

A Brief Analysis of the Imagery in The Metamorphosis

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Abstract: This article briefly summarizes Franz Kafka and his work *The Metamorphosis* in the modernist period, explores the imagery in the work, analyzes the application and function of the imagery in the novel text, from the bug, doors, and windows to apples, explores the effect of imagery in the novel, and finally reveals part of the themes of the novel.

Keywords: Kafka; *The Metamorphosis*; Imagery

1. Introduction

Austrian writer Franz Kafka, one of the most important Western writers of the 20th century, is an explorer of modernist literature, and most of his works use absurd and deformed imagery and symbolism to express his understanding of contemporary society. The plot of *The Metamorphosis* is simple but absurd, and the author uses cold words to tell the tragic situation of Gregor's transformation into a bug and his family's abandonment. "Metamorphosis" is not only the "metamorphosis" of Gregor's appearance, but also the "metamorphosis" of his mind, and the "metamorphosis" of this twisted society. The work profoundly exposes the individual's lonely and desperate plight of survival in the modern capitalist society of the western countries, where materialistic desires run rampant.

1.1 Modernism

Modernism is a rather vague term that is used to refer to the works of a group of poets, novelists, painters, and musicians between 1910 and the early years after World War II. The term includes various trends or schools, such as imagism, expressionism, Dadaism, stream of consciousness, and existentialism.

The two industrial revolutions that broke out in the late 19th century pushed the world into a rapidly developing and rapidly changing industrial society. At the beginning of the 20th century, the outbreak of World War I destroyed the material foundation of modern Western civilization and also disintegrated traditional culture. Modernism sees the irrational as meaningless and focuses on depicting inner absurdity and disorder; the literature is devoid of typical and morbid characters; the narrative is non-linear; and the depictions are fragmented and anti-heroic. The philosophical views of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bergson, and Freud's psychoanalysis constitute the theoretical basis of a new generation of writers, so they focus on portraying modern people's anachronism and unique social psychology in modern society. The ideological trend emerged in response to it, swept the art field, and became the mainstream of the literary world following the realist trend of thought in the nineteenth century. The modernist literary trend has learned from and subverted its predecessors. For the description of psychology, the modernist trend of thought is based on the emerging psychological research results, showing readers a completely different side than traditional literature. Kafka, known as the originator of modernist literature, has modernist characteristics in his novel, *The Metamorphosis*.

1.2 Kafka

Franz Kafka was hailed by critics as one of the most influential writers of the 20th century. Kafka's representative works, *The Metamorphosis*, *The Trial*, and *The Castle*, have distinctive themes and are based on real-life alienation and alienation of human beings, as well as having a horrific quest for characterization and making bizarre transformations of characters.

Kafka's full name is Franz Kafka. He is a German-speaking Bohemian novelist. Born in Prague, Kingdom of Bohemia, Austria-Hungary, he likes literature and drama. At the age of 18, he entered Prague University to study chemistry and literature. He later studied law and obtained a doctorate. Although Kafka is one of the representatives of modernist literature, his early works were quite influenced by expressionists. He wrote the famous short story *The Trial* all night. Kafka passed away on June 3, 1924, and his works only received enthusiastic

responses after his death. His father succeeded in starting a business through hard work, but he also developed a violent and bossy character, which had a great negative impact on Kafka. His mother was melancholic and sentimental. In this family, Kafka developed an extremely introverted and withdrawn character. Kafka has lived in the shadow of his father all his life, afraid of socializing with people, and even afraid of starting a family. He broke off the marriage three times, so that people have to re-understand this great writer who is under tremendous pressure both mentally and physically. When Kafka was 36 years old, he wrote a letter with 30,000 words to his tyrant father. This letter is only slightly less than *The Metamorphosis*. This letter reveals his fearful attitude towards his father.

1.3 Metamorphosis

The *Metamorphosis* is a novella in which the protagonist, a salesman, wakes up to find himself transformed into a giant bug. This is one of Kafka's most famous works and contains much symbolism and many different interpretations.

There are four main characters in *The Metamorphosis*, namely the protagonist Gregor, his father Samsa, his sister Grete, and his mother. The content of *The Metamorphosis* can be divided into three parts. The first part introduces the protagonist, Gregor, who finds himself turned into a bug. The sudden change makes Gregor very melancholy and helpless. He also wants to go to work. Working hard to open the door, he scared everyone and finally was driven back to the bedroom by his furious father. The second part is that although the protagonist, Gregor, has become a bug, he still thinks of family in his heart. Although his life habits have become bugs, he still has human thinking and consciousness. Unemployed Gregor still cares about the things in the family, his father's debts, and his sister's dream of going to music school. However, after a few days, the family began to regard Gregor as a bug and a burden. After adapting to him becoming a bug, his attitude gradually changed from caring and sympathy to disgust. In the third part, Gregor's family had to go out to work in order to make a living. They hated Gregor, who had become a bug, and finally drove Gregor into his own room intolerably. In front of the indifferent family affection, Gregor, who had become a bug, dropped his head to the ground unknowingly and died silently in helplessness.

2. Image analysis

The concept of imagery appeared very early in China; there are two phrases in Zhou Yi. One is "watching for images" and the other is "showing images for expounding meanings". The American poet Pound defines imagery as "a complex of thoughts and feelings in a moment"^[1]. In this work, Kafka poured his inner emotions into objects and created a lot of vivid images.

2.1 Bug

The bug is Gregor's form after his alienation and fits the reality of his situation. Gregor's shift in status makes him even more inferior in his family and society.

