

## Marxism in “Metamorphosis” by Franz Kafka: A Marxist metaphor

Farjana Yasmin<sup>1</sup>

Lecturer, Department of English  
Times University Bangladesh, Faridpur

Md. Abul Bashar<sup>2</sup>

Senior Lecturer, Department of English  
Meherpur College of Engineering and Technology, Meherpur

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### Abstract

This article will pursue Marxism in relation to the literary works of Franz Kafka’s “Metamorphosis”. Specially, the article will substantiate that while Kafka’s writing may not strictly agglutinate to any specific interpretation of Marxism, his explorations of the human condition bargain an idiosyncratic and insightful lens through which to view the doctrine. Ever since its inception, Marxism has had a discerning outcome on the way people think about and view the world around them. The theory revolves around the idea that society is embodied by the forces of economic and political power. In this article, we explore the ways in which Marxism has subjugated our thinking in “Metamorphosis”. Throughout our research, we have been heavily obsessed by Marx’s concept of historical materialism and his analysis of capitalism and its effects on society. Though we now have a different perspective on how Marxism informs our thinking, we recognize the magnitude of his theory in informing our intellection of the world. Further, the article concludes by hitting of some ways in which Marxism can be resorted to the analysis of “Metamorphosis”.

**Keywords:** *Marxism, class struggle, bourgeoisie, proletariat, Capitalist society, transformation, economic position, production system, social inferiority.*

### Introduction

We are aware that at every stage of history, the interaction of productive forces and productive relations is reflected in the literature of that era. In this view as says Birch (1962),

“a Marxist position grounds social reality in a history, struggles, cantered upon class and systems of production, reflecting at any given moment a dialectical relationship between history and society.”

According to him “In Marxism, this is an underlying structure that determines social reality, and that must be grasped if social reality is to be understood.”

In the view of this reality, with the immergence of capitalism, we notice its influence in the literary arena, the most striking example of which is the literature written in 20<sup>th</sup> century such as “The Metamorphosis” by Franz Kafka, has a place in the terrible paws of the capitalist social system, depicts the miserable life of the central character, Gregor Samsa, representative of the lower working class and expresses a sincere resistance against the upper class or bourgeoisie. In this article, we have experimented that, though the novella “The Metamorphosis” seems comical at first, it carries a deep significance in meaning that the story is a reflection of the mechanical life of the poor working class where they have to spend the day in misery despite toiling all day long. Actually the novella is set in a story of Gregor Samsa, a travelling salesman, who undergoes a life-changing transformation that affects his family, friends and community. We have combed here, Kafka uses traditional elements of the genre, such as a protagonist’s alienation and isolation to explore the core problem of capitalism and his exploration of human condition through the lens of Marxism has had a lasting impact on critical thinking.

Many scholars believe that Franz Kafka’s “Metamorphosis” is a complex examination of Marxism and it's brunt on society. In our research, we asserts the protagonist, Gregor finds himself transformed into an insect after an

unlucky accident. The experience makes him to reevaluate his life and he comes to believe that the austere principles of Marxism could assist to improve the condition of society. However, Gregor's reluctant acceptance of Marx's philosophy underscores the degree to which his faith in the order is tentative at best.

## Literature Review

Marxism occupies a special place in English literature. Not only in "The Metamorphosis" by Franz Kafka, but also we brainchild the ideology of Marxism while researching, in some literary works of 20<sup>th</sup> Century such as Franz Kafka's Eugene O'Neill's "The Hairy Ape", Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party", and Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" with the evidence of the presence of Marxism. The imprint of Marxism is thoroughly augmented in the literature of 20<sup>th</sup> Century that numerous researchers have alluded in their research paper.

The article written by Ria Mistry in the title of 'A Marxist Perspective: "The Doll's House", "The Garden Party", and "A Cup of Tea"' where she has applied the theory of ideology proposed by Karl Marx and Frederick Engel.

Tayyaba Bashir, Shahid Hussain Mir and Arshad Mehmood have uttered the view of economic and social theory influenced by Marxism in their article "Marxism and Literature: Marxist Analysis of 'The Garden Party'."

Mei Sun has written in his article "The Collapse of a Low Man's Great Dream: Reading the Fusion of Traditional Marxism in *Death of a Salesman*" successfully portrayed the conflict in the American consciousness between the desire for material success and the power of stupid sociality.

