

MALFORMATION AND ISOLATION: CRITIQUE TO JEWISH ORTHODOXY FOUND IN FRANZ KAFKA'S THE METAMORPHOSIS

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Abstract

The research discusses the Jewish images found in *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka and its interpretation. It aims to prove that the utilization of Jewish images within the novella shows the author's underlying critique towards Jewish Orthodoxy's ways of thinking, particularly the way they regard the Holy Scripture. The data used in the research are taken from Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, in the form of words containing plot structure, characters and characterizations (including dialogue and actions), metaphors, symbols, and allusions, which represents a certain Jewish value within Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. The data are then analysed with Freudian Psychoanalysis, supported by external data such as the background of the author and information about Orthodox Judaism. The result of the research concluded that, in *The Metamorphosis*, Franz Kafka demonstrates that in front of the unquestioned and oblivious masses of the divine law human is hopeless; just like Gregor who ends up dying an unjustified death.

Keywords: Freudian Psychoanalysis, Psychocritique, Jewish Orthodoxy

Intisari

*Penelitian ini membahas gambaran-gambaran bangsa Yahudi yang ditemukan dalam novel Franz Kafka berjudul *The Metamorphosis* dan interpretasinya. Penelitian ini bermaksud membuktikan bahwa penggunaan gambaran-gambaran yang terkait dengan golongan Yahudi dalam novela ini menunjukkan kritik terselubung pengarang terhadap cara pikir bangsa Yahudi Ortodoks, terutama berkaitan dengan cara pandang mereka terhadap kitab suci mereka. Data yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini berupa teks yang diambil dari buku *The Metamorphosis* karya Franz Kafka, yaitu berupa: stuktur plot, karakter dan karakterisasinya (termasuk percakapan dan tindakan), metafor, simbol, dan alusi yang merepresentasikan nilai tertentu bangsa Yahudi dalam buku tersebut. Data yang terkumpul kemudian dianalisa menggunakan teori Psikoanalisis Freud didukung dengan menggunakan data-data eksternal seperti latar belakang pengarang dan informasi mengenai Yahudi Ortodoks. Berdasarkan hasil dari penelitian ini, disimpulkan bahwa buku *The Metamorphosis* Franz Kafka menunjukkan bagaimana manusia menjadi tak berdaya di hadapan kepercayaan dan keyakinan absolut sekelompok umat akan aturan-aturan ketuhanan; seperti hanya Gregor yang meninggal secara mengenaskan..*

Kata Kunci: Psikoanalisis Freud, Psikokritik, Yahudi Orthodox

INTRODUCTION

The Metamorphosis, first published in 1915, is a bizarre novella about a travelling salesman who one morning found himself transformed into a monstrous insect-like figure for a reason never explained in the story. It explores on how he and his family deal with the sudden change. Even though the novella is quite short and simple in composition, but it is rich in reading and interpretations. Straus (1989) emphasizes this quality in her writing *Transforming Franz Kafka's 'Metamorphosis'*, stating that

The reasons for scholars' interest in Kafka, particularly his short masterpiece, "Metamorphosis," reflect a recognition on the part of the 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. (651)

The Metamorphosis is a complex work with many layers of interpretations. There are just so many ways to decipher the real meaning of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, what the work is about and what it is trying to convey to us, that it becomes an intriguing choice of research for many writers—and also for me.

Many of Kafka's scholars tend to omit his Jewish background from their analysis and focused on the struggle of modern man in dissecting Kafka's works. Despite its subtlety—for Kafka's works are never bold, however, Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* clearly presents an underlying message about the author's critique towards Orthodox Judaism. Unlike many Kafka's scholars who suggest that his work represent the struggle of modern man, in this paper I propose that *The Metamorphosis* is more closely related to Kafka's Jewish identity, more specifically his view of Orthodox Judaism. I aim to prove that *The Metamorphosis* contains a hidden critique to Jewish Orthodoxy's ways of thinking.

In line with the objective previously stated, this paper focuses on the Jewish images; references, symbols, allusions, which appear in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. I also put heavy emphasize on the way those images are presented and how it proves to be a

significant indication of a critique towards Orthodox Judaism. The research covers metaphors, symbols, and allusions, which represent a certain Jewish value within Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. I examine a few aspects within the works, including plot structure, characters and characterizations, dialogue, and the central theme of the novella. I also look for symbols and references which allude to Jewish images.

Aspiring to present a different approach and interpretation I use psychoanalysis theory to dissect the work. I mainly use Freudian psychoanalysis as the base of my research. Tyson, in *Critical Theory Today* (2006), states that Psychoanalytic literary criticism originates from the field of psychology, most notably Sigmund Freud's notion of the conscious and the unconscious. Freud's controversial 19th Century idea believes that human behavior do not only driven by their conscious, known desires, but also the unconscious fears, needs, and psychological conflicts they are unaware of. Freud believes that we acquire our unconscious through repressing painful childhood memories. Our unconscious is akin to a storehouse where we keep painful experiences and emotions—wounds, trauma, guilt, unresolved anger—hidden because it will overwhelm us otherwise. The focus of psychoanalysis is to find "patterns of behavior that are destructive in some way". It reveals our repressed psychological problem—which is hidden as the unconscious—that had been unknowingly influence our behavior. (12)

