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Gregor's Father: A Confirmation of the Oedipal Complex

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Abstract

The present study aims to analyze Franz Kafka's work, The Metamorphosis, in terms of the psychoanalytical theory of Sigmund Freud. According to the theory, the Oedipus complex indicates the feelings and thoughts that the brain keeps oblivious, to through powerful constraint, that concentrates upon a boy's longing to have his mom physically and sexually. The metamorphosis is the sensation of Gregor's internal world, the one which is portrayed by Kafka is the universe of obliviousness. Freud characterized the unconscious as a place wherein our stifled wills, sentiments, abhorrence, drives, and clashes are held. The focus of this study is not on Gregor; it is rather on his father as a confirmation of the Oedipus complex. The study finds that Gregor is perceived by his father, in his unconscious, as a rival who has come between him and his wife. To get rid of him, the father hits him with an apple, due to which Gregor dies. The father is relaxed now. Getting a new job, he starts a fresh life and takes his family on a picnic

Key Words: Metamorphosis, Oedipus Complex, Freud, Kafka, Unconscious, Psychoanalysis, Confirmation

Introduction

Published in 1915, The Metamorphosis (Kafka 2013) is one of Kafka's great works. It relates to the story of Gregor Samsa, a salesman and the protagonist of the story. One morning, Gregor Samsa wakes up as usual and tries to get off the bed and make himself ready for the office of the business firm but in vain. A few moments later, however, he finds out that he is no more a human being, and he is transformed into a giant insect and is lying on his spherical back with multiple thin legs moving in the air.

"It struck as unnatural that he had really been able up to this point to move around with these thin little legs" (Kafka 2013).

When his family comes to know that he is no more a human being, they are shocked and panic. Resultantly, they keep him locked in the room until

he eventually dies, having been hit by an apple that his own father throws toward him (Barfi, Azizmohammadi et al. 2013).

The story is analyzed through the lens of Freud's psychoanalytical theory. According to this theory, the Oedipus complex indicates the feelings and thoughts that the brain keeps in the oblivious, through powerful constraint, that concentrates upon a boy's longing to have his mom physically and sexually. Over his psychosexual turn of events, the complex is the kid's phallic stage arrangement of a discrete sexual personality (Liu and Wang 2011). This work of Kafka, *Metamorphosis*, has been studied from various perspectives. However, no significant work has been carried out to test the oedipal complex in Gregor Samsa's father. That is why the authors particularly fix focus on the deeds and actions of Gregor's father.

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Literature Review

Kafka's *metamorphosis* is a masterpiece that for some time had remained uninviting but afterward grabbed the attention of the readers and researchers. It has henceforth undergone a number of interpretations from religious, philosophical, and psychoanalytical to social and Marxist points of view ([Straus 1989](#)). Furthermore, Meet in his research, argues that flat characters are built and exist in their fictitious domain around a single characteristic or attribute, according to Forster's theoretical categorization. Because this is the most important criterion, Forster claims that readers can readily distinguish and remember flat characters. Flat characters don't change much no matter what happens to them. Flat characters, in other words, never surprise the reader. Round characters, unlike flat characters, operate in the opposite direction of their counterparts. Round characters never stay the same during events, and it's difficult to spot them because they don't have a particular trait that defines them. Round characters, on the other hand, are the ones who surprise the reader. Although Forster's classification of fictional characters has worked successfully in the majority of cases, some characters are difficult to categorize using this method. Gregor Samsa, for example, appears neither round nor flat in Franz Kafka's story. He doesn't change throughout his story. Simultaneously, he surprises the reader, which is unexpected given that he is basically the same character throughout the work. The transformation of Samsa into an insect adds to the difficulty of determining whether he is round or flat.

