

Gregor and the Unconscious Self of Kafka: A psychoanalytical Reading of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*

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The 'unconscious' of man was absolutely inaccessible until the emergence psychoanalysis theory propounded by Austrian neurologist, Sigmund Freud. In his path breaking books viz *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* Freud has discussed at length the functioning and significant role of the unconscious and the subconscious upon a human being. The concept of 'Id', 'ego' and 'superego' is very crucial in this regard. 'Id' is the very identity of a person that is bestial in nature and savage in its behavior. 'Superego', the superstructure implies the societal rules of society that are made the savage, the beast a human in its literal sense. 'Ego' represents the man, in between the two. The evil desires, bestial nature of the subconscious mind of man is continuously suppressed by the rules and laws of society. But inevitably there will be a 'return of the repressed' either in forms of dreams or in reality or through the form of art. Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* could be perused from this perspective.

Freud is of the opinion that creator's psyche will be reflected in the creation. Celine Surpreant stated:

It (the said theory) emerged from Freud's general idea that creative writings are the product of unconscious process, and it is possible to understand how the mechanisms of the psychical forces operate in them. ... Works of art and literature become substitutes for the creator's pathological ideas or affects, which must be elucidated by means of a specific method. (*Literary Theory*)

In this regard, a literary text, like dream, dramatizes author's inner world, his angst and his repressed desire. Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* is the documentation of the reflection of that inner psychic repression and suppression of the writer's own self. Gregor Samsa and Franz Kafka have become synonymous in this novella. Samsa is nothing but the exterior expression of the interior Kafka.

The Metamorphosis is the story of a salesman, Gregor Samsa who one morning was transferred in to a verminous bug. He was hidden in his room and transformed. The novella begins thus:

One morning, as Gregor Samsa was waking up from anxious dreams, he discovered that he had been changed into a monstrous verminous bug. He lay on

his armour-hard back and saw, as he lifted his head up a little, his brown, arched abdomen divided up into rigid bow-like sections. From this height the blanket, just about ready to slide off completely, could hardly stay in place. His numerous legs, pitifully thin in comparison to the rest of his circumference, flickered helplessly before his eyes. (*The Metamorphosis*)

But, this story is more than just a transformation of a human being into a big insect. Vladimir Nabokov, in this case, referred to anyone who reads the metamorphosis beyond just a fantasy as a good reader. The tale is a projection of his own life, even when Gregor Samsa transferred into a verminous bug. Kafka's stories present symbolically his inner personality so professionally that understanding his stories is possible just when one has a precise view of his life. His guilty conscience, full of feeling of terror, anger and lack of self-confidence, is depicted throughout his works. *The Metamorphosis* is also no exception to this. Gregor Samsa of the present story, in fact, represents Kafka himself. It is also interesting to note that the word Samsa is phonetically the same as the word Kafka. Furthermore, in the word, Kafka the letters 'k' and 'a' are repeated two times and in the word, Samsa the letters 's' and 'a' are repeated in the same way. Perhaps, this is another reason which proved that Gregory Samsa represents Franz Kafka himself. Gregory Samsa, like most of Kafka's antihero, lives in a situation which is called "Kafkaesque", a nightmarish situation which is full of terror, horror and angst. This situation reminds the reader of the condition that Kafka himself experienced in his whole life. *The Metamorphosis* is a symbolic presentation of Gregor's unconscious world. According to Freud, our mind consists of two parts: conscious and unconscious. He demonstrated that our suppressed wills, feelings, horrors, drives, conflicts and even memories are held in unconscious part of our psyche. The first image which takes us to Gregor's unconscious world is the setting of the story. In the inception of the story we have the words 'waking', 'dream' and 'bed', accordingly; it is possible to say that Gregor wakes but by this awaking, in fact, he transfers from the conscious to the unconscious world which is the world of dream. Moreover, in the very opening part of the story, it is mentioned that Gregor's body is cold. This coldness is an attribute of unconscious world for the images of night and darkness, storm, rainy coldness suggest features of unconscious. The next image which appears to us from Gregor's unconscious world is the time of the story. Interestingly, the times which are portrayed in *The Metamorphosis*, throughout most of the story, are mostly night or evening, and if the time is morning, it is frosty and raining. For instance, the story begins in one morning when Gregor understands that he is no longer a human being but a big insect. In the third paragraph, it is mentioned that Gregor's glance then had turned to the window and finding the dreary weather he became sad. Or in another part, the writer depicted that Gregor who gazed at the window found that that was foggy, so that, it seemed to him that it was seven o'clock. This depiction reminds us of the unconscious world. Frosty, dark, cloudy weather are all attributes of the unconscious world of the protagonist and even of the writer himself. The next image by which we take to Gregor's unconscious mind is the moment of his death. At the time of his death, when injured Gregor stands by the window and looks out, it is on 3 o'clock in the morning, at dawn and "he remained in this state of empty and peaceful reflection

