

I'm not a robot



























If you’ve read Franz Kafka’s The Metamorphosis in English, it’s likely that your translation referred to the transformed Gregor Samsa as a “cockroach,” “beetle,” or, more generally, a “gigantic insect.” These renderings of the author’s original German don’t necessarily miss the mark—Gregor scuttles, waves multiple legs about, and has some kind of an exoskeleton. His charwoman calls him a “dung beetle”... the evidence abounds. But the German words used in the first sentence of the story to describe Gregor’s new incarnation are much more mysterious, and perhaps strangely laden with metaphysical significance. Translator Susan Bernofsky writes, “both the adjective ungeheuer (meaning “monstrous” or “huge”) and the noun Ungeziefer are negations—virtual nonentities—prefixed by un.” Ungeziefer, a term from Middle High German, describes something like “an unclean animal unfit for sacrifice,” belonging to “the class of nasty creepy-crawly things.” It suggests many types of vermin—insects, yes, but also rodents. “Kafka,” writes Bernofsky, “wanted us to see Gregor’s new body and condition with the same hazy focus with which Gregor himself discovers them.” It’s likely for that very reason that Kafka prohibited images of Gregor. In a 1915 letter to his publisher, he stipulated, “the insect is not to be drawn. It is not even to be seen from a distance.” The slim book’s original cover, above, instead features a perfectly normal-looking man, distraught as though he might be imagining a terrible transformation, but not actually physically experiencing one. Yet it seems obvious that Kafka meant Gregor to have become some kind of insect. Kafka’s letter uses the German Insekt, and when casually referring to the story-in-progress, Kafka used the word Wanze, or “bug.” Making this too clear in the prose dilutes the grotesque body horror Gregor suffers, and the story is told from his point of view—one that “mutates as the story proceeds.” So writes Dutch reader Freddie Oomkins, who further observes, “at the physical level Gregor, at different points in the story, starts to talk with a squeaking, animal-like voice, loses control of his legs, hangs from the ceiling, starts to lose his eyesight, and wants to bite his sister—not really helpful in determining his taxonomy.” Difficulties of translation and classification aside, Russian literary mastermind and lepidopterist Vladimir Nabokov decided that he knew exactly what Gregor Samsa had turned into. And, against the author’s wishes, Nabokov even drew a picture in his teaching copy of the novella. Nabokov also heavily edited his edition, as you can see in the many corrections and revisions above. In a lecture on The Metamorphosis, he concludes that Gregor is “merely a big beetle” (notice he strikes the word “gigantic” from the text above and writes at the top “just over 3 feet long”), and furthermore one who is capable of flight, which would explain how he ends up on the ceiling. All of this may seem highly disrespectful of The Metamorphosis’ author. Certainly Nabokov has never been a respecter of literary persons, referring to Faulkner’s work, for example, as “corncobby chronicles,” and Joyce’s Finnegans Wake as a “petrified superpun.” Yet in his lecture Nabokov calls Kafka “the greatest German writer of our time. Such poets as Rilke or such novelists as Thomas Mann are dwarfs or plastic saints in comparison with him.” Though a saint he may be, Kafka is “first of all an artist,” and Nabokov does not believe that “any religious implications can be read into Kafka’s genius.” (“I am interested here in bugs, not humbugs,” he says dismissively.) Rejecting Kafka’s tendencies toward mysticism runs against most interpretations of his fiction. One might suspect Nabokov of seeing too much of himself in the author when he compares Kafka to Flaubert and asserts, “Kafka liked to draw his terms from the language of law and science, giving them a kind of ironic precision, with no intrusion of the author’s private sentiments.” Ungeheueres Ungeziefer, however, is not a scientific term, and its Middle German literary origins—which Kafka would have been familiar with from his studies—clearly connote religious ideas of impurity and sacrifice. With due respect to Nabokov’s formidable erudition, it seems in this instance at least that Kafka fully intended imprecision, what Bernofsky calls “blurred perceptions of bewilderment,” in language “carefully chosen to avoid specificity.” Kafka’s art consists of this ability to exploit the ancient stratifications of language. His almost Kabbalistic treatment of signs and his aversion to graven images may consternate and bedevil translators and certain novelists, but it is also the great source of his uncanny genius. Note: An earlier version of this post appeared on our site in 2015. Related Content: Hear Benedict Cumberbatch Read Kafka’s The Metamorphosis The Art of Franz Kafka: Drawings from 1907–1917 How Insomnia Shaped Franz Kafka’s Creative Process and the Writing of The Metamorphosis: A New Study Published in The Lancet The Metamorphosis of Mr. Samsa: A Wonderful Sand Animation of the Classic Kafka Story (1977) Vladimir Nabokov (Channelled by Christopher Plummer) Teaches Kafka at Cornell Josh Jones is a writer and musician based in Durham, NC. Follow him at @jdmagness When Gregor Samsa wakes up early one morning, he sees himself as an insect. Thus begins the novel. When we take a look at Samsa’s life, which continues with an apple rotting on his back and ends with his death, we see him as a copy of Kafka. Samsa, who has to work because of his parents’ debts, feels obliged to work to