In analyzing literary work, psychoanalysis can focus on one out of three aspects; (1) the author, (2) the text, and (3) the readers. (Selden, et al 153) It can also tell how a literary work is formed and what the formation of the text means (Loncar-Vujnovic 329). Psychoanalysis sees work of art, including literature, as heavily influenced by the unconscious forces within the author or the reader (Tyson 37) Freud, especially, sees a work of art as "as a symptom of the artist, where the relationship between author and text is analogues to dreamers and their 'text' (literature = 'fantasy')" (Selden, et al Ibid) When analysing a text the way dreams are analysed, we should focus on the way a censorship exists in the text, which protect the author—the dreamer—from their own frightening repressed emotions. This censorship appears in the form of *displacement*, using a 'safe' person in exchange of the frightening ones and also *condensation*, using a certain single dream symbol to represent our repressed feelings). (Tyson 18)

This paper thus will focus on mainly three things; (1) to verify the lack of change in character development and how it signifies to the novella's interpretation, (2) to elaborate on the existence of images; references, symbols, allusions, in *The Metamorphosis* which refer to a certain characteristic of Jews and Jewish Orthodoxy, and (3) to prove that Kafka's utilization of those Jewish images contains a form of critique towards Orthodox Judaism.

JEWISHNESS AS A THEME IN FRANZ KAFKA'S WORKS

During his lifetime, Kafka wrote three novels in total: *Der Prozess* (The Trial) in 1925, *Das Schloss* (The Castle) in 1926, and *Amerika* (The Man Who Disappeared) in 1927, which were all edited and published from the fragments of his writing by best friend Max Brod after his death. He also produced short stories and novella such as *Betrachtung* in 1913, *Die Verwandlung* (The Metamorphosis) in 1915, *Das Urteilm* (The Judgement) in 1916, *The Hunger Artist*, *Josephine The Singer*, *In The Penal Colony*, and many others.

In Franz Kafka's works, the ideas of alienation, isolation, and hopelessness against bigger power are often found as the central theme of the story. Such realistic premise is also mixed with bizarre situations, producing a sense of absurdity and complexity which elicit an effect known as *Kafkaesque*. And while Kafka's works revolve around many themes, his protagonists, however, seem to be cut from the same fabric: a helpless, misunderstood man, caught in a certain authoritative power he could not fight back. Josef K of *The Trial*, K of *The Castle*, Gregor Samsa of *The Metamorphosis*, and Karl of *The Man Who Disappeared* are some who fall into the category.

These characteristics do not materialize from vacuum, but instead the result of the writer's own intricacy. A complex individual, sewn from the fine fragments of the multifaceted 20th century, the distinctive and altogether problematic status as a Jew, and a personal, intimate remoteness from a family, was Franz Kafka. And his writings, heavily influenced—of course—by his concern, opinion, and way of thinking, were not the slightest bit simpler than the man.

The Metamorphosis, for example, features many aspects of Franz Kafka's life within its narrative. Gregor Samsa and his hatred to his job often reminds critics to Kafka's own loathing to his profession as a

lawyer. Gregor's isolation from his family and their inability to understand him is similar to Kafka's experience with his own parents and sisters. Even Mr. Samsa's violent nature and the father-and-son's bad relationship is a mirror to Franz Kafka's fear of his own father. Despite the abundant amount of associations, however, turning *The Metamorphosis* into a personal biography of the author will be a huge reduction of meaning, for Kafka's quality lies on how he manages to internalize his social critiques into something which are both personal and universal. As Warren Breckman (2000) noted in his lecture that "One of the most compelling elements in Kafka's genius is precisely his uncanny ability to translate the highly personal, particular circumstances of his life into works that are universally compelling."

Many of his works are also thick with underlying Jewish message. Many Kafka scholars associated Kafka's characters with the Jews as a group, like how Gregor's struggle is that of a Jew in the assimilation era (Classon 2014). Most of them, however, failed to see that Kafka's writing sometimes touch an even closer subject; Kafka is not merely a Jew condemning the 'outer' world, Kafka is also a self-critical Jew criticizing the Jews from within, more specifically the traditional Orthodox view of Judaism.

One of Kafka's parable entitled *Fellowship* (1917) heavily refers to the Hebrew Bible, with the characters of five friends representing the Five Books of Moses. The parable goes with the five friends leaving a house one by one through a gate, until they become a 'fellowship', which then refuse the arrival of the Sixth friend due to their sense of unity.

We are five friends, one day we came out of a house one after the other, first one came and placed himself beside the gate, then the second came, or rather he glided through the gate like a little ball of quicksilver, and placed himself near the first one, then came the third, then the fourth, then the fifth. Finally we all stood in a row. People began to notice us, they pointed at us and said: Those five just came out of that house...

David Suchoff argues that this parable "envisions the process of canon formation itself as a series of departures, or the setting-forth from a commonly occupied house." (97) This short writing is Kafka's thought on the formation of Hebrew Bible which is impossible if it is not for the departure from the home ground, the native land of Judaism—something which

at that time rising again with the nationalist agenda of Zionism. This parable undoubtedly shows that Kafka writes as Jew commenting on Jewish problems.

Kafka also often wrote stories about the futility in front of a bigger—and unknown, or indescribable—power. In one of his most famous parable, *Before the Law*, a man is wishing to enter the law, but was barred by a gatekeeper. Repeatedly, the man went again and again, but at the end of the story the gatekeeper said that he would never gain the access to it. Kafka's other story, *The Castle*, also deals with a man who wished to enter a guarded castle, but unable to do so. Franz Rosenweig (in Suchoff 96) states that he never read a book which is such a powerful reminder of the Hebrew Bible just like *The Castle*. *The Trial* is, again, also tells a tale about a man who was brought for a trial, without knowing what he had done wrong. Those stories share the same red lines; a man hopeless who is hopeless in front of an untouchable law.

