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An Exploration of Horror in Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis"

by

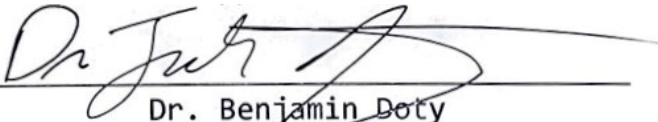
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HONORS THESIS

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Abstract

Readers often identify Gregor's vermin body as the only horrific element in Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis." But what about the walls that he lives in? This study will deemphasize the horror of Kafka's creature and offer new themes to consider. The following collects scholarship around Kafka's time to understand how he used the domestic space to create horror. It includes studies on Gothic literature and Freud's term "*unheimlich*" from his essay "The Uncanny." The findings bring light to a type of horror often overlooked – the horror in the liminal, the "in-between" state of being. This space belongs to neither man nor monster and is neither familiar nor completely fantastical. The purpose of this study is to relay the importance of horror's grounded nature. Reading works with this type of "weird horror" provides the reader with more insight into the human subconscious and societal structures.

Keywords: horror, the uncanny, *unheimlich*, domestic spaces, Franz Kafka, The Metamorphosis.

An Exploration of Horror in Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis"

What is Kafka's Horror?

In "The Metamorphosis," one may believe that Kafka's horror is not like "horror" at all. The vermin Gregor Samsa becomes surely sounds disgusting, and the reader sees the fearful reactions of the Samsa family, but he does not fit into the role of the assigned monster. Unlike other horror stories, Kafka's work does not include grand castles or foul beasts – "[Kafka's] ghosts belong to everyday bourgeois life; and, since this life itself is unreal, there is no need of supernatural ghosts..." (Lukács 772). Because the reader follows Gregor closely, his form becomes more pitiful than anything, a cause for sadness than fear. In fact, it is almost comical how he, in spite of transforming into a "beast," is still concerned about harming his family. The novella's horror may come off as superficial, with Gregor's body being the only horrific element, but that is assuming that "The Metamorphosis" horror lies in what is obviously seen, not in the unassumed.

While his various works include the fantastical, Franz Kafka does not let that drive his story. Gregor turning into a vermin is surely fantastic, but everything else is based on reality. Despite what one may believe, the fantastic is not the main origin of horror in "The Metamorphosis," but rather a way for a more subtle force to emerge. Indeed, his many works use the fantastic to first derive the feeling of disgust and fear, but what makes the story horrifying is through the force of the uncanny. Kafka creates an "in-between" space in which the uncanny force emerges, an area that is not beyond reality but is certainly not familiar to the characters nor the reader. Essentially, "By playing off this tension between human and non-human, between what is 'the self' and what is 'not the self,' Kafka is able to explore the ontology of otherness that clarifies the space between self and other" (Powell 130). This is arguably Kafka's true horror

in “The Metamorphosis,” as it is not out of the realm of the tangible and carries real-life implications.

Even if one is not fond of horror, it remains influential on one’s outlook on the world and answers to philosophical questions. “The Metamorphosis” allows the reader to gain a deeper understanding of oneself and what society fears most. Kafka’s usage of space makes the reader question why one fears what one cannot understand. The novella asks the reader to understand why society ostracizes an individual if they do not fit within society’s boundaries. And so, a horror analysis of “The Metamorphosis” offers more than just a literary insight into weird horror – it is a gateway to understanding society and the human subconscious.

Kafka is no stranger to the abundance of literary criticism over the years. But despite the vast amounts of scholarship on him, “having attracted virtually endless interpretation... The power of his work to compel interaction seems inexhaustible,” an exploration of the uncanny – weird horror, is comparatively limited (Corngold and Gross 3). While Kafka is not a Gothic horror writer, his work does indeed include many Gothic elements that involve his usage of space and barriers, a gateway to uncovering his horror. Therefore, I aim to make the implicit explicit. Through understanding Freud’s concept of “*unheimlich*,” and by considering the historical sphere of Kafka’s time, this analysis will bring to light Kafka’s often overlooked horror in “The Metamorphosis” – the uncanny.

This analysis will explore the meaning of “*unheimlich*,” its origins, and the climate around Kafka’s life that inevitably influenced his writings. Then, I will thoroughly examine each section of “The Metamorphosis,” identifying when the uncanny emerges and analyzing the various stages Gregor Samsa undergoes – from entering the liminal, to trying to survive in a transitional period, and finally losing himself entirely to this unrelenting force. Finally, I will

discuss the implications of reading Kafka's novella and what the reader is forced to face after witnessing the uncanny.

