levy in a manner that was all but homoerotic. On the other hand, he was afraid of catching lice from his new friends and was disgusted with Levy’s gonorrhea. In any case, he meticulously described in his diary the exaggerated movements and gestures of the actors; how they danced Hasidic dances holding in their hands the clapped on side locks that were about to drop; how the actresses, equipped with wide backsides, kept bumping them against the men actors—either because the stage was so tiny or because they wanted to elicit laughter from the public; how the prima donna, Ms. Tshizhik, spread her hair so that it would cover the strange protrusions on the skin of her face; and how her “manly mouth” was surprisingly devoid of the slight moustache, which usually went

together with such mouths. He particularly liked the posture, gestures, and voice inflexions of Levy, a Warsaw yeshiva student, who had fled his Hasidic home, worked as a laborer in a Parisian factory, then opted for the life—from hand-to-mouth—of a wandering actor and bohemian. Dr. Kafka became both a “groupie” and a patron of Levy. As the “Representative of the government” (Kafka’s own, sardonic self description; was he not an important employee of the governmental insurance company, responsible for checking industrial accidents throughout a large part of Bohemia, and then paying injured workers their compensations, which, nobody knew better than he, were fraudulently reduced to a minimum?!), he protected him. When Levy once, in a scuffle with other actors, tore the curtain of the Savoy’s stage and was collared by a waiter and thrown out to the rainy autumnal street, Kafka hastened to his rescue. Otherwise, he would spend with him countless afternoons, guiding him through the quaint romantic alleys of old Prague, visit him in his hotel room for the purpose of learning from him about Yiddish literature and the Talmud—all these to the mounting chagrin and exasperation of his parents, Hermann and Julie Kafka, who regarded Levy as something the cat dragged in, absolutely not *Salonfähig*, and their son as someone who quite criminally wasted the precious time he should have dedicated to the asbestos factory he half-owned (together with his fresh brother-in-law, Karl Hermann; both partners were financed by Hermann Kafka—Karl’s money was his wife’s dowry; Franz’s was given in the hope that he would eventually give up his position as a *Concipist* (junior official) and become an independent entrepreneur. In the meantime, he was supposed to take care of the family’s investment and see that its hard-earned capital was not being squandered, which he consistently failed to do. The project went bankrupt within a short time. Hermann did not mince words, telling his son that his protégé was “vermin,” a dirty vagabond, and reminding him that whoever went to bed with a lousy dog should expect to wake up with lice. Franz, deeply offended, never forgot this and would bring it up in the long list of complaints contained in his rather narcissistic *Brief an den Vater*, in spite of the fact that his own attitude toward the Yiddish troupe in general and Levy in particular was deeply ambivalent, certainly not free of prejudices and stereotypical images, informed by strong, not fully conscious affect triggered by what was to him the personification of the Jewish “body.” Attracted and at the same time repelled by Levy, he was nevertheless fascinated by him in a particularly muddled manner, regarding him as having become “indispensable” to him. To him, Levy was the representative *Ostjude*, an authentic exponent of an old religious civilization

replete with old-world intimacy and emotionalism, weak and deformed, and yet also strong and alluring. He totally disregarded the fact that the actor was a secularist, who fled his yeshiva and whatever it stood for, regarded himself as a modernist and as an inspiring artist, who was fully aware of the inadequacy of his own stagecraft and aspired to nothing better than the elevation of the contemporary Yiddish theater to the level of the famous Viennese Burgtheater. In this respect, as in many others, he was very much like Leo Rafalesko (originally Leyb Rafalovitsh), the protagonist of Sholem Aleichem's comic-tragic theater novel *Wandering Stars*, which was being published in weekly sequels in the same days and months Kafka was struck with the magic of Levy and Tshizhik. As a matter of fact, it is through this novel and its satirical exposé of the life and "art" of theatrical troupes such as those of Shtchupak and Muravsky; Getsl, the son of Getsl; and Holtsman and Shvalb; that we can get a full and realistic picture of the troupe that caught the attention of Kafka and some of the other Prague Jewish intellectuals, understand why they functioned the way they did—why, for instance they would speak Germanized Yiddish when they could have used their Galician or Bessarabian Yiddish, and so on.