Those stories arguably hits very close to the Jews and their problems. It also touch on Orthodox Judaism's way which prohibited access to the biblical law in the name of celestial acceptance of the Torah. And it is highly probable, that *The Metamorphosis*, just like many of Kafka's writings, shares a certain message in regard to the Jews and Judaism.

THE NATURE OF THE METAMORPHOSIS

The first thing that can be noted from the use of metamorphosis in the novella is its ambiguity and vagueness. If anything, the physical transformation of Gregor Samsa into a vermin-like giant is best described as (quoting Susan Bernofsky in her 'The New Yorker' article) "blurred". Franz Kafka was intentionally avoiding plain details in describing Gregor's physical change. Commonly known as 'a bug', or 'an insect', Kafka never actually pinpointed what creature Gregor has become. Gregor has been addressed by at least two names throughout the story, 'a monstrous verminous bug' and 'dung beetle'. However, what kind of bug—or whether it exactly is a bug—was never being confirmed in the story or by the author himself. Being rounded up together, Kafka's description of Gregor's physical features is quite vague. "... armor-hard back, arched abdomen divided up into rigid bow-like sections.... numerous legs." "wriggling legs" "... these thin little legs" "two rows of legs" "... itchy part, which was entirely covered with small white spots..." "... protruding

eyes..." "enormous brown splotch" "Gregor body was completely flat and dry". The features do not construct a known species, only illustrating how Gregor had changed into something inhuman and quite monster-like. "...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." (Bernofsky 2014) Kafka himself mailed his publisher in 1915 to not include any illustration of Gregor's insect-like picture in the cover of the printed book.

The reason for Gregor's change is also unknown. Who did it or why it happened never are the subject of discussion in the story. There is only one moment when Gregor addresses the issue but it was also quickly went off of his train of thought.

'What's happened to me,' he thought. It was no dream. His room, a proper room for a human being, only somewhat too small, lay quietly between the four well-known walls.... Gregor's glance then turn to the window. The dreary weather (the rain drops were falling audibly down on the metal window ledge) made him quite melancholy..... 'O, God, he thought, 'what a demanding job I've chosen! (Kafka 3-4)

Gregor is conscious that he is changed, however, the thought is quickly replaced by everyday mundane concerns like his room, the rain, and how much he hates his work. Is it as though Gregor and the rest (including the author) do not care about such details, that it does not matter how or why a salesman suddenly changes into a monstrous bug-like being.

Different with the metamorphoses in most fairy tales, which performs as some sort of consequences, Gregor's metamorphosis in this novella behaves as a start button which pushes the story to roll. What happened before *the metamorphosis*, why Gregor suddenly has to experience *the metamorphosis*, it does not matter. Thus, it shows that the reader should focus on is the aftermath of it and how it changes the whole family dynamics, how *the metamorphosis* generates problem and the characters respond to it.

THE LACK OF CHANGE IN CHARACTERS DEVELOPMENT

The most apparent qualities of Gregor Samsa is his selflessness and humanity. Since very early in the story, it can be spotted as he disregards his hate for the job as a traveling salesman for his parents. In his bed, as he tries to comprehend the situation he was in, he

mused over the fact that he abhors his job. (Kafka 4-5) Despite being unhappy and unsatisfied with his job; clearly abhors every single thing of it, Gregor stays to pay his parents' debt, bottling down every complaints he has for himself. His family and their financial stability also comes first for Gregor, for at one point he thought of sacrificing his all just so he can go to work and thus saving himself from getting fired. (Kafka 9) During the morning of the discovery, the fact that he was transformed into a horrid creature never really bothers Gregor as much as him missing the train to work and the arrival of the manager. It is as if he never thought about his importance as an individual, and put his whole focus on being the breadwinner of the family. His act of self-sacrifice can also be seen by the way he handles his family's reluctance to be near—or even look at him in general. Looking at his sister unwillingness and fidgety nature around him, Gregor took it to himself to hide. (Kafka 40)

His final act of self-sacrifice was shown near the end of his life when Grete exploded with wrath and finally told the whole family—and Gregor who is also present in the room—that they must get rid of him because “it is killing you both. I see it coming. When people have to work as hard as we all do, they cannot also tolerate this endless torment at home. I (Grete) just can't go on anymore.” (Kafka 68) Furthermore, Grete also convinced the Samsas that the creature living with him was not Gregor, but a mere monster. “But how can it be Gregor? If it were Gregor, he would have long ago realized that a communal life among human beings is not possible and would have gone away voluntarily.” (Kafka 69) Finally having the family's opinion being said out loud in front him, Gregor who “did not have any notion of wishing to create problems for anyone and certainly not for his sister.” (Kafka 69) understands that he is not wanted, that he is the reason of his family's unhappiness and then retreats to his room as a form of final surrender.

It is also important to note that, regardless of how his family reacts to him and how his habits and preferences are changing, Gregor still thinks that he is a human from the beginning until the end of the story. Even when he momentarily forgets about this and nearly goes along with his sister's plan to remove all his furniture and alter his room so he can freely crawl around, in the end Gregor still perceives himself as a human inside. (Kafka 44) He thinks that having food kicked into his room, which is also hardly getting cleaned up and even somehow being functioned as a

shed, is not something that he deserves. His anger only shows how much he views himself not as an animal or monster, but a human. Furthermore, Gregor still exhibits a longing of his old life back even after it is already long gone into his transformation. “Gregor spent his nights and days with hardly any sleep. Sometimes he thought that the next time the door opened he would take over the family arrangements just as he had earlier.” (Kafka 57) He wants to be in charge, to be an important part that matters to the family.