pay off the debts, even though he accepts that he has turned into an insect. In the same letter to his father, who appears as a “despot” in the Letter to My Father, Kafka writes that he is indebted to him for taking care of him until now. And that he has to pay his debt. Samsa, who had to work to pay off his father’s debt in The Change, is actually nothing more than the mirror image of Kafka, who considers himself indebted to his father. Metamorphosis (German: Die Verwandlung) is a novella written by Franz Kafka and first published in 1915. One of Kafka’s best-known works, Metamorphosis tells the story of salesman Gregor Samsa, who wakes one morning to find himself inexplicably transformed into a huge insect (German: ungeheueres Ungeziefer, lit. “monstrous vermin”) and subsequently struggles to adjust to this new condition. The novella has been widely discussed among literary critics, who have offered varied interpretations. In popular culture and adaptations of the novella, the insect is commonly depicted as a cockroach. His father’s debt in the first case and his debt to his father in the second prevent him from being that. In order for Kafka to live as Kafka and for Samsa to live as Samsa, they must escape from the unhappy environment. In Change, the boss comes home after Samsa does not go to work and sees that Samsa has turned into an insect, so he throws himself out of the house in fear for his life. Even in this situation, Samsa wants to go after the boss. This is because he wants to pay off his family debt. However, this desire is prevented by the household. Again, one day, Samsa wants to help his mother, but this results in his mother getting sick. After his mother’s illness, this wish is prevented by his father. Samsa is stuck inside with a stick. Because they don’t want him to embarrass themselves, Apple is mentioned in religious texts with the expulsion of Adam and Eve from heaven. Even though it was forbidden, Adam and Eve could not stay away from this apple. Finally, the apple is eaten. In fact, the apple is symbolic in these texts. The real “secret” is the union of two people. What is forbidden is the desire of the two to unite. Kafka, who knows the Torah well, symbolizes the apple with unity. When we return to the book, Samsa, who is imprisoned in a room and deprived of all his freedom because he is imprisoned in a room, thinks that he needs to escape from this situation, so he attempts to leave the room. The family in general, and the authoritarian father of the family in particular, do not want this. An apple is thrown at Samsa by his father as he tries to leave his room. The first apple thrown does not hit. The “second thrown apple” gets stuck in his back, rots on his back, creates a wound, and eventually Samsa “dies” from this wound. What does Gregor turning into a bug symbolize? Kafka uses the symbolism of Gregor becoming a bug to represent the tragedy of the life that Gregor was leading , and his metamorphosis symbolizes a more gradual metamorphosis towards an individual humanity. By physically disassociating Gregor from humanity, Kafka perfectly exemplifies how human Gregor has really become. What does Gregor’s transformation symbolize? The entire Metamorphosis is an allegory about Gregor changing into a vermin, symbolize that he wanted to free himself from his family obligation . “As Gregor Samsa awoke from unsettling dreams one morning, he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous vermin” (Kafka 7). Why is Gregor turned into a bug? Why did Gregor Samsa turn into a cockroach? The uniform the father wears for his job symbolizes the father’s dignity, as well as Gregor’s shifting feelings of pity and respect for him . Throughout the story, we see the father primarily from Gregor’s point of view. The first lesson that can be learnt from the transformation of Gregor’s life is the absurdity that exists in everyday life . The transformation of Gregor’s life from human to that of an insect symbolizes how life operates or at times exists in absurdity. Samsa is the biggest culprit for Gregor’s atrocities . It is largely of him that Gregor had to abandon his studies to live the miserable life he was living before the metamorphosis, and the life of a disgusted vermin after the metamorphosis. ...read more. Did Gregor actually turn into a bug? Despite his complete physical transformation into an insect at the beginning of the story , Gregor changes very little as a character over the course of The Metamorphosis. Most notably, both as a man and as an insect Gregor patiently accepts the hardships he faces without complaint. What was Kafka’s intent in having Gregor transformed into a bug in the very first sentence? Kafka uses Gregor transforming into a bug as a way of exaggerating himself, trying to express his feelings and point of view . What does being a bug mean? What is a bug person? What does the name bugs mean? The exact origin of the term is unclear, but it seems to have become popular during the early 20th century. Rather than just having a playful cadence, “bugsy” came from comparisons to someone who’d been driven insane by bugs. To call someone “bugs,” or refer to a person as “bugsy” was to call them crazy, or unstable . One of the most crucial symbols in The Metamorphosis is the portrait of the lady in the muff . It is a complex symbol, so there are several ways to interpret the picture. This wall portrait was cut out of a magazine and put into a frame by Gregor before the events of the book. What was the symbolism behind the apple Gregor’s father hit Gregor with how did this apple represent the family’s situation? The apple thrown at Gregor