In Theory

“*Unheimlich*” is a term from Freud’s essay “The Uncanny” in 1919. Though it may not be known to the broader world, it is still found in horror media today. “*Unheimlich*,” as explained by Freud, is “the opposite of what is familiar,” the unhomely (Freud 800). It is often a token of repression – one feels a sense of uncanniness because they are led to the once familiar that became foreign through psychological repression (Tatar 169). Encountering places of the once familiar and experiencing the uncanny can occur anywhere, including the domestic sphere. The home, a notable symbol of comfort and an area of intimacy can manifest this experience.

The uncanny, or “*unheimlich*,” is considered a sort of liminal space, with the individual living in between the strange and the familiar. One who lives in this liminal space, the place of the uncanny, deviates from human expectations and societal norms. This ultimately disrupts the people around them, challenging fixed routines and allowing new beliefs to emerge.

In “The Metamorphosis,” Gregor Samsa lies within this liminal space. The reader witnesses the transformation of the people closest to him as a result of their proximity, as well as his struggle with conflicting identities. The question remains: Could he be considered a person anymore? The horror in “The Metamorphosis” is this shift. The home, once familiar and “homely,” now turns into “*unheimlich*.” For the world of Gregor Samsa to become habitable, he must unveil a repression of humanity (Tatar 182).

To understand Kafka’s story, the reader must understand why “*unheimlich*”? Kafka did not create this shift coincidentally, independent of the world’s climate. The existential questions occurring at the time of the 20th century among the working class surely held a connection to the novella. One must first review and analyze the century’s immense changes and its rise in creations before diving further into Kafka’s work.

The 20th century marked the period where writers, scientists, artists, and various other creatives challenged already held strong ideals. Einstein, facing against the strongly believed knowledge of Newton's concept of time, reshaped what one knew about time and space. Many scientists in the 19th century claimed that there was nothing left to be discovered and that physics could not expand further than what was known (Quinn 113). Surely Newton had explored everything necessary. But Einstein persisted, writing "On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies" which would challenge this common perception of reality (Quinn 113). In the end, he proposed that time nor space was absolute, but rather relative. Time slows down and space contracts the greater the speed is to the observer — time moves relative to the individual (Quinn 112).

With challenging these strongly held beliefs came anxiety at the forefront of discoveries, an overarching feeling throughout the century. Rooted from 19th-century ideas and into the defined era of existentialism, not helped by the addition of World War II, came themes such as alienation, guilt, and the loss of one's religious faith, especially from working class individuals (Quinn 114). These same themes can be identified in Kafka's works, as he often explored the meaning of existence from such perspective (Quinn 115).

Of course, the realm of the Visual Arts also led to changes alongside science. The classics of art from the 19th century extended into details and images that were not yet defined or easily imagined (Eimert 7). Instead of copying from what was seen through the eye, the art gained its autonomy – a "dimension of existence" (Eimert 7). Exploring the unconscious wasn't new, especially with the rise of Freud. One specific type of notable art was "Pittura Metafisica." Around 1914, Giorgio de Chirico brought forth a new way of painting and seeing the world,

redefining the laws of classical art (Eimert 113). The similarities between Kafka's works and *Metafisica* become blatant when Chircio describes this type of art:

There is the normal aspect that we almost always see. Then, there is a ghostly, metaphysical one that rare individuals might see in moments of clairvoyance and metaphysical abstraction. A work of art must speak poetically about something that is far away from figures and objects, as well as what its material shapes conceals them from us (Eimert 113).

De Chircio's paintings contain the uncanny. The normal aspect one almost always sees is what is familiar, but the abstract – the feeling of uncanniness, remains almost hidden if one does not step near the area of the liminal.

His paintings are characterized by things that could be considered uncanny as well: empty squares and no living beings or vegetation, figures are artificial and unreal, the architectural elements are extended in height or length and have enormous shadows (*"unheimlich"* creates this same off-putting feeling, where everything is just a bit longer and taller than what is considered familiar), and decorations seem to extend infinitely (Eimert 113). Both the uncanny and *Pittura Metafisica* "border on the unconscious, where the outsized becomes real, what in daily life is not possible becomes possible" (Eimert 113). The evolution of art in the 20th century, specifically with the *Pittura Metafisica*, shows that challenging notions of the expected, classical, normal life were increasing in various forms of art and life.