The actor, of course, saw through his patron's misunderstanding or unwillingness to see in him the real person he was, and although he took from him everything he could get and demanded more (he would go on writing to him, asking for money), he could hardly have had a high opinion of his admirer's perception. Twenty years later, in an article he published in the Warsaw literary weekly *Literarische bleter* on the occasion of Max Brod's fiftieth anniversary, he referred to his patron in passing as "the strange writer" and made much of his connections with the respectable and well-known Dr. Brod, a writer of wide European reputation. Nevertheless, he allowed himself a light and ironic tone even with regard to him and the entire circle of Prague's Jewish intellectuals, who, he said, were "excited and attracted" by the "religious and exotic qualities of Eastern Jewry," and no doubt made fools of themselves by taking for good money the "classics" they played: "Latayner, Hurwitz, and Company." To the readers of the Yiddish weekly in 1934, the latter were charlatans and hacks, and the pleasure their plays gave to those highly educated but presumably not-too-clever half-*Yekkes* of Prague must have been a subject for jokes and derisive comments, as they certainly were for Levy himself. One can almost hear his groan of impatience and the barely repressed tittering as after each show he would be sent—his heavy "Hasidic" make-up barely washed off—by the manager of the ensemble to his "admirers," Dr. Brod, Dr. Kafka, Dr. Hugo

Bergman, and the other Drs. whom he was supposed to engage in learned conversations about Talmud, Cabbala, Zohar, Hasidism, Hebrew and Yiddish literature, and so on; he, Levy himself, being a half-educated youngster, who knew about most of these matters only the little he had brought with him from home and the yeshiva. Once, he remembered, he had been unable to countenance these intellectuals' smug adoration of the exotic traditional Jewish fur hats (the *shtraymlekh*) and silken *kapotas*, as well as of all those other things young eastern European Jews like himself were only too glad to have shed and gotten rid of, and he told them to their faces: "the fanatic eastern European Jewry can impress you modern, cultivated Jews, but we are happy that we pulled ourselves out and freed ourselves from this world." Brod "only smiled good naturedly." Kafka, it would seem, never heard what he did not want to hear, for he would have otherwise recorded Levy's civilized rebuke in his diaries (as he recorded almost everything the actors said: for instance, an altercation between Levy and Manya; the latter, being a fiery socialist, admired the poetry of the anarchist poet David Edelshtat, whereas Levy preferred that of Morris Rosenfeld, a socialist, too, but tarnished by his Zionist inclinations). In the reaction of those Prague intellectuals to the Yiddish theater there was more than a modicum of willed stupidity and self-serving smugness. The Yiddish actors were to them just figments of their own imagination, not real people. Kafka's ambivalent identification with Levy was thoroughly theatrical, in the sense that it was the identification of an observer, a member of an audience, with a make-believe person, an image, which fed his cherished fantasies.

Be that as it may, Kafka enjoyed not only the Yiddish shows but also "recitals" (solo-readings) given by Levy, in which the actor would be given free range for exhibiting his various talents (he was also a reciter of poetry and a reader of humoresques, which, unlike the stuff he had to play on the stage, was of a canonical level) and also make some much needed money. The better known of these occasions (which he meticulously recorded in his diary, dwelling on voice inflections and body language, as well as on contents) took place just before Levy's leave-taking of Prague and his patrons there, on February 18, 1912. It was Kafka himself who arranged for this recital to take place and who also introduced the evening. In vain he sought to enlist the help of others in the preparation of the event. He tried, unsuccessfully, to harness the young members of the Bar Kochba Zionist students club (the same club in which, a few years earlier, Buber had read his famous "Three Lectures on Judaism" that Kafka attended). But the young activists, all ardent Hebraists—whether they knew or