([Sweeney 1990](#))

Due to the inclusive nature of the work, *metamorphosis* can be interpreted from a number of different viewpoints. Much like the other works on *metamorphosis*, identity issues have also been raised about the protagonist Gregor Samsa who, each time when leaves his room after turning into a bug, is driven back into his room. His original identity is lost and is thrust with the identity of an alien organism. This is where his identity is dislocated, and he feels suffocated (Sweeney 1990). Lungeli and Dipak (2008) In their paper argues that, To understand the meaning of the transgressive body in a postmodern perspective, read Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis"

and Philip Roth's "The Breast," which Kafka articulates by transforming the protagonist Gregor Samsa into a disdainful beetle and Roth portrays David Kepesh as a dislocated female breast. The reader is taken aback by the heroes' bodily transformation. We witness the story events and know that the protagonists are human beings because of their mental consciousness, cognitive aptitude, and linguistic knowledge. The anti-evolutionary process is significant in the protagonists' metamorphosis since it violates the culturally ingrained meaning of the 'body' and human subjectivity.

Kafka and Roth blur the deeply ingrained hierarchy of human/nonhuman (animal), male/female, subject/object, mind/body, and inside/outside by redrawing the concept of 'body.' Human and animal bipolarity is a worry for Kafka, whereas Roth anticipates the prevailing duality inherent in gender meaning. In this way, Kafka breaks the anthropocentric notion of the human body in terms of trans-physicality, while Roth takes trans-sexuality into the realm of gender meaning. However, they, like the depiction of metamorphosis, better explore human complexity, absurdity, and disintegration. (Lungeli, 2008).

Similarly, work has also been carried out on the said novella in which the struggle between good and evil is shown in this work of fiction (Arivovna 2019). Also Boroomandjazi states that, it is a Daseinsanalytic contribution to the reading of literary works, focusing on the life-world of Gregor Samsa, the protagonist in Franz Kafka's novella The Metamorphosis, who, after dedicating his life to the financial support of his family, finds himself in a difficult situation as an insect-like creature. As the described experiences of the character indicated, it addresses four key shortcomings in this case: a human sense of self, existential temporality, lived spatiality, and embodiment. The way Gregor lives exemplifies the pathological world-openness of a not-owned human being. However, contrary to the sad ending of the story, the prospect of being saved could be opened up for him through a futural projection with reference to the covered potentials in his life, according to the Daseinsanalytic point of view. ([Straus 1989](#)).

[Davachi \(2009\)](#) argues that Kafka uses the existentialist approach in his work *Metamorphosis* to highlight the chaotic and confusing situation of human life in the modern complex world ([Davachi 2009](#)). Since the growth of gender studies, according to Joshi, (2021), studying Franz Kafka's work with a gender-based concern has been fundamental to the study of the author's text. Kafka's most important work is *The Metamorphosis*. The social and political developments that Kafka conveys in his short prose about his period are revealed through a critical analysis of the novella's characters through the lens of gender. The researcher's work assessed a rereading of Kafka's text, its characters, and the story's metaphors in relation to the biography of the author. With the help of Freudian reading, Beauvoirian reading, theories, and rationales proposed by Mary Wollstonecraft, Judith Butler, and several other critics, the same has been done. (Joshi, 2021).

Liu and Wang ([Liu and Wang 2011](#)) state that the Oedipus complex was first mentioned by Sigmund Freud in 1897. According to this theory, the Oedipus complex indicates the feelings and thoughts that the brain keeps in the oblivious, through powerful constraint, that concentrates upon a boy's longing to have his mom physically and sexually. Over his psychosexual turn of events, the complex is the kid's phallic stage arrangement of a discrete sexual personality.

Barfi ([Barfi, Azizmohammadi et al. 2013](#)) finds that *The Metamorphosis* is an emblematic show of the unconscious world of Gregor. As indicated by Freud, our psyche comprises of two sections: unconscious and conscious. He showed that our smothered wills, sentiments, revulsions, drives, clashes, and even recollections are held in the unconscious piece of our minds.

Metamorphosis has been studied from various perspectives; however, no significant work has been carried out to test the oedipal complex in Gregor Samsa's father. This paper attempts to bring out the oedipal complex in Samsa's father.