until the tower struck 3 o'clock in the morning. From the window he witnessed the beginning of the general dawning outside. Then without willing it, his head sank all the way down, and from his nostrils flowed out weakly out his last breath". This occurrence shows that Gregor Samsa is turning back from the unconscious world in to the conscious one. So, Kafka attempts to portray the unconscious world which is inaccessible to anyone except in the dream. This tragic death of Gregor is, in fact, the death of unconscious and metaphorically the death of his desires by his father. Interpreting *The Metamorphosis* as a day dream, Gregor's transferring into his unconscious world in which all repressed desires and longings are collected. Gregor transferred into a big insect with thin and weak legs. This image of his legs is repeated several times during the story as when the writer depicted Gregor's legs as thin and little in comparison to other parts of his body. On the contrary, it struck him as so unnatural that he had really been able up to this point to move around with these thin little legs. Following Freud's premise in interpretation of dream, it is suggested that all images whose length exceeds their diameter are considered as male or phallic symbols. By this description, Gregor's legs are symbol of phallus. In Freudian psychology, also phallus is the symbol of power. But here, there is the image of weak legs which suggests Gregor's weakness and vulnerability in comparison to his father who has the phallus, the symbol of authority. Kafka's father was tyrannical, his mother, however dominated by her husband, loved her children passionately. The good relationship between Kafka and his mother is looked upon jealously by his powerful father. So, he had always showed his power to him and frightened him with his tyrannical authority. Kafka, in this case, in the letter to his father addressed him and while referring to the differences between them noted that we were too dangerous to each other. I was a child who grew up slowly and you were a man. Then, he begged his father to stop considering him as a malignant for he was succumbed in this struggle. Therefore, Kafka, in comparison to his father, felt weak which results from his father's repression. In this regard, it can be said that Kafka's strained relationship with his father can be seen as the origin of Samsa's story. Kafka wanted a leave from his father's grip. Here Samsa's father rejects him from the very inception of the story. Such rejection continues as Samsa undergoes this metamorphosis and this is symbolized by his father's bombardment with apple after apple. Complaining about this tiresome work, Samsa says:

O God, ... what an exhausting job I've picked on ! Travelling about day in, day out. It's much more irritating work than doing the actual business in the warehouse , and on top of that there's the trouble of constant travelling , of worrying about train connexions , the bed and irregular meals , casual acquaintances that are always new and never become intimate friends. (*The Metamorphosis*)

This languishment is of Kafka's too. As Samsa finds in dreams a means whereby he can escape his horrible real life, Kafka too finds in writing away which enables him to release and escape the pain, fears, sorrows, sufferings and despair he feels inside home where he comes to feel that he is a failure or even zero in front of the tyrannical, authoritarian presence of the 'gross

giant' forceful father who had fought his way up from a miserably impoverished childhood to become a relatively prosperous merchant.

Metaphorically, this big insect is considered to be Gregor's repressed desires which are shown in disguised form. In this sense, Gregor's transferring into an insect and therefore his interring in to an unconscious world is an escape of oppressive tyranny and cruel restraints of the father, superego. As a result, he is guilty in his father's eye and should be punished. So, in the last part of the story, father throws an apple toward him as a punishment which causes his death and symbolically his interring into conscious world. In this context Freud's comment is profoundly important:

Works of art or of literature express the artist's or the writer's most secret mental impulses. What is expressed is a distortion of a repressed impulse, of a thwarted wish, the falsification, the substitution of an unpleasurable impression... (*Literary Theory*)

So, the angst, repression, derision of Samsa is actually Kafka's. *The Metamorphosis* will be seen as Kafka's own autobiography. It is the dramatization of Kafka's inner world, the world of unconscious. Freud defined the unconscious as a world in which our suppressed wills, feelings, horrors, drives and conflicts are held. We find the just picture of that in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*.

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