The metamorphosis is just like its name; only the appearance of Gregor is changed. Gregor is "worm-shaped with a human heart", with the same psychology and thinking as humans. Although Gregor turned into a bug, he was still a "human heart." In a capitalist society, no matter what the incarnation becomes, it is impossible to get rid of the oppression of ordinary working people and small potatoes by capitalism. The nature of capitalism is a state of exploitation and oppression. As a small bug in a disadvantaged group, its own strength is small. "First, he slid down a few times from the smooth chest of drawers. But at last he gave himself a final swing and stood upright there. He was no longer at all aware of the pains in his lower body, no matter how they might still sting. Now he let himself fall against the back of a nearby chair, on the edge of which he braced himself with his thin limbs" (Kafka 16). "Then he made an effort to turn the key in the lock with his mouth. Unfortunately it seemed that he had no real teeth. How then was he to grab hold of the key? But to make up for that his jaws were naturally very strong; with their help he managed to get the key really moving, and he did not notice that he was obviously inflicting some damage on himself, for a brown fluid came out of his mouth, flowed over the key, and dripped onto the floor" (Kafka 18). Through these detailed descriptions, Gregor's powerlessness as a bug is revealed. He is different from normal people. Just like in the capitalist society people are in now, the weak, small, and low-level individuals cannot change their own destiny and can only be controlled by others. At the same time, as a bug, he cannot speak but can only talk to himself and then express his thoughts to his family through his actions. Gregor, who was

at the bottom of society, was unable to tell his family members in the face of difficulties and pressure from his family and society. Faced with the oppression of capitalists at work, he can't resist and complain, and he can only hide his inner pain silently.

2.2 Doors and windows

In *The Metamorphosis*, the images of "door" and "window" involve a series of actions, such as knocking on the door, closing the door, opening the window, leaning against the window, etc. The "door" and "window" in the work not only refer to the part of home decoration in real life but also the boundary between inside and outside the house, the boundary between physical and mental freedom and constraint.

Doors and windows appear many times in the article. ' "Gregor, open the door, I beg you." Gregor had no intention of opening the door, but congratulated himself on his precaution, acquired from traveling, of locking all doors during the night, even at home (Kafka 28). "You'll see it immediately, as soon as Gregor opens the door. Anyway, I'm happy that you're here, Mr. Manager. By ourselves, we would never have made Gregor open the door" (28)." Across the room from him, his mother had pulled open a window, in spite of the cool weather, and leaning out with her hands on her cheeks, she pushed her face far outside the window. Between the alley and the stairwell, a strong draft came up, and the curtains on the window flew around" (Kafka 4). Doors and windows are channels of communication—a way for Gregor and his family to communicate with the outside world. Only when you open the door can you communicate. For Gregor's family, during the time when Gregor became a bug, Gregor's father, mother, and sister all tried to communicate with Gregor in different ways, and these ways are bound to go through the "door" of Gregor's room. Because of the door that was closed at the beginning, the family can only learn about Gregor's condition by shouting outside the door and knocking on the door, trying to enter the door. Here, the door hinders the communication of information. He was gradually ignored by his family. The closed door also closed Gregor's inner heart. As a result, his heart became more helpless, and his family understood his suffering better. The distance between himself and his family has become even more estranged. The last but one paragraph of the first part of the article has a description of windows. "He undertook the very difficult task of shoving a chair over to the window. Then he crept up on the window sill and, braced in the chair, leaned against the window to look out, obviously with some memory or other of the satisfaction that used to bring him in earlier times" (Kafka 1). Now Gregor, who is a bug, cannot go out normally. The windows symbolize hope and freedom, allowing Gregor to see the outside world. However, the existence of the window has not been able to bring substantial changes to Gregor. He has been in his bedroom almost all the time, but it will make readers feel Gregor's helplessness and loneliness.

2.3 The apple

The apple, as an inanimate object, represents indifference. The father's throwing of the apple at him is a reflection of his disgust and even hatred for him, while at the same time, the apple is a huge object to the bug and represents danger.

At the end of the second part, it is said that his father hit Gregor with an apple, and he was seriously injured. As a result, the apple was embedded in his body. "Gregor's serious wound, from which he suffered for over a month (since no one ventured to remove the apple, it remained in his flesh as a visible reminder), seemed by itself to have reminded the father that, in spite of his present unhappy and hateful appearance, Gregor was a member of the family, something one should not treat as an enemy, and that it was (Kafka 3). Apples have been associated with desire and temptation in Western culture. Father hitting Gregor with an apple was reminding Gregor that he was evil. At the beginning of the article, his father's attitude towards Gregor shows that he deeply dislikes Gregor, and from the bottom of his heart, he also believes that he is a bug and that he is evil, and this caused the whole family to go out to look for work and make life changes. It's getting harder and harder; all of this was brought about by Gregor. At the same time, his father chased Gregor with an apple, and the plot of Gregor hiding in the room was the climax of the plot of *The Metamorphosis*. At the same time, the trauma the apple brought to Gregor's body was fatal. At the end of the article, it is described that Gregor's death was also caused by being beaten by an apple.

3. Conclusion

The use of many images in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* makes the article more substantial and comprehensive, from content to struc-

ture, and fully describes the many adverse effects brought about by Gregor becoming a bug. He lost the channel of communication with the outside world; he was alone and helpless, and his family's indifference and disgust accompanied him, and he became more sad and helpless. In a closed environment, Gregor eventually died in pain and helplessness. Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* describes the weakness and helplessness of ordinary, toiling people in a capitalist society. They are always in an oppressed position. They are the weakest in society and cannot resist. At the same time, it also describes the indifference between people and provides a new perspective for people to understand that period of history.

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