The 20th century, with challenging already set beliefs into doing the impossible, is important to understand the conditions Kafka was working in. Naturally, along with the rest of the world, the literary realm was going to change, including Kafka and the development of *"unheimlich."* The concept of *"unheimlich"* is an example of faulty representation and the world

challenging itself. Such as when Einstein completely changed one's understanding of time and reinvented concepts of science, "*unheimlich*" acted the same in "The Metamorphosis." It twists what the reader understands, it unravels the faulty representation of the "home," and the reader therefore discovers the often unexplored horror of Kafka.

Entering the Liminal

"The Metamorphosis" begins with the revelation of Gregor's new form — a "horrible vermin" with an "armor-like back" and "many legs, pitifully thin" (Kafka, 1915). From the start, the story centers on the fantastic with his unbelievable transformation. Though, Kafka does not reveal the novella's horrifying nature right away, as Gregor still acts like his former self, thinking of nothing but work, and therefore doesn't see his metamorphosis as anything significant. The reader sees the contrast, and even possible humor, in Gregor struggling with his new body despite the novella's setting. With his body being the focal point of the novella at first, the reader naturally inquires for more – what will his body do to horrify? By centering this transformation within the unassuming domestic sphere, Kafka sets the stage for a more ongoing, subtle horror. If Gregor is not horrified by himself, the man suffering from lack of mobility and communication, with a described weird body, then the horror is not fully yet recognizable to the reader.

Freud's notion of the uncanny is prevalent in many gothic stories, which share many similarities with Kafka. Referencing Victor Turner, Tatar notes that "Turner argues... liminal subjects are 'entities in transition,' as yet without place or position between the binaries... they thus elude or slip through the network of classifications" (Tatar 68). The uncanny then is never a stagnant element, rather it is a change in the overall story, a shift in perception – a redirection of the story's narration. Gregor becomes this "liminal personae" beyond human classification (Tatar 68). And though Kafka does not explicitly state Gregor's form, the novella's descriptions

indicate that he embodies an insect (not human), symbolizing both death and decomposition. Kafka labels this the moment when Gregor becomes a non-classified entity, right from the beginning of the story.

The uncanny relies on the reader to understand how Gothic elements emerge in non-gothic works and calls them to look beyond the obvious. A deeper look into the domestic sphere gives the reader an understanding that despite the same items in Gregor's room — a “collection of textile samples... on the table” and “recently cut out of an illustrated magazine,” it is different. The room becomes “a little too small,” therefore starting the immediate disconnection of Gregor from the familiar (Kafka, 1915). Despite trying to retain normalcy, when he finally makes his way to open the door, the home completely loses its homeliness. From Tatar, the “liminal space of the house acts as a container or coffin where metamorphic transformation take place” (Tatar 72). Gregor's room is this liminal space. Once he reveals himself to his family, the liminal is exposed to the rest of the world as well – it is no longer simply his place of residence. This unleashes a shift until the novella's conclusion because as long as he is alive, the home remains unfamiliar to all parties.

Kafka writes subtle descriptions that further suggest this shift – the dull, gloomy weather with the “street... enveloped in morning fog” suddenly becomes “much lighter; part of the endless gray-black building on the other side of the street could be seen quite clearly” (Kafka, 1915). And the novella points out numerous items in Gregor's home – “The washing up from breakfast lay on the table... on the wall was a photograph of Gregor when he was a lieutenant in the army” (Kafka, 1915). Why did Kafka decide to point out the seemingly unimportant objects to the reader? Inserting descriptions of the story's environment makes sense in Gothic fiction, as the setting sets up the atmosphere and mood for the rest of the story. Its architecture is typically

described as grand and daunting, and the home dark and dull, adding to the haunted and horrifying feeling that something bad is coming. But Kafka rather utilizes domestic objects to portray the same haunting feeling. He shows that the physical has not changed, but everyone's perception has. Within the mind and heart, everything is no longer the same.