What Gregor wants, how he sees his world, and his overall character does not change much in the course of the story. Having himself transformed into a bug-like creature which horrified others, he remains his naive, selfless Gregor who longs for his old life to return. That being explained, even though Gregor is the one who undergoes *the metamorphosis*, but there is nothing changing—except his physical appearance—inside of him.

Gregor's initial relationship with his family, prior to *the metamorphosis*, is somewhat lackluster. It consists of Gregor working away from home and his family receiving the money for granted. “They had become quite accustomed to it, both the family and Gregor himself. They took the money with thanks, and he happily surrendered it, but the special warmth was no longer present.” (Kafka 35) Gregor does not find meaning in the money he makes for his family, and they accept it simply as Gregor's responsibility. There had been times when it means something to both of them, but as it becomes a routine, it slowly loses its meaning.

The lack of compassion between the family members can also be seen when Gregor, in his new bug-like form, tries to open the door of his room. Realizing that the doorknob is slowly moving, and already suspecting that Gregor is heavily sick, there is no effort from the family to encourage Gregor, which Gregor actually minded. “For Gregor that was a great encouragement. ‘But they all should've called out to him, including his father and mother, ‘Come on, Gregor,’ they should've shouted. ‘keep going, keep working on the lock.’” (Kafka 18)

In general, however, there is a slightly different way of how each family member treats Gregor that can be observed from their responds towards Gregor's lockup and the defining moment of the Manager's arrival. The father, despite being respectful, harbors the strongest negativity for his son. When the manager

comes to inspect on Gregor, the father instantly believes that Gregor has made some kind of a mess. “Mr. Manager has come and is asking why you have not left on the early train... So please open the door. He will good enough to forgive the mess in your room.” (Kafka 12) In the back of his mind, the father thinks that Gregor is always up for trouble. The mother on the other hand, believes in Gregor in such an oblivious naivety, proclaiming Gregor’s love for his job which was inexistent (Ibid.). She assumes the best of Gregor from her blind conclusion that his son enjoys his work to the fullest. Meanwhile, the sister is always ready to help Gregor, giving him informations through cautious whispers from her room ‘... the sister was whispering to inform Gregor: ‘Gregor, the manager is here.’ (Ibid.)

Kafka wrote this scene in a way that readers, through Gregor’s perception, can feel the different approach of each family member in a subtle way, hiding behind the chaotic words and conversations happening beyond Gregor’s door and being heard through Gregor’s ears. It shows that, contrary to how the general masses think, Gregor family does not precisely love him. Each of them already possess a certain bad characteristic hidden behind their respect and need of Gregor. This initial stand accentuates how far Gregor’s change will eventually disclose their real characters, which bring changes into their relationship with Gregor. The preceding examination proved the lack of characters’ change in *The Metamorphosis*, both Gregor and his family underwent little to no alteration in character development. Instead it was concluded that *The Metamorphosis* is more of a disclosure tale. In a sense, Gregor’s metamorphosis is a catalyst that ignites the disclosure of each family member’s real characteristics. It brings more prominence to the already present quality of the individuals.

It becomes a significant step because it ascertained that Gregor’s metamorphosis was utilized to bring into light something which was hidden instead of simply inexistent in the first place. The horrible attitudes—the father’s violence and prejudiced view, the materialistic tendency of the sister, and the mother’s weak surrender—do not appear from vacuum. Every single one of it sprouts from a potential. They are already capable of cruelty, unsympathetic in their nature, and Gregor’s metamorphosis only helps it resurface out from the many facades.

THE PSYCHOANALYTIC READING OF GREGOR AS FRANZ KAFKA’S UNCONSCIOUS

The Metamorphosis opens with one of the most famous line in the history of literature: “One morning, as GregorSamsa was waking up from anxious dreams, he discovered that in bed he had been changed into a monstrous verminous bug.” (Kafka 1) This line, while being read by Kafka in front of his colleagues, received burst of laughter for its absurdity. This is a surreal situation; a man changed into a bug, with his legs flailing around uncontrollably, he himself thinking mainly of his job as if nothing happened.

He must have tried it a hundred times, closing his eyes, so that he would not have to see the wriggling legs, and gave up only when he began to feel a light, dull pain in his side which he had never felt before. ‘O God,’ he thought, ‘what a demanding job I’ve chosen! Day in, day out on the road... (Kafka 2)

The use of ‘anxious dream’ in its opening is very Freudian in nature. Gregor wakes up in a groggy state, feeling in between reality and dream as suggested by Gregor’s line “Why don’t I keep sleeping for a little while longer and forget all this foolishness” (Kafka 1-2) referring to his changed physique. The opening of the second part of the novella is also similar. “Gregor first woke up from his heavy swoon-like sleep in the evening twilight...” (Kafka 27) The motives of coming back and forth from consciousness also appears to mark the beginning and end of each part, with the first and second chapter end with Gregor losing consciousness.