Theoretical Framework

This article employs Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytical theory as a theoretical basis ([Freud 1900](#)). According to this theory, the Oedipus complex

indicates the feelings and thoughts that the mind/brain keeps in the oblivious, through powerful constraint that concentrates upon a boy's longing to have his mom physically and sexually([Bressler 1999](#)). Over his psychosexual turn of events, the complex is the kid's phallic stage arrangement of a discrete sexual personality([Liu and Wang 2011](#)). The *Metamorphosis* is an emblematic show of the unconscious world of Gregor. As indicated by Freud, our psyche comprises of two sections: unconscious and conscious. He showed that our smothered wills, sentiments, revulsions, drives, clashes, and even recollections are contained in the unconscious piece of our psyche([Barfi, Azizmohammadi et al., 2013](#)).

Discussion

Gregor's Father: A Confirmation of The Oedipal Complex

We know from the history that Franz Kafka read, for sure, Freud's *the interpretations of dreams*. It was published in the 1900s. That was almost a dozen years before the story was published. When Franz Kafka read Freud, he was interested in, if not only entirely convinced by, Freud's theory of unconscious motives, buried impulses, and the fact that so much what we do comes from some level of the unconscious we cannot get access to.

To begin with, the story contains several biological elements. Interestingly enough, "Kafka", the word, is phonetically very much identical to "Samsa" when the letter 's' is replaced with the letter 'k': Samsa, Kafka.

Mr Samsa, furthermore, might possibly be the projection of Kafka's own father. Franz Kafka himself had a very tense relationship with his father. His father was a tyrant beast for Kafka. Owing to that, he constantly lacked self-confidence. Kafka admittedly mentioned in one of his letters to his father that since his very childhood, he underwent a sense of guilt which ultimately resulted from his lack of confidence. He held his father responsible for that([Kafka 2019](#)). This way, the text dramatizes Kafka's inner self, his rage, and suppressed desires.

In the story, Gregor, not his father, is the breadwinner of the family. The evidence for this, from the text, is when the author maintains that Mr Gregor does not think to 'desert' the family by not

getting up from the bed([Kafka 1948](#)). It clearly implies that the family is totally dependent on his only earnings. Gregor being the sole breadwinner, has already, in many ways, usurped his father's role. In Freudian kind of reading, he may very well feel guilty about that usurpation. Beyond that, there are some scenes in the story that seems inescapably Freudian if we look at them with Freudian eyes.

At the very beginning of the story, it is very interesting that the first person who comes in contact with him is his mother, Mrs. Samsa. Gregor Samsa is sleeping in his room which is locked from the inside (that is something mysterious: locking the door in one's own house!). She comes and knocks on the door made of wood and says, in a gentle voice, to him that it is already a quarter to seven. He has to get up and catch the train. This scene can possibly indicate the close intimacy they both have with each other. The wooden door, however, between them can be interpreted, in Freudian view, as an unconscious barricader representing his father.

A few moments later, when Gregor fails to show up, this time, his father comes and knocks on the door with his "fist" and says in a "deeper" voice: "Gregor! Gregor!". This scene is quite the opposite of the previous one: The father knocking on the door with his 'fist', not with the back side of his fingers, which is usually done and speaking in a 'deeper' rather than in a gentle voice as his mother previously did. At the very start, it shows that their relationship is strained and Gregor's father has an extremely harsh attitude towards him.

Later, the chief clerk arrives to inquire about the situation on his own and find out the cause of Gregor's, not usual, absence. This time again, there are quite contrastive replies from the father and mother to the clerk. His father says to the clerk that he does not know what to say about the incident while his mother starts making all the possible excuses on his behalf. She says that her son is not feeling well and exclaims if anything else can make him miss the train. She maintains that her boy always thinks of nothing but his work. She is desperately trying to save the job for her son.

Subsequently, when it is known to everyone that he has transformed to an insect, his father begins to treat him as a savage. He stamps his feet and

flourishes the newspaper and the stick, and cries 'shoo' to drive him to the room. The body of Gregor, now a beetle, is big enough to go through the narrow opening of the door. Instead of opening the closed wing of the two-winged door, Mr Samsa gives him a powerful push in order to let Gregor move in through the narrow opening. His body is scratched by the sharp edges of the door and starts bleeding. His father does not have any regard that Gregor is a human-turned-insect, let alone being his own son. On the very same day, Gregor, almost no more counted in the family, overhears his father explaining the financial situation and prospects to his sister and mother both.