Gregor's family is inevitably impacted by this shift. He is incomprehensible to his family that his mother "hurr[ies] backwards... forgotten that the table was behind her with all the breakfast things on it... without even seeming to notice that the coffee pot had been knocked over and a gush of coffee was pouring down onto the carpet" (Kafka, 1915). His mother, who is concerned about him the most, forgets the layout of the once familiar space and acts against her usual self. His father, who was usually self-controlled, impulsively seizes him into his room, hurting him in the process since it "did not occur to his father to open the other of the double doors so that Gregor would have enough space to get through. He was merely fixed on the idea that Gregor... got back into his room as quickly as possible" (Kafka, 1915). His family, the people closest to Gregor and who always relied on him, now began driving a wedge. His room becomes a space of entrapment because it is now a space where the incomprehensible lives, separated from the rest of the world.

Because Gregor now lives in an unfamiliar space, he eventually unravels. If he is no longer perceived the same, nor interacts with his family the same, then his being unavoidably changes. The body wants a new self, as "Liminal rites often 'manufacture' monsters to make threshold people reconsider their place in the world" (Tatar 69). Not only does Gregor enter a phase where he struggles with re-finding himself, but his family and the place around him now function differently. The Samsa family would have to figure out how to survive without him, while he tries to survive in his liminal entrapment. Part of Kafka's horror comes from the

understanding that one loses oneself when one cannot be understood by the world, changing those around them.

Surviving in the Unfamiliar

From the now-created distinct space, Part Two of “The Metamorphosis” fully showcases Gregor’s room as the bearer of the liminal, for those who trespass this line leave as quickly as possible. This section reveals the “*unheimlich*” and breaks down the family as a reason for the uncanny’s growth.

The Samsa home was becoming deconstructed. The doors that occupy the residence are no longer entrances. Rather, the doors block Gregor from seeing his family and speaking with the other members of his “community.” He is forced to witness his family changing,

Through the crack in the door, Gregor could see that the gas had been lit in the living room. His father at this time would normally be sat with his evening paper, reading it out in a loud voice to Gregor’s mother, and sometimes to his sister, but there was now not a sound to be heard... It was so quiet all around too, even though there must have been somebody in the flat (Kafka, 1915).

His family rarely includes him in conversations, and if so, they are minimal – “There was seldom any conversation, especially at first, that was not about him in some way, even if only in secret” (Kafka, 1915). As a result, the home becomes something more sinister. The Samsa residence, specifically Gregor’s room, keeps him trapped within the walls while he witnesses his family progressing without him and remains ultimately powerless. According to Douglas, this involvement of forbidden whispering and secrecy is a damaging component of the family sphere (Douglas 304).

In “The Metamorphosis,” doors are almost always mentioned with a negative connotation. If a home is completely a home, then a crucial component, such as a door, should not be portrayed in this manner. This shows the reader that the Samsa home can no longer be considered “homely.” Gregor notes that “The previous morning while the doors were locked everyone had wanted to get in there to him, but now... no-one came, and the keys were in the other sides” (Kafka, 1915). When his sister eventually enters his room to clean and bring him food, there is minimal contact and she almost always leaves the room in a hurry, “quickly clos[ing] the door as a precaution so that no-one would have to suffer the view into Gregor’s room, then... go[ing] straight to the window and pull[ing] it hurriedly open almost as if she were suffocating” (Kafka, 1915). When Gregor exposes himself to her, she “lost control of herself and slammed the door shut again from the outside” (Kafka, 1915). The actions of people entering his room are always portrayed negatively – nervously entering his room, slamming his door shut in a rush to leave, slowly opening the door when entering, etc. The walls and doors that occupy the Samsa home then could only be described as “*unheimlich*.” There is no familiar welcome or greeting – the flat is characterized as a hidden antagonist, one that is succumbing Gregor to this new reality and eventual end.

The gone familiarity from Part One is mentioned again by Gregor himself, as he comments that “for some reason, the tall, empty room... made him feel uneasy as he lay there flat on the floor, even though he had been living in it for five years” (Kafka, 1915). These comments are brief, yet they indicate that the uncanny now roams freely within his space. Though, “for some reason” strongly suggests that Gregor has not fully identified the liminal’s existence.

The furniture and fixtures described in Part One – Gregor’s mother forgetting the items on the kitchen table, his father forgetting to open another one of Gregor’s doors – become visibly more different. In Douglas’ examination of the home, she writes that for a home to be a “home,” “neither the space nor its appurtenances have to be fixed, but there has to be something regular about the appearance and reappearance of its furnishings” (Douglas 289). Gregor’s space no longer has these regular furnishings. As he cannot be understood by the rest of his family, his sister aims to remove his furniture so that he can roam around more comfortably, which at first blindsides him completely.