The surreal nature of the text is also very Freudian. Gregor’s change in to a bug-like creature is being treated as something natural by both Gregor and his family. The time span from Gregor’s change to his death is also unmapped, as Gregor’s sense of time is blurred and he is jumping from a being cronologically specific to not at all. Another example of the surreal, dream-like quality of this narrative appears in page 23 “Mother, mother,’ said Gregor quietly, and looked over towards her. The manager momentarily had disappeared completely from his mind; by contrast, at the sight of the flowing coffee he couldn’t stop himself snapping his jaws in the air a few times.” One will wonder what kind of thought lies behind this symbolic movement of Gregor’s snapping jaws.

In psychoanalytic criticism, a text can be seen as the author's dream. Freud argues that while dreaming, our unconscious expresses itself freely, however, there also exists some kind of a censorship which protect us from the frightening repressed emotions. This censorship mainly appears in the form of *displacement* (using a 'safe' person in exchange of the frightening ones) and condensation (using a single dream symbol to represent our repressed feelings). (Tyson 18) When being applied in a literary work, one should try to recognize images; characters, actions, things, which are the product of either *displacement* and condensation and try to find the underlying message—the *latent content*—which is unconsciously hidden by the author behind those images.

In the novella, Gregor appears as a man who is changed into a vermin-like creature and due to his metamorphosis is being shunned and isolated from his family. When being examined using psychoanalysis, treating the text as a dream and of the author as the dreamer, Gregor's character—subsequently his monstrous vermin self—can be seen as an act of *condensation* by the author: Gregor and what happened to him is Kafka's own repressed emotions; his fear and trauma.

Kafka and his identity as a Jew is arguably inseparable. Furthermore, it is rather impossible to talk about Jewish history without including anti-semitism—the prejudice and act of discrimination and hate against Jews—which constantly haunts them throughout the history. Although the term anti-semitism itself was only began to be used in 1879—first coined by Wilhelm Marr—but the hate on Jews is something that had been done for ages. Jones (2010), in *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction* stated that anti-semitism in Europe had begun as early as Medieval era and still persist in the 20th Century.

Kafka is a Jew living in the early 20th Century when it is rather problematic to be a Jew; on one hand there is the Jewish assimilation dividing the community, on the other hand there is the increasing degree of hate to the Jews leading to the historic Holocaust. Kafka himself is a part of the assimilated Jews of Prague. He went to secular German school, spoke mainly German and Czech instead of Yiddish, and is a Czechs national. His life was considerably better than many Jews because he and his family was not really showing their Jewish identity. In the 1889 anti-semitic riot, his father's store

was spared because they think he was a Czech—and legally, was a Czechs national. However, Kafka still witnessed—although indirectly went through—the problematic position of being a Jew, especially the unassimilated ones.

Living and dying before Hitler's reign do not make Kafka oblivious to the problematic position of Jews in the world. Many scholars argue that Kafka, through his writings, has somewhat predicted the upcoming Jewish annihilation. As what Quinn (2014) says "Twenty years before Hitler came to power, Franz Kafka (1883-1924), an obscure Jewish insurance clerk in Prague, wrote, but chose not to publish, a series of novels and short stories that would mark him as the literary prophet of the Holocaust." (168) Kafka witnessed many Jews who are setting themselves apart from the crowd with their cultural and religious exclusivity, and are incapable of adapting and living among others. It seems to add fuel into the already anti-semitic masses of Prague, and Kafka (being a secular and an intellectual himself) internalised some anti-semitic belief himself, as illustrated by several entries in his diary. "Sometimes I'd like to stuff all Jews (myself included) into the drawer of a laundry basket... then open it to see if they've suffocated. What do I have in common with the Jews? I don't even have anything in common with myself!"¹

A monstrous verminous bug is usually the rough translation of the German words *ungeheueres Ungeziefer* *the opening line*. As what Bernofsky explains, *Ungeziefer* refers to "the class of nasty creepy-crawly things" and if being related to insect refers to "dirty, nasty bug". The monster Gregor has become thus has an image of a lowly creature, not merely an insect but an insect who is not even suited for sacrifice—Bernofsky further elaborates that *Ungeziefer* "comes from the Middle High German *ungezibere*, a negation of the Old High German *zebar* (related to the Old English *ti'ber*), meaning "sacrifice" or "sacrificial animal." (2014) Psychoanalytically read, Gregor is Kafka's repressed fear and trauma. Gregor used to be a human, but one day suddenly wakes up finding himself changed into an insect-like creature. He was afraid that one moment he will wake up—just like Gregor—and find himself turns into a lowly creature. Living his life in ease, while simultaneously witnessing constant hate to the Jews haunt Kafka with fear that he will finally be seen as a Jew who is unfit for the society he lives in, just

¹ Wyatt, C. S. "Existential Primer: Franz Kafka." Tameri Guide for Writers. Web. 17 Dec. 2009. <[http://www.tameri.com/csw/exist/kafka.shtml&qt:](http://www.tameri.com/csw/exist/kafka.shtml&qt;)

like Gregor within his family. The insect-like Gregor thus is the condensation of Kafka's fear of being seen as a lowly and unfit being, just like how the world (even to some degree himself) see the unassimilated Jews as.

THE JEWISH IMAGES FOUND IN THE METAMORPHOSIS

This research argued that Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* is a critique to Orthodox Jewish's ways despite the nature of the narrative which is not at all preaching or moral-spoon feeding the readers. Kafka, in his ambiguous ways, implanted Jewish imageries all over the novella. It needs a careful reading and a familiarity to Orthodox Jews' ways of thinking to recognize it because as observed, Kafka does not dwell enough on the settings; of place, time, and culture that we can explicitly know for sure what he *exactly* addressed. A careful looking into the recurring contrasting imagery in *The Metamorphosis* and the hidden unconscious force behind it, however, will give the reader an insight into how Jewish Orthodoxy works. And the way it is written, the frequent contrasts, its surreal contexts, will tell us how Kafka regards of the matter of Jewish Orthodoxy behind his subtlety and indirect allusion.

