



# Metamorphosis

*Franz Kafka*

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## **Metamorphosis** Franz Kafka

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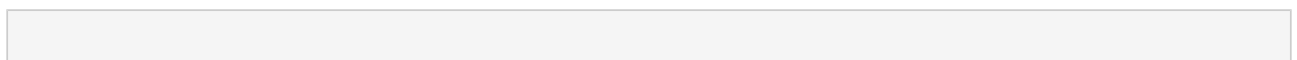
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- Literary Critique
- Historical Context

The *Metamorphosis* (German: *Die Verwandlung*) is a novella by Franz Kafka, first published in 1915. It is often cited as one of the seminal works of short fiction of the 20th century and is widely studied in colleges and universities across the western world; Elias Canetti described it as "one of the few great and perfect works of the poetic imagination written during this century". The story begins with a traveling salesman, Gregor Samsa, waking to find himself transformed into a vermin.

Gregor Samsa awakes one morning to find himself inexplicably transformed from a human into a monstrous vermin. Rather than lament his transformation, Gregor worries about how he will get to his job as a traveling salesman; Gregor is the sole financial provider for his parents and sister, Grete, and their comfort is dependent on his ability to work. When Gregor's supervisor arrives at the house and demands Gregor come out of his room, Gregor manages to roll out of bed and unlock his door. His appearance horrifies his family and supervisor; his supervisor flees while his family chases him back into his room. Grete attempts to care for her brother by providing him with milk and the stale, rotten food he now prefers. Gregor also develops the fears of a vermin, being effectively shooed away by hissing voices and stamping feet. However, Gregor remains a devoted and loving son, and takes to hiding beneath a sofa whenever someone enters his room in order to shield them from his vermin form. When alone, he amuses himself by looking out of his window and crawling up the walls and on the ceiling.

No longer able to rely on Gregor's income, the other family members are forced to take on jobs and Grete's caretaking deteriorates. One day, when Gregor emerges from his room, his father chases him around the dining room table and pelts him with apples. One of the apples becomes embedded in his back, causing an infection. Due to his infection and his hunger, Gregor is soon barely able to move at all. Later, his parents take in lodgers and use Gregor's room as a dumping area for unwanted objects. Gregor becomes dirty, covered in dust and old bits of rotten food. One day, Gregor hears Grete playing her violin to entertain the lodgers. Gregor is attracted to the music, and slowly walks into the dining room despite himself, entertaining a fantasy of getting his beloved sister to join him in his room and play her violin for him. The lodgers see him and give notice, refusing to pay the rent they owe, even threatening to sue the family for harboring him while they stayed there. Grete determines that the monstrous vermin is no longer Gregor, since Gregor would have left them out of love and taken their burden away, and claims that they must get rid of it. Gregor retreats to his room and collapses, finally succumbing to his wound.

The point of view shifts as, upon discovery of his corpse, the family feels an enormous burden has been lifted from them, and start planning for the future again. The family discovers that they aren't doing financially bad at all, especially since, following Gregor's demise, they can take a smaller flat. The brief process of forgetting Gregor and shutting him from their lives is quickly completed.



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