Because Gregor is trapped within a space that is unknown to the rest of the world, he is forced into new conditions and changes into a new developing self – his “creature” self. For a while, he forgets anything about his attachments to the real world (because he is no longer in the real familiar) and begins to live with the liminal instead of against it. His human-self is entrapped and helpless that he can no longer live with his family the way he used to. His creature-self lives more openly and he adapts to his environment quickly. Living within a haunted area of the once alive familiar, Gregor does not know who he is anymore. A sort of horror is created within the body that splits itself over how to act. Gregor lacks “any direct human communication, along with the monotonous life led by the family during these two months, [which] must have made him confused – he could think of no other way of explaining to himself why he had seriously wanted his room emptied out” (Kafka, 1915). The furniture being a connection to Gregor’s humanity thus shows the reader that the familiar and one’s humanity are intertwined – if one is within the liminal, the unfamiliar, then one’s humanity will slowly succumb to this outside force.

Gregor started seeing things “less distinct[ly] every day, even things that were quite near,” to eventually not seeing anything at all... “if he had not known that he lived in

Charlottenstrasse... he could have thought that he was looking out the window a barren waste where the grey sky and the grey earth mingled inseparably” (Kafka, 1915). The outside warps because, within this space, his perceptions are violently changed. And because his furniture – his chest containing fretsaw and other tools, and eventually the writing desk – the familiar, was going to be removed, feelings of “*unheimlich*” were now growing in full force.

Even with Gregor’s realization of his fleeting humanity, he cannot fight against it. He is not understood by his family because he is beyond the point of recognition, his efforts to communicate are perceived as attacks or moments of uncontrollability. His body works against himself and his motivations, as once he tried to protect his beloved picture and ended up scaring his sister and mother, he could only do nothing “but wait... oppressed with anxiety and self-reproach... crawl[ing] over everything, walls, furniture, ceiling, and finally in his confusion as the whole room began to spin around him he fell down into the middle of the dinner table” (Kafka, 1915). Once the familiar furniture is removed, the layout of the flat becomes more disorienting to Gregor, and so his body can no longer function within his own space. The uncanny emerges from this as he recalls his previous life as a human due to his inability to live like an autonomous being any longer.

A feeling of doom grows stronger when Gregor’s father attacks him even more violently than before to, once again, drive him into his room. Gregor is forced back into the space of the liminal, permanently fixing his place within the home, because he cannot be understood and is therefore not considered “real” or equal to his family. Ultimately, Part Two of “The Metamorphosis” shows the failure of Gregor’s escape from the liminal and the struggle of the Samsa family to tolerate this new “*unheimlich*.” If he is bound to only one space, then his family enforces it, leading the functioning community to cease.

The Inevitable End

As “The Metamorphosis” reaches Part Three, the liminal loses its distinction. The Samsa family cannot distinguish Gregor and the liminal because the liminal space in the home is losing its relevance. As the Samsa’s attitudes and their way of living change, they finally reach the point of no return. There is no bargaining for Gregor to somehow survive along with them. The uncanny is transforming beyond itself — meaning, he and the liminal do not appear as unfamiliar as they did before because they are no longer being perceived at all. The boundaries of the familiar and the unfamiliar are eroding because he and his room are fading from the physical realm.

Compared to Part Two when the Samsa family members start to feel the uncanny’s effects from Gregor, Part Three finally settles and emboldens them. The family’s roles transform permanently around Gregor’s exclusion, leaving no room for the acknowledgment of the outsider. The women in his family center their attention around his father, whose position grows more indomitable, “run[ning] after his father and continu[ing] being of help to him” (Kafka, 1915). And even though the Samsas, due to their own guilt, would leave the door open for Gregor to peer out of, there is no noticeable change or strengthening of their relationship. If it had occurred earlier in the novella, perhaps it is arguable that the Samsas could have accepted him, leaving room for a more optimistic ending. However, in Part Three, the boundary between Gregor and the Samsas is already so strong that it is no longer considered a boundary — he and his space are moving beyond the Samsa’s perception, eventually reaching beyond recognizability. This signals the novella’s inevitable ending – Gregor will move past the point of uncanniness to simply become non-existent.