The motive of bodily perfection and appearance become the basis of Gregor's struggle in *The Metamorphosis*. Franz Kafka's intentional avoidance of precision exists to emphasize this. It is not important what creature Gregor has become, whether 'a bug', or 'an insect', or 'a vermin'. The most important thing is that Gregor, through his metamorphosis, has acquires a malformation which made him unfit and that his new form evokes disgust to others.

Right after the manager and the family sees Gregor's new form for the first time readers are given the image of Gregor's past appearance. As Gregor scans the room, his military photograph—which represent his prime condition—is presented to give an irony. "Directly across on the opposite wall hung a photograph of Gregor from the time of his military service; it was a picture of him as a lieutenant, as he, smiling and worry free, with his hand on his sword, demanded respect for his bearing and uni-form." (Kafka 20) The presence of the picture gives contrasting detail between his respectful, perfectly normal figure on the picture, and his now malformed self which produces disgust and hostility.

The contrasting images between the healthy normal-bodied, and the malformed also being illustrated by the dynamic of the sibling, Gregor and Grete. As Gregor meets his downfall, Grete raises herself amidst the chaos. At the end of the book, while Gregor dies alone in his dark room, surrounded by trash, his body thin and weak—a rotten apple still adamantly stuck on his back and his body covered with white dust (Kafka 71-73), Grete is shown basking under the sunlight, talking about dream with the parents, blooming into a fine young woman. Her "beautiful and voluptuous" body becomes "something of a con-firmation of their (the Samsas) new dreams and good intentions" (Kafka 77) In the eyes of Mr and Mrs. Samsa Grete youthful frame embodies their new hope and a new start for the family.

The perfection of the physical stature is a rather important part of the Orthodox Jewish life, which based it views upon holy scriptures. Rabbi Joel Blau (2013) in his essay *The Defective in Jewish Law and Literature* admits that the Jews do appreciate bodily perfection. The admiration for well-favored men and women are numerous in the passages of Hebrew Bible and Talmud. Deborah Beth Creamer, in her book *Disability and Christian Theology: Embodied Limits and Constructive Possibilities*, also has a similar take on the subject "Additionally, it is not difficult to find examples in ancient Judaism that problematize embodiment. Even a quick reading of Leviticus will show an overwhelming concern with the body," (Creamer 42) Creamer stresses on the seemingly dual understanding of ancient Judaism view about the body image. She argues that although there are passages which seem to be lenient about bodily perfection, but it is also true that Hebrew Bible does obsess with it.

The Orthodox Jews' fixation of bodily perfection, of being healthy and unblemished, is highly influenced by their concept of sin and punishment. It is a common notion between the Jews that prosperity and well-being are granted to the righteous while the wicked is punished with bad luck and destruction². It is in Deuteronomy 11:13-21 that they find the basis of this belief, along with the many stories in the Hebrew Bible about the sinners and their punishment.

The contrast between Gregor's new and past condition, and also of him and Grete, represents the condition of the normal-bodied and its counterpart

² "Reward and Punishment." *Jewish Virtual Library Online*. Jewish Virtual Library, 2013. Web. 10Nov 2016.

in the eyes of Orthodox Judaism. Notice that what repulses the family was not Gregor's changed inner-self or behavior but merely his appearance. Right from the very start when they see Gregor, they judge him as something which needs to be avoided at all costs. Those with physical blemishes are treated in similar manner by Orthodox Jews because of their association with bad luck, punishment, and impurity. When one sees someone with imperfection they assume immorality, shame, or wickedness—a sign that one has infuriated God, and it is represented in *The Metamorphosis* by the family who assume the worst from Gregor's new revolting appearance. Kafka wanted to highlight this shallow nature of Orthodoxy with the Samsas' view of Gregor's monster bug-like new form which symbolizes general physical repulsiveness.

According to Tzvi Marx (2003) in his book *Disability in Jewish Law*, There are "instances of apparent indifference, or even callousness with respect to the disabled" (Marx 1) found in the Halachic literature. There are laws and liturgical passage which marginalized individuals with disabilities, although figures like Isaac (he is blind), Jacob (who limps) and Moses (who was speech-disabled) are also highly respected within the Torah. The seemingly injustice treatment is also apparent to those who contain illnesses, especially skin diseases. This view toward sickness and malformation appear as a result of their association with sins, related to the previously mentioned notion of bodily perfection. "The Israelite idea of "health" was complicated by its interaction with notions of purity and impurity." (Creamer 43) "Few, if any passages in the Hebrew Bible focus on medical diagnoses when discussing conditions that we might consider disabilities. More often, the Hebrew Bible approaches disability as a religious or theological issue under divine control (cf. Gen 16:2; 20:18; 25:21; 29:31; Exod 4:11; 23:26; Deut 7:14; Judg 13:2-3; 1 Sam 1:5; 2 Chron 16:12)" (Schipper)

For example, the detailed account on leper (*tzara'at*) found in Leviticus does not necessarily take the illness as a medical malady. Instead, Jeremy Schipper in his article *Disability in The Hebrew Bible* elaborated, it is more focused on its religious impact. The purpose of the instructions on how should a priest handle the ones contained with leper (*tzara'at*) is not to cure the patient, but to protect the community and the Israelite sanctuary from religious impurities.