As time passes on, his mother wants to visit his room and see him but his father and his seventeen years old sister dissuade her from doing so. This implies the unconscious desire of the two of them to reunite with each other.

One time, when the mother comes in to see Gregor, she is so overwhelmed by the state of Gregor in the room that she suddenly faints. Gregor rushes out of the room to get his sister to get some medication for her mother. When Greta, his sister, comes in rushing back into the room, she pulls the door behind her and then inadvertently locks Gregor out. It is about that time that the mother and Greta are inside and Gregor is pressed up against the door. At the moment the father comes home and finds Gregor between himself and his wife pressed up against the bedroom door no less. He misinterprets the situation and holds Gregor responsible for the fainting of his wife. He immediately resorts to throwing apples at him([Hess 2003](#)).

"Further flight was useless, for his father had decided to bombard him. From the fruit bowl on the sideboard, his father has filled his pocket, and no, without for a moment taking accurate aim, was throwing apple after apple. These small red apples rolled as if electrified around on the floor and collided with each other. A weakly thrown apple grazed Gregor's back but skidded off harmlessly"([Kafka 2013](#)).

In the chaos that follows the door of the bedroom opens, and the mother rushes out. She is already half naked by that time, and she seems to be losing more of her clothes as she rushes out and claws

onto the father's neck, begging him not to kill their son. That seems about as possible: father trying to kill his son that has come between him and his wife who is falling on him not to kill their son.

So this reading for Freudians is about

father and son having usurped the father's role as head of the household. Gregor is made to feel guilty by his father and his own guilt as well contributes to this. Gregor is made by that guilt into a kind of human insect that has to be killed so that the father can assume his rightful place as head and the breadwinner of the family. To convince his family that he is still able to do a job for a living, Mr Samsa deliberately wears his uniform all the time. Consequently, the family is restored.

In one of the last scenes of the story, when the family has had enough, his sister explicitly says that they should get rid of Gregor for he persecutes them and drives their lodgers away. Her father immediately agrees to her proposal and says that she is more than right.

Later in the story, as Gregor begins his slow decline towards his death, the father is gradually relaxed. Coincidentally, at the time when Gregor is taking the last breaths of his life in his terribly lonely room, his father and mother are in their double bed enjoying their uninterrupted intimacy. The charwoman comes and announces the death of their son. Mr Samsa crosses himself and says thanks to God, his daughter, and wife following suit. None of them, neither father nor mother nor their daughter, resorts to tears. His mother even has a timid smile on

her face. She and her husband turn to leave Gregor there and ask her daughter, Grete, to follow them to the bedroom. Grete obliges accordingly.

At the end of the story, Mr Samsa gets a new job and regains his strength, and becomes the breadwinner for the family. He, furthermore, takes his family on a picnic and wears a new uniform. So, Gregor's descent is absolutely balanced by his father's rise.

Conclusion

The study finds that Gregor is perceived by his father, in his unconscious but represented by his actions, as a rival who has come between him and his wife. To get rid of him, at the last moments of the story, his father hits him with an apple due to which Gregor is badly hurt and subsequently meets his tragic death. The father regains his rightful status (he is the crown of the family now) and is comfortably relaxed. Getting a new job, he starts a fresh life and takes his family on a picnic leaving the past behind.

The paper finds that the actions, triggered and motivated by the unconscious, of Mr. Samsa, Gregor's father, confirmed that his son, Gregor, is suffering from Oedipus complex. There is, on the one hand, a deep intimacy between Gregor and his mother and, on the other hand, unconscious hatred of Gregor and his father towards each other. Gregor thinks of him as a devil, and the father considers him as his rival. The rivalry is finally resolved by the death of Gregor at the hands of his father.

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