"Under the Shade of Ideology: A Marxist Study of Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*" Houriyeh Farhoudi, Yaser Zolfaghari have explored in their paper that the play is demonstrated by Marxist Theory in socioeconomic system.

V. I. Lenin in his work "Marxism and Revisionism" has termed the Marxist perspective in the way of its ideology.

## Theoretical Framework of Marxist Theory

There is no authoritative theory of Marxism, as the ideology has undergone significant changes and transformed over the years. However, broadly speaking, Marxism is a political and economic theory that holds that society is divided into two classes: the proletariat, who work for the benefit of the bourgeoisie, and the bourgeoisie, who own the means of production. Marxism seeks to dispel class distinction and ultimately create a classless society in which all people are equal. The theory is based on the idea that human beings are tendentious by economic concerns and that enlightenment thought which holds that humans are rational creatures, can be used to overthrow the ruling class.

Marxism, arose in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, came to the fore in 20<sup>th</sup> century, a social, political and economic theory, the concoction of which is to sort out the distinction between owner and working class. According to the theory, the execution of social reality in the work of ascertaining literary works is mainly possible through the analysis of economic structure. Likewise, Karl Marx has contemplated the living system of any society through economics, which we have rummaged in this article. In our research, we found that the two most familiar terms of Karl Marx's elementary phases of this theory are base structure and super structure. The center of both these is the production system. Base structure is composed of the interrelationships between the factors of production and the people involved in production. And super structure is concentrated in education, culture, literature, philosophy, religion and life style of a society.

In 20<sup>th</sup> century, Marxism was a full-aged movement in the history of human civilization. Mainly German sociologist, Karl Marx is the proponent of this Marxism, who ignites the scientific socialism from a theoretical point of view, and Frederick Engel first coined the term Marxism. Marxism is a socio-economic philosophy based on the holistic thought of Karl Marx and Frederick Engel where differences in the production system are attributed to the causes of inequality among diverse classes of society. And the objective of Marxism is to establish an egalitarian social system by annihilating the social disparity between the upper and lower classes of the society,

between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Although the famous economist Adam Smith and sociologist Herbert Spenser of that time attributed the poverty of working people to their economic inefficiency, in conformity with the theory of Marxism, the radical reason of this economic crisis is class discrimination. The downtrodden working people of the society are deprived of benefits from their owning class promised low wages. In their famous book "The Communist Manifesto" (1964), Karl Marx and Engels have denominated that the main tool for creating class struggle is the balance of the wealth growth of the deprived sections of the society. Karl Marx and Frederick Engel depicted the capitalist social system in the light of Marxist theoretical elements in this way:

1. Capitalist society consists of two classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Bourgeoisie is the owner class, who owns the production system and controls the entire production system. And those who transfigure commodities through labor into economic production are proletarian workers.
2. In order to augment profits, the owner class exerts hideous pressure on the working class to work for low wages. On the contrary, the working class people accepted the exploitation of the owning class in order to escape from the burden of unemployment, resulting in a pronounced form of class discrimination in the society.
3. The bourgeoisie manipulate government, media, social and economic institutions to maintain this class distinction in their own interest. On the other hand, due to the underprivileged proletariat working classes are being vocal for their rights. Thus class conflict arose in the society.

According to Marx and Engels:

The bourgeoisie "has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless and indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom-free trade, in one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation."

Marxism examines the impact of capitalism on labor, productivity and economic development in this troublesome society and argues for communism and worker's revolution.

### Research Methods

A few steps that are followed are deemed to help in analyzing a text applying Marxist Theory. Content analysis method is applied based on selected texts such as, "Metamorphosis", a novella.

Firstly, it suggests approaching the text with a locus on inquiring how the characters' communication differs. Marxist Thought idolizes on relationships between individuals, even those aspects of relationships that can form part of a social Marxist critique.

Secondly, we have submitted the evaluation proposal of vocational role of all characters. Marxist criticism includes an aging on a class system, where the characters' occupations negotiate the most direct reference to their place within its procedure. The Persons' luxury level and how much they do the work is also a considerable dealing phenomenon.

Thirdly, the central theme of the novella is resolved to achieve equality between the working class and the bourgeoisie. This will be done through the establishment of a communist society, in which all people share equally the prosperity and power of the collective.