The imagery similar to that of leper was also found in the novel, although hardly mentioned. When Gregor first examines his body, he found an itchy part which is covered with small white spots. "He slowly pushed himself on his back closer to the bed post so that he could lift his head more easily, found the itchy part, which was entirely covered with small white spots (he did not know what to make of them), and wanted to feel the place with a leg." (Kafka 4) In Leviticus 13, a priest was initially alarmed by the risk of leper (*tzara'at*) with the emergence of *a rising, a scab, or bright spot* in the skin. However, even in general, Gregor is being isolated in his room solely because of his physical condition. Due to the other's inability to even look at him, or tolerate his physical change, Gregor is forced to dwell alone in the isolation of his room. It is similar to the patients of leprosy which were forced to dwell alone outside of the walled city because of their physical repulsiveness, something which reminds the Jewish masses of sins and moral defamation.

Upon seeing Gregor's metamorphosis there is no mention of a doctor or any kind of medical help for Gregor, despite the initial attempt to get one and the location of the hospital which is right across the apartment. It is as though that the family gave up on medical help, which means that they regard Gregor's condition as being incurable by modern medical treatment. This once again reminds the readers of the Jewish's traditional view of sickness and disability. The 18th Century Hasidim (Now known as a part Ultra-Orthodox Jews) believed that praying, reading psalms, fasting, and giving charity can cure illnesses, all which are an attempt to put one's relationship to God back in balance³. The family's medical surrender on Gregor signifies that Gregor's condition was seen more from the supernatural point of view instead of a medical one, once again alluding to the Jewish motives Kafka has been giving throughout the story.

Gregor's final moment is preceded by the appearance of the three lodgers in the house, whose extreme meticulousness becomes the focus of their characteristics. The image of these three men, with full beards, hat, and a solemn fastidiousness, is easily a reminder of an Orthodox Jewish man.

These solemn gentlemen (all three had full beards, as Gregor found out through a crack in the door) were meticulously intent in tidiness, not only in

³ "Illness & Healing." *My Jewish Learning Online*. My Jewish Learning, 2013. Web. 7 Nov 2015.

their own room but (since they had now rented a room here) the entire household, and particularly in the kitchen. (Kafka 60)

The lodgers demand the house to be extremely clean and in results Gregor's room become the trash bin of the household. Every unwanted item is thrown into his room without any kind of consideration to Gregor's well-being. In a sense, Gregor and the garbage are similar, both unwanted in the sight of the lodgers.

Without doubt, it is the three lodgers' reaction to Gregor which finally gives the final blow to the family. Upon seeing Gregor for the first time, the lodgers declare that there is a '... disgraceful conditions prevailing in this apartment and family' (Kafka 67) and refuse to stay or even pay their rent. They even warn Mr. Samsa that they will act against him in regard to this matter. The lodger's exclamation is an assertion that with Gregor presents, the family also becomes unfit and is a disgrace, and it is impossible to be a part of the community while Gregor is still present.

A personal family matter becomes a social problem with the arrival and scrutiny of the newcomers. The three lodgers thus represent the social pressure within the Orthodox Jewish community. The family's choice, then, becomes an interesting focus of analysis. The three lodgers symbolize the Jewish community and their harsh view regarding malformation, sickness, and disability, which the family need to conform to. Barry Jones, in *Childhood Disability in a Multicultural Society* explains that sickness and disability does not merely affect the victim, but also the victim's family in traditional Judaism view, "according to the Talmud it is not lawful to marry into a family in which there have been at least three epileptics or lepers" (44) In general, the family which has a sick or disabled member will be linked with bad luck and sin by association. The family's burst of anger to Gregor is the result of their longing for a 'normal' life. Gregor's lonesome death in the isolation of his room gives the family the liberation to continue with their life. Since the beginning, there is no going back for Gregor. His metamorphosis is a dead end in his life.

Another aspect which becomes the core problem of the novella is Gregor's almost inexistent communication with others following his metamorphosis. Most of the conflicts appear because on one hand; Gregor still wants to be a part of the family, and on the other hand, the family already regards him as an incompetent monster incapable of living amongst human being.

Gregor's difficulty in communicating with his family does not only appear verbally, because even his attempt to communicate with them through simple body language goes mainly unnoticed. (Kafka 24)

Furthermore, the family thinks that even he cannot understand their words, or the situation in general, despite Gregor's struggle to do so. "If only he understood us," said the father in a semi-questioning tone. The sister, in the midst of her sobbing, shook her hand energetically as a sign that there was no point thinking of that" (Kafka 68-69) The family simply think that Gregor, just by looking like a vermin, instantly turns into a low animal who does not understand human, without trying to prove otherwise.

This image is similar to the case of deafmutism—of those who are both deaf and mute—in traditional Judaism view. Those who are both deaf and mute are regarded in the same category with the insane. "Deafmutism according to the Talmud constitutes a mental defect no less than a physical affliction. The rabbinic dictum is: "*Chereshlav bar deah hu*"¹ But the disqualifying element in deaf mutism is rather deafness than dumbness." (Blau 10) Because the general mass thought that they cannot understand them (simply because they cannot hear), then are unable to learn, and thus regarded as less than other sane people.

To an even more fundamental matter, the deaf and the mute is regarded as less because they could not possibly learn religious teaching due to their inability to listen to sermon and prayers. Both the deaf and mute in Orthodox Judaism and Gregor are being marginalized and look down upon because of the prejudice that they could not understand the world; despite the case has not been yet proven.