was meant to drive him away from his family and to serve as a reminder for Gregor become his own self - free from his responsibilities to his family . In The Metamorphosis, a woman’s picture in Gregor’s room reflects sexual or romantic desire . It represents the lack of love in Gregor’s life. Before being vermin, he could not be with a woman. It left a deep scar on his heart. What is the main theme of The Metamorphosis? What obstacles does Gregor face after turning into an insect? Is Gregor more human or bug? Human and Insect. “ Though Gregor’s body is completely insect, his mind is thoroughly human . Since his family finds him disgusting, Gregor hides in his room. He longs for human companionship however, and he often attempts to listen to his family’s conversations from afar. Why did Kafka not want a bug on the cover? In his novel The Metamorphosis, Franz Kafka describes his own life through the life of his protagonist Gregor Samsa. Careful study of Franz Kafka’s life shows that Kafka’s family, workplace, and reaction to the adversity in his family and workplace are just like those of Gregor. What does bug mean in social media? Where does the term bug come from? In 1946, when Hopper was released from active duty, she joined the Harvard Faculty at the Computation Laboratory where she continued her work on the Mark II and Mark III. Operators traced an error in the Mark II to a moth trapped in a relay , coining the term bug. What does it mean to be called Love Bug? (informal) A person who is in love; a sweetheart . How is Gregor wounded what symbolic significance? Gregor was wounded after his father through an apple into his back and left it in there to rot . The apple seems to hold a parallel to the apple in the story of Adam and Eve, just like how the apple in Adam and Eve drives a wedge between them and God, the apple drives a wedge between Gregor and his family. What does Gregor’s death symbolize? Gregor’s death symbolizes the end of his family’s suffering, as well as his own . The Samsas remember that he used to be a human. They find comfort in his death; Gregor is no longer a burden to them. His death freed him from personal hardships. Written by Leah Dearborn Columns > Published on October 12th, 2016 The premise of Kafka’s The Metamorphosis is well known. After waking one morning from uneasy dreams, traveling salesman Gregor Samsa found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect. And that’s the image that most readers associate with The Metamorphosis, in addition to what is depicted on the covers of various editions of the work—a big bug. Kafka wrote The Metamorphosis over a period of just three weeks in 1912 and called it his “bug piece” while reading it aloud to friends. What Gregor really is, however, a “Ungeziefer,” has no direct, literal translation. Without a few key descriptive words, the reader would have no idea what Gregor actually transformed into. What Gregor really is, however, a “Ungeziefer,” has no direct, literal translation. A Monstrous Vermin Kafka was in fact very careful to avoid specificity on that point. He insisted that an insect not be depicted on the cover of the book and translations over the years have been fairly inconsistent in how they present Kafka’s tragicomic protagonist. As a result, there are many versions of Kafka’s “insect.” Gregor is also defined as a monstrous vermin, cockroach, and a bedbug. It has been argued that the reason for this is that Kafka didn’t want to have a clear and easily accessible visual image of the transformation. Part of the horror the story inspires is derived from the manner in which it unfolds, after all, with the reader discovering what has happened to Gregor along with the protagonist himself. A form of outer shell and waving feeble legs are first seen through their owner’s eyes upon casting off a blanket. The concept of such a radical, unexpected and repulsive change is utterly terrifying. The Transformation In the New Yorker, translator Susan Bernofsky wrote that even the work’s title isn’t exempt from translation: 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. Appropriate to its contents, the meaning of Gregor’s metamorphosis is shifty and blurred. No matter how many legs you have, however, October is an excellent time to scuttle off with one (or more) copies of The Metamorphosis. Explore other columns from across the blog. Photo by Erik Karits on Unsplash “When Gregor Samsa woke one morning from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous insect.”This startling opening line from Franz Kafka’s The Metamorphosis sets the stage for one of literature’s most perplexing transformations. But what exactly is Gregor Samsa transformed into? The answer to this question has puzzled readers and scholars for over a century.Franz Kafka’s novella, The Metamorphosis, tells the story of Gregor Samsa, a traveling salesman who wakes up one morning to find himself inexplicably transformed into a giant insect. This bizarre transformation deeply affects Gregor and his family, leading to a series of tragic events.However, Kafka never specifies what kind of insect Gregor has become, leaving much to interpretation. This ambiguity has prompted readers to explore various theories about Gregor’s new form, questioning: What kind of bug does Gregor become?The precise nature of Gregor’s transformation is shrouded in mystery. Kafka deliberately leaves the type of insect ambiguous, which adds to the story’s unsettling atmosphere.Kafka himself was adamant that the insect should not be depicted visually, writing to his publisher, “Not that, please not that! . . . The insect itself cannot be depicted...”