yet did not know Hebrew—and believers in the return to the ancient sources, were uninterested in enhancing a Yiddishist agenda. So he drafted his friend, the blind writer Oskar Baum, demanding from the poor man to be the moderator of the evening, introduce the actor, and open his recital with a short description of Yiddish and its charms—a language the prospective audience, respectable and well-off members of the city’s Jewish middle class, despised and disassociated themselves from. However, Baum, albeit a timid man of good will, bolted at the last moment, so Kafka, in addition to renting a hall, writing the invitations, printing the announcements, and defraying all costs, reconciled himself to the delivering of the introductory keynote speech, the only public speech he ever gave—with the exception of professional papers on work-related accidents that he delivered in factories and various conferences as the representative of the state-run insurance agency he worked for—his *Einleitungsvortrag über Jargon* (Introductory Lecture about Yiddish). For the purpose of doing that, he carefully read M. Pines’s *L’Histoire de la littérature Judéo-Allemande*, a dissertation submitted at the Sorbonne only a short time before (1911). We shall come back to the contents of this lecture or speech to which the Zionist Prague weekly *Selbstwher* (edited by Felix Weltsch) referred in a rather light vein as Dr. Kafka’s “lovely, charming speech,” whereas to Levy’s acting and reciting it referred as a performance of “gay profusion,” in which “what was lacking in artistry was gained by a degree of historical documentary value.” “It was so interesting,” the writer of the short review added, to hear eastern Jewish poems and songs, recited and sung, by someone who “was not only an Eastern Jew ... but also without western schooling.” In short, the evening was a success, but also not taken very seriously. Levy left, and at 36 Nicklasstrasse—the home of the Kafkas—a family, whose patience had been tried to the point of distraction, uttered a sigh of relief.

* * *

† From Dan Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Understanding* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2010), pp. 313–12. Copyright by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Jr. University. All rights reserved. Used with permission of Stanford University Press.

Kafka: A Chronology

1883

Birth in Prague on July 3; son of Hermann Kafka, a successful businessman in the textile trade, and his wife, Julie (maiden name Löwy).

1885–87

Birth and death of his brother Georg.

1887–88

Birth and death of his brother Heinrich.

1889–92

Birth of three sisters: Gabriele (Elli), Valerie (Valli), and Ottilie (Ottla). All three died in Nazi camps.

1889–93

Attends German-language elementary boys school at the Fleischmarkt in Prague.

1893–1901

Attends German-language Gymnasium in the Old Town in Prague in the Kinsky Palace. The pupils are all male and predominantly from Jewish families.

1896

June 13, bar mitzvah.

1901–6

Enrolls in chemistry, then studies law at Charles University in Prague; some study of German literature. Important friendship with Oskar Pollak, a student of art history, with whom he exchanges letters and his first literary attempts.

Beginning of friendship with Max Brod, his future editor and literary executor.

1904–6

Writes “Description of a Struggle.”

1906

June 18, doctorate in jurisprudence from the Karl-Ferdinand University; internship in penal and civil law courts in Prague.

1907

Writes *Wedding Preparations in the Country*, a novel that remains unfinished. Works briefly for an insurance company based in Trieste, the Assicurazioni Generali.

1908

Begins work in a partially state-run insurance company, Arbeiter-Unfall-Versicherungs-Anstalt (Workers’ Accident Insurance Institute for the Kingdom of Bohemia, in Prague), where he will spend his entire career until his retirement for health reasons in 1922. First literary publication in *Hyperion*—eight short prose pieces under the title *Betrachtung* (Meditation).

1909

Trip with Max and Otto Brod to Italy, where they attend an international airplane competition in Brescia. Writes “The Aeroplanes of Brescia,” which is published in the German newspaper *Bohemia*.

1910

Begins keeping a diary—“I won’t give up the diary again. I must hold on here” (December 16)—which he continues until 1923.

1911

First encounter with traveling Yiddish theater troupe in Prague; friendship with one of the actors, Yitzak Löwy. Trips to Switzerland, Italy, Paris, and Erlenbach.

1912

Breakthrough year, in which he writes “The Judgment,” *The Metamorphosis*,

and the bulk of his first novel *The Man Who Disappeared* (also known as *Amerika*). Trip to Weimar with Brod, then alone to a natural health spa in Harz Mountains. On August 13, meets Felice Bauer, with whom he will carry on a five-year correspondence and become engaged twice without ever marrying. Public reading of “The Judgment” at Prague Herder Association in December. Publication of his first book, *Meditation*.