The case of the family's lacking effort to understand Gregor, whom they regarded as an inferior being, also touches the core problem of Jewish Orthodoxy. The branch of Judaism, which lay its basic tenets on the divine nature of Torah and *Halakhah*, often get criticized due to their overly proud nature. Basing on the scriptures they see themselves as better than the non-Jews, even within the Jewish community they also see themselves as religiously better than any other denominations who they call defiant because they do not possess enough Judaism. As a result, they become rather close-minded and are well-known to refuse to listen to others' opinions. This is comparable to the Samsas who does not want to understand Gregor, a family member tied with the same blood, merely

because they already prejudiced him as a lower creature.

Touching the theme of religious oblivion, it is time to explore the image of the father and his newfound job, which is a rather silly disposition. After Mr. Samsa finds an occupation as a servant of a bank, he is seen to be clinging onto his job, as illustrated by his sleeping habit of wearing his uniform; “the father dozed completely dressed in his place, as if he was always ready for his responsibility and even here was waiting for the voice of his superior” (54) The uniform is ‘dirty’ with ‘stains all over it’, only its gold buttons ‘always polished’. However, the father seems to be oblivious to the condition, being equally contented and proud of his uniform and what it symbolizes to him.

A thorough observation will bring into light Kafka’s choice of words which are carefully woven to the seemingly nonchalant scene. Gregor identifies Mr. Samsa as always waiting for the voice of his superior. The use of the word ‘voice’ is clearly a religious allusion to the ‘voice of God’. Sleeping while wearing the uniform, being always ready to get back to work, symbolizes the endless devotion and piety for the case of higher purpose; the divine purpose of the religion. The image of the uniform itself, which is dirty, completed with the father’s oblivion to its state, represents the unawareness of the lack in one’s belief—masked by the pride of simple ‘wearing’ it. The book also describes the state of the buttons, which contrary to the rest of the uniform, ‘always polished’. It suggests that only a part, and the part which require the most ‘method’; the act of buttoning oneself, is being taken care of. This subtly challenges the Orthodox views of Judaism which are often criticized as being too ‘methodical’, only focusing on the meticulous religious regulations instead of the essence of the religion in a whole.

As summarizes in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*⁴, in Semitic dialects the pious are regarded as the servants of God. Even in the general sense of most religions, individuals are servant of God’s will, living to solely devout themselves. In the novella, Mr. Samsa’s stubbornness appears since he had acquired his job as a servant (58) It implies that when one has become a servant (in this case, a servant of God) they will develop a sense of obstinacy, an inflexibility regardless of their own strain—and the others around, as symbolizes by Mr. Samsa’s stubbornness which resulted in the two women’s obligation to help him move to bed.

CONCLUSION

What previously explored in the preceding part are images that Kafka uses in *The Metamorphosis* which allude to Jewish written laws and custom. It illustrates several approaches to the Jewish teaching which are detrimental to some groups; specifically the sick and the malformed. As previously elaborated, the literal taking of the written laws can unconsciously subjugate a certain group and molds an unhealthy attitude towards religion, reflexively affecting human relationships.

Gregor changes into a monstrous vermin-like creature, does nothing wrong, but instantly get hated by his own family due to his repulsive appearance. As what proposed earlier, it is important to concentrate on the family’s reaction and what it signifies instead of Gregor’s metamorphosis. Although rather different in characteristics, each having their distinct drawback (the father’s violent and negative outlook, the sister’s materialistic tendency, the mother’s weakness), but the Samsas behaves with an underlying likeness; they are judgemental, very focused on themselves; their needs, their predicaments, and very much oblivious to their flaws. There is a contrasting pattern between: a.) Gregor’s tendency to self-blame despite his constant sacrifice versus his image as lowly creature, with b.) the Samsas’ inclination to always blame others for their own fault versus their image as fine human beings.

Due to their own flaw, the Samsa fails to see the good in Gregor which leads him to undergo isolation and die a lonesome death. Gregor becomes a monster solely because of their own prejudice (because Gregor clearly has not done anything wrong or offensive being an awkward yet weak monstrous vermin-like creature he is). Focusing on their own laments they also fail to see Gregor’s struggle. Their self-righteousness made them see Gregor as a lower being worthy to be discarded, regardless of his past deeds. More importantly, they are very much oblivious to these characteristics throughout the course of the story.

Kafka strongly implies that these qualities, which arguably found on the Orthodox Jews character; self-righteousness, oblivion in front of the divine law, prejudice against the ‘others’—and subsequently lower group, as a dangerous trait. It can tragically result in the same way as in *The Metamorphosis*; everyone can easily fall victim to the alienation and isolation, which even results in death—even those as close as a family member.

⁴ Ibid

Just like many of his tales, in this novella Kafka also talks about human's hopelessness against a higher unbreakable power. This time, it is in the form of one's insistence in their religious righteousness. Through *The Metamorphosis*, Franz Kafka illustrates how dangerous Orthodox Jewish insistence on their righteousness and the unquestioned power of Torah as God's will can be. Due to their own flaws, their inability to see beyond Gregor's physical appearance, prejudice, and extensive focus on themselves, the Samsas fails to see the good in Gregor which leads him to undergo isolation and die a lonesome death. Orthodox Jews self-righteousness, oblivion in front of the divine law, prejudice against the 'others'—and subsequently lower group, results in the same aftertaste.

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