The uncanny plagues the Samsa's home as Gregor's body starts to further deteriorate, leaving the family no longer able to co-exist with him if they want to fit within society. Either they must banish Gregor from their minds and try to function as best as they can, or physically remove him or themselves from being further influenced. The Samsa family considers the latter, because though Gregor could "have been quite easy to transport in any suitable crate with a few air holes in it" with them to a new place, their consideration was ultimately "more to do with their total despair," the uncanny's influence too strong to simply bring along without struggle (Kafka, 1915). The family decides to ultimately leave the source — Gregor, behind with the home, because both are now inseparable. He becomes tied to the antagonistic room. Though at first, the Samsa family decides to deal with Gregor as minimally as possible.

Indeed, in the first half of Part Three, the Samsa family succeeds in majorly forgetting Gregor's existence. The rough transition of Part Two — the fight between fearing the unfamiliar, yet still present connection between Gregor and his family, is finally destroyed. No slamming or locking of doors was necessary to divide him from the rest of the home. His sister, the closest one to him, "no longer thought about how she could please him but would hurriedly push some food... into his room with her foot before she rushed out to work in the morning" (Kafka, 1915). The closest contact with Gregor furthers her distance as his room starts to lose prominence in the real world. Reality starts changing to exclude Gregor because his space no longer has a tangible impact on others or the physical realm.

As Gregor becomes unrecognizable to the Samsa family, naturally the reader begins to see the long-term physical effects of the uncanny. The leftovers of the Samsas — the things unneeded or unwanted by the residents, find themselves in Gregor's room. The unseen, the forgotten — just like him. His room becomes dirty, "smears of dirt were left on the walls... little

balls of dust and filth,” as his mental and bodily state deteriorates, no longer eating or wanting to leave outside his darkened space (Kafka, 1915). Like the room, Gregor’s body begins to rot away, the liminal dragging him with it from existence. It is a hidden force behind the scenes, furthering his attachment to reality.

Even the moment where there was hope for Gregor's salvation ended up meaningless in the end. The separation and deterioration of Gregor are far too great. Even when he breaks the so-defined boundary, feeling a spark of longing that he had forgotten during the entirety of Part Three, it does not matter anymore. Once his sister plays the violin, he transforms from his indifferent state, yearning for this “unknown nourishment... He was determined to make his way forward to his sister” (Kafka, 1915). Music, in this case, resonates with him because he remembers his humanity and his sister whom he cared for — there the previously existing Gregor remains, even as he exists infected by the uncanny. But as Cantrell describes, “A network of shared perceptions makes a literal life or death difference... The fear of shame, the habit of secrecy, and the hope for power within the family all work to cut off alternate ways of seeing things before they are even expressed” (Cantrell 585). This moment is only a revelation to the reader, who now understands that Gregor’s fight with the uncanny is not tied to only his room and his home, but also to the cruel world he existed within. Once his family rejects him for the final time, there is no escaping from the uncanny. If the people closest to him could not accept him, how could anyone within society accept him either?

Gregor’s sister's reluctant helpfulness transitions into disdainfulness, referring to Gregor as an “it,” a being not human or worthy of being called her brother, saying “We have to try and get rid of it. We’ve done all that’s humanly possible to look after it and be patient” (Kafka, 1915). His sister openly acknowledges the “*unheimlich*” inside of him. Gregor is not human,

beyond understanding, familiar now unfamiliar. The Samsas wanting him completely separated from their lives seals his fate: he will be physically removed from the flat (which means he will have to survive somehow in the real world), or he will simply die. There is no revelation from his family, because as Cantrell explains, “[The Samsa’s] conception of ‘the human circle’ is rather restrictive. It admits only those who keep up appearances; the most powerful emotion for them is not love or loyalty, but shame” (Cantrell 583). Gregor remains an uncanny figure that the Samsas cannot accept into their lives.

Gregor’s death, compared to the suffering he endured from the uncanny, is rather quick. This represents the horror of the uncanny at its core. It requires long suffering and the transformation of surrounding outsiders, only to be gone in an instant once death is ensured. Gregor recalls his family one final time, as the novella details his deteriorated body before the uncanny becomes no more. His room has nothing to house, his family has no one to separate themselves from, and so the boundaries between the liminal are removed. The Samsa family –

Left the flat together, which was something they had not done for months. They had the tram, filled with warm sunshine, all to themselves. Leant back comfortably on their seats, they discussed their prospects and found that on closer examination they were not all bad — until then they had never asked each other about their work but all three had jobs which were very good and held particularly good promise for the future. The greatest improvement for the time being, of course, would be achieved quite easily by moving house... Grete was becoming livelier... (Kafka, 1915).

