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Beyond The Bug: A Study Of Psychological Setback And Self-Alienation In Franz Kafka's Novel “The Metamorphosis.”

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Abstract: Franz Kafka's novel “The Metamorphosis” presents an unexplainable transformation of the main character of the novel, Gregor Samsa into a "monstrous vermin." This paper conveys that Gregor's physical change is not a random occurrence but the ultimate expression of his pre-existing self-alienation rooted in oppressive familial and financial duties. Even before his physical transformation, Gregor's psyche had been eroded by a mechanical, soul-crushing routine, effectively reducing him to a mindless machine serving a system and a family that valued his labour over his humanity.

Utilizing psychoanalytic and existential frameworks, the paper tries to demonstrate that how the physical metamorphosis initiates a predictable course of psychological setbacks, through detailing the retreat from human consciousness and utility into a giant bug. Furthermore, the paper attempts to examine that how Gregor's regression triggers a reciprocal self-alienation within the Samsa family, proving that their relationship was conditional, thus solidifying Gregor's path to self-willed extinction.

Index Terms – Metamorphosis, self-alienation, regression, relationship

I. INTRODUCTION

Franz Kafka's novella “The Metamorphosis” written in 1915, begins with one of the most shocking and terrifying transformations in literature that, Gregor Samsa wakes up to find that he has become a gigantic insect. Even though the story never explains why and how the transformation happens, though many critics see it as a huge metaphor to the psychological setback. This paper opines that Gregor's change into a bug is actually not just a physical manifestation or a psychic breakdown but it also indicates that he had already reached a mental breaking point. The metamorphosis serves as a setting for Kafka's deeper exploration of Gregor's deep self-estrangement and his following slide into a primitive psychological state.

This study conveys that Gregor's insect form represents the final, unavoidable physical manifestation of his loss of self, a loss driven by his role as the family's sole economic provider. The subsequent decline, marked by shifting behaviours and desires, is an analytical study in psychological decline. This analysis tries to reveal that Gregor's mind, stripped of its function, collapses into a primal state, ultimately concluding that his loss of human utility dictates his eventual death.

II. GREGOR'S LIFE BEFORE THE CHANGE: ALIENATION AS A WAY OF LIFE

Before Gregor's physical change, he exists in a deepest state of self-alienation, a term rooted in existential and Marxist philosophy referring to the estrangement of a person from their true self, their labour and their creative potential. He worked as a traveling salesman specifically to pay off a massive debt his father owed to his boss. He estimated it would take another five to six years of misery before he could resign. As a traveling salesman, Gregor is wholly defined by his economic function taking care of his family financially. He showcases bitterness for his exhausting job and the demanding Chief Clerk, yet he remains trapped by the family's debt. Gregor Samsa's family seems like an entirely parasitic family, depending only on his income while showing him little unauthentic affection.

In his business minded family environment, Gregor has willingly suppressed his individuality his desire for an independent life, his connection to the portrait of the woman in furs and his personal relationships are all sacrificed for the happiness of his family. Gregor Samsa room, specifically with its three locked doors, serves as a potent metaphor for his deep-seated loneliness, profound alienation, and eventual dehumanization. The transformation, therefore, is not a random punishment, but the realization of his worthlessness outside of his role. Having reduced his identity to mere utility, Gregor awakens as a creature defined by its lack of utility—a bug. The body simply catches up to the soul with pain and helplessness.

III. THE MECHANISM OF DECLINE: PSYCHOLOGICAL REGRESSION

Following his transformation into an insect, Gregor's behaviour aligns with the Freudian framework of psychological regression. This defence mechanism occurs when the consciousness collapsing under the weight of trauma or intense stress, retreats into more animalistic, primitive, instinctual and childlike patterns of existence.

A. The Retreat from Consciousness

Initially, Gregor retains a human mind, preoccupied with his schedule and job security. However, this human intellect rapidly deteriorates. Gregor's self-worth was entirely tied to his role as the family's breadwinner. Once he can no longer work, he loses his purpose and is treated by society symbolised by the Chief Clerk as a "monstrous vermin" rather than a person.

- **Becoming More Like an Animal**

Gregor loses the things that make him human, like speaking and walking upright. Whenever he tried to speak, he only made strange animal noises. He no longer felt comfortable in an open human room, instead, he feels safest hiding in the dark under a sofa, just like an animal in a burrow. As his voice becomes an unintelligible "twittering," he can no longer express his needs or humanity to his family. This communication breakdown intensifies his isolation; he overhears them discussing him as a "burden" and an "it," which accelerates his psychological decline

- **Drastic Change in Food Habit**

His appetite changes from normal human food to rotting scraps and trash. This shows he is moving away from the way humans eat and behave, following animal instincts instead.

- **Losing the Last Pieces of Himself**

When his family takes his furniture and his personal belongings away, he thinks that they are removing the last signs of his human life. Gregor desperately clings to a picture of a woman on the wall because it is his final link to his human feelings and memories. He only fully loses his human self once these objects and memories are gone.

As his mind retreats, the bug body begins to govern the man. He finds pleasure in crawling on the walls and ceiling, a behaviour entirely alien to the human self and his will to rejoin society is replaced by an instinct for self-preservation through hiding.

B. The Family's Abuse and Detachment

Gregor's regression acts as a trigger for the family to complete their reciprocal alienation from him. As he loses his human form, they lose their human care and regard.

- **The Father's Transformation:** Mr. Samsa, who was an inactive and lazy, suddenly assumes a new, authoritative persona and quickly acts authoritative, disheartening and physically asserting his dominance over Gregor forgetting that he is his own son. His violent act of throwing an apple, which damages permanently and stuck in Gregor's back is the final and fatal injury. By throwing the apple, the father is making a violent move to show that he is the boss of the house again. He is rejecting Gregor and using his power to permanently hurt him, ensuring Gregor can no longer interfere with his authority.

- **Grete's Final Words :** The final blow comes from Grete, the sister who used to care for him. After Gregor is seen by the lodgers, she says, "It has to go." By calling him "it," she stops seeing him as her brother and starts seeing him as a disposable object. She is thinking only about what is useful for the family. To her, Gregor is no longer a human being; he is just a burden that is ruining their chances at a normal, successful life.

IV. CONCLUSION

Gregor's death is the natural end to his journey of losing himself. As he lies in his room suffering, hurt and hungry, nobody cares for him. He doesn't just die because his body fails; he dies because he chooses to. His last thoughts are filled with love for his family. By passing away, he performs one last sacrifice. He removes himself so his family can finally live in peace without the weight of caring for him.

His final thoughts are of his family, which are described as "tender and loving feeling," suggesting a final, subconscious sacrifice. By dying, he full fills his ultimate purpose to remove the burden of his existence so that his family can fully continue their lives peacefully without him.

Kafka's famous story is really about the connection between who we are and how useful we are to others. It shows what happens when a person lets their own identity be swallowed up by the demands of work and family. Gregor's sad ending is a warning that when one completely lose his human sense of self to please others, it can lead to a total breakdown of the mind and body which only leads to suffering.

Gregor's suffering serves as a critique of a society that values individuals only for their utility. Once Gregor is no longer "useful," his humanity is taken back. His psychological suffering ends only when he ceases to exist. His death is not just a physical end, but the final silence of a man who was psychologically eliminated from humanity long before his heart stopped beating."

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