1913

Reading of *The Metamorphosis* on March 1. “The Stoker” (the first chapter of *The Man Who Disappeared*) published as a fragment in Kurt Wolff’s series *Der jüngste Tage*. “The Judgment” published in the yearbook *Arkadia*. Proposes marriage to Felice Bauer. During work trip to Vienna, attends 11th Zionist Congress.

1914

Formal engagement to Felice Bauer in May, broken off on July 12. Begins works on *The Trial* in August and completes most of the novel by December. Writes “In the Penal Colony” and “The Nature Theater of Oklahoma” in *The Man Who Disappeared*.

1915

The Metamorphosis is published in *Die weissen Blätter* in October; in November, it appears as a double-issue volume in *Der jüngste Tag*, volumes 22 and 23. Carl Sternheim is awarded Fontane Prize but declines monetary award, which he gives to Kafka.

1916

“Before the Law” published in yearbook *Vom jüngsten Tag: Ein Almanach neuer Dichtung*. “The Judgment” published in *Der jüngste Tag*. “A Dream” published in anthology *Das jüdische Prag*.

1917

Lives in Alchemist Lane, below Prague Castle, where he writes a series of aphorisms. Second engagement with Felice Bauer in July. August 9–10, hemorrhage from lungs; tuberculosis diagnosed in September. Final breaking off of engagement with Felice Bauer.

1918

Publication of “In the Penal Colony.”

1919

Becomes engaged to Julie Wohryzek, but engagement is broken off the following year. Writes “Letter to His Father.” Publication of the collection of stories *A Country Doctor*.

1920

Meets Milena Jesenská, Czech journalist. Trip to sanatorium in Meran, Italy.

1922

Begins work on *The Castle*. Publication of the story “A Hunger Artist” in the *Neue Rundschau*. July 1, takes early retirement for health reasons.

1923

Meets Dora Dymant during vacation to Baltic Sea; moves with her to Berlin, where he lives until May 1924.

1924

Publication of the story collection *A Hunger Artist*. Dies June 3, in a sanatorium near Vienna. Buried June 11, in the Jewish cemetery in Prague-Strashnitz.

1925

Posthumous publication of *The Trial*.

1926

Posthumous publication of *The Castle*.

1927

Publication of *Amerika* (*Der Verschollene* or *The Man Who Disappeared*).

1936–38

First English translation of *The Metamorphosis*, by Eugene Jolas, published in *Transition: A Quarterly Review*, alongside James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*.

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• indicates works included or excerpted in this Norton Critical Edition.

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First Edition

Book design by Antonina Krass
Production manager: Vanessa Nuttry

The Library of Congress has cataloged the printed edition as follows:

Kafka, Franz, 1883–1924, author.

[Verwandlung. English]

The Metamorphosis : a new translation ; texts and contexts ; criticism / Translated by Susan Bernofsky, Columbia University ; Edited by Mark M. Anderson, Columbia University. — First edition.
pages cm. — (A Norton Critical Edition)

Summary: Franz Kafka's 1915 novella of unexplained horror and nightmarish transformation became a worldwide classic and remains a century later one of the most widely read works of fiction in the world. The Metamorphosis is the story of traveling salesman Gregor Samsa, who wakes one morning to find himself transformed into a monstrous insect. In her new translation of Kafka's masterpiece, Susan Bernofsky strives to capture both the humor and the humanity in this macabre tale, underscoring the ways in which Gregor Samsa's grotesque metamorphosis is just the physical manifestation of his longstanding spiritual impoverishment. Mark Anderson's critical apparatus brings together a wide variety of analyses of the existential story, ranging from the psychological vantages of Sacher-Masoch and Nietzsche to focuses of Kafka's relationship to animals, Judaism, and photographs. Along with snippets of Kafka's letters and diary entries concerning The Metamorphosis, a chronology and selected bibliography are also included. — Provided by publisher

Includes bibliographical references.

1. Kafka, Franz, 1883–1924 *Verwandlung*. I. Bernofsky, Susan, translator. II. Anderson, Mark M., editor. III. Title.

PT2621.A26V413 2015

833'.912—dc23

2015013869

ISBN 978-0-393-92320-9 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-393-52314-0 (e-Book)

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New York, N.Y. 10110
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