They were able to think freely, figure out solutions to their economic issues, and recreate a functional family.

Now that nothing controls the Samsas, they are released from the uncanny's metaphorical chains. Gregor does not disturb them any longer and there is no unfamiliar force that keeps wiggling itself into their lives. The home is no longer an antagonist, for nothing is disturbing the familiar. The "evil" is defeated. Though instead of an evil monster, it was merely Gregor. "The Metamorphosis" may read similarly to other horror stories — the clouds clear up, evil is defeated, and the story is resolved — but as the reader now understands, Gregor is not an "evil" to be rid of. Rather, Gregor's life got tangled up with the uncanny, affecting his loved ones and he, as a result, could no longer fit within society. It is an ending, but far from a resolution. The root of the problem — society's inability to accept the unfamiliar, does not cease, even if the novella no longer has a problem to solve. The liminal lies out there, people like Gregor are trapped, and eventually, they succumb because they are never allowed to undergo a revelation or are given acceptance. Essentially, Kafka gives these people a voice — "to that other(ness) that had always already been rendered silent" allowing the hidden horror to reveal itself (Powell 141).

Conclusion

The reader may ask if Gregor could be saved, yet it remains uncertain due to the conditions he exists under. Like Kafka, the conditions of his environment place immense strain on him. If Gregor escapes his abode, he will face the same consequences, unless he somehow manages to live outside human perception altogether. His family is only an extension of society. In fact, revealing himself to his family is his closest chance to being accepted and cared for. His connection with humanity when he heard his sister's violin playing is the only possible moment of revelation. But, in the end, even the people closest to him could not accept those who did not fit within society. The Samsas refuse to see the humanity Gregor still retained and the

experiences they shared. Instead, they reject him once more, leading to “The Metamorphosis” conclusion.

As mentioned, while “The Metamorphosis” ends as all novellas do, Kafka’s conclusion is far from a resolved one. He does not leave the novella with an optimistic outlook for Gregor, nor indicate that the Samsa family will ask for forgiveness or undergo any action to set things right. Ultimately, its ending does not set out to solve any of the root problems it brought up, with societal restrictions and alienation still plaguing the world.

Then, perhaps what one gains from Kafka is more than just an understanding of his horror. Many may not favor his nihilism, and indeed it may be difficult for the reader to accept such an unsatisfying ending. Even Kafka himself looked back on his work with dissatisfaction (Sweeney 34). Yet, as Sweeney states, “Perhaps Kafka’s displeasure at the epilogue thus reveals not artistic dissatisfaction but rather a desire not to obscure the competing ethical and philosophical issues that the work raises” (Sweeney 34). Like horror often does, especially through the force of the uncanny, “The Metamorphosis” allows the reader to reflect on their identity and how they survive under society’s watchful eyes.

One is ultimately faced with unsettling thoughts of the world’s instability. ‘If I were someone else, could I survive like I do now?’ ‘If I couldn’t do a certain thing, would the world be as cruel to me as it was to Gregor?’ ‘Would there be any circumstance in which my family completely turns on me or shuts me out?’ The uncanny does not “prove” anything to the reader, but rather offers insights into relationships, human acceptance, and society’s influence on the consequences of alienation. Just as Gregor understood that his family could survive without him and did not see him as a person due to his inability to act “normal” anymore, the reader may face and understand uncomfortable truths and difficult questions.

In this sense, Kafka's horror is why "The Metamorphosis" is still read and well-known today – why it does not have a shortage of analysis and new areas of exploration. Just like Kafka's world, struggling to accept where he belonged during this period of immense innovation and war, the reader still identifies and experiences today. Societal expectations have not ceased, and war is not without lasting consequences. The world in which Gregor and Kafka live, this "mood of total impotence, of paralysis in the face of the unintelligible power of circumstances" still follows the reader today, successfully showcased through the presence of the uncanny (Lukács 766). The novella gains its integrity from its honest portrayal of the displacement of man under society's restraints and Kafka's horror probing into the human mind. So, while Kafka's novella may have concluded, it is far from over. The uncanny jumps from Kafka's writing into the reader's mind, a prominent force that forever makes one consider its societal implications, both in fiction and reality.

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