### The ambit of Marxism in "The Metamorphosis"

"The Metamorphosis" is obsessed on the view of Marxism. One of the major themes is social inferiority for his being unable to work which is demonstrated by Gregor's relationship with his family and specially his manager, a typical member of the bourgeoisie or "the class of modern capitalists, owner of the means of social-production and employers of wage-labor" (Marx and Engels 769) and his social life and the way he lives after the transformation or metamorphosis. The protagonist, Gregor Samsa, a member of "the class of modern wage-

laborers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labor-power in order to live” (Marx and Engels), is a travelling salesman who devotes his life to his family and work for nothing in return. As he says:

“Day in, day out-on the road...I’ve got the torture of traveling, worrying about changing trains, eating miserable food at all hours.....” (Kafka 4).

At the outset of this novella, the protagonist, Gregor appears as a young energetic man who is the sole employed member of his family. Though he wanted to quit his work many times, he did not do because every time he said to himself:

“If I didn’t hold back for my parents’ sake, I would have quit long ago” (Kafka 4).

Though Gregor is conflicted, fed up with his nomadic life, reluctantly he had to give in the life of a travelling salesman considering his family’s financial condition.

A little further into the story we meet Gregor’s manager, a member of the bourgeoisie, whom Kafka introduces as so inhumane and inconsiderate that he doesn’t even think it necessary to give him a name. And his behavior was so unrestrained that he pretended to be superior to the workers because of his high economic attainment. He humiliated the workers and to discourage them even if Gregor was a little late in arriving at the office, he did not hesitate to come home and scold him.

The main hub of this novella is Gregor’s transformation. One morning suddenly he discovers himself changed into a monstrous vermin in his bed. The change causes a lot of changes in his internal and external world. Although such a transformation of man is practically impossible, a laboring man may be incapable of working in any way. In fact, in the story the class struggle was described by focusing on Gregor’s inability to act without focusing on how he was transformed. In a capitalist society, the proletariat have value as long as they can give their labor, but lose their social status if they are unable to work. Not only they are neglected socially, but they are also deprived of family economic aspects, and slowly their own lives also abandon them.

After Gregor’s transformation, his office manager was the first to scorn him and run away in fear. The manager leaves his house as fast as he can upon seeing Gregor’s transformation. This means that since Gregor no longer has the ability to work, he has no value and no longer needed in their office.

When Gregor is unable to support his family financially after the transformation, his family’s true nature is revealed. The family, in where he was an integral part of when he was working for their expenditure, now he is their burden. Even his father, for whom he used to work day and night to repay his father’s debt, now attacks him with a stick whenever he gets a chance. The boy who was the hope and aspiration of the family, the pacemaker of progress and prosperity, in his sudden transformation, is now regarded as a filthy insect. Marx and Engels state that:

“The Bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation into a mere money relation” (771).

Basically the story is trapped in a strange word cycle called life and war in the brutality of capitalist society. Gregor longed for release, yes release from the daily grind of making a living, but eventually he was released into the embrace of a life of captivity, turned into an insect. Capitalist cruelty, manager’s scorn, the risk of losing job, he escaped by turning into an insect that deprived him of social and family status.

Eventually his mother and only sister, who had kept him being responsible for some days after the transformation, perhaps hoping for his return, at one point became desperate and began to plan to drive him out of the house, a ruthlessness that killed Gregor’s will to live. As Grete say to her father:

“It has to go”, referring to Gregor .....“realized long ago that it isn’t possible for human beings to live with such a creature, and he would have gone away of his own free will” (52).

The then capitalist society of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is moving towards a civilization where the society is far away, the family evaluates the individual by his economic position. If you are unable to work, if you are unable to earn money, your family, your father, your mother, your sister all become cruel. In this society, people are considered by money, influence and prestige where relationships, responsibility and love are not given priority. This system of capitalist society slowly pushes Grigor to death. This society just sits by, throwing the person in the dustbin if he is unable to work.

### **Marxist Perspective in “Metamorphosis”**

Marxism, the philosophical and socio-political theory that underlines Karl Marx’s critique of capitalism, has been the belly button of much deliberation from philosophical and critical theorists over the years. This paper will explore the way that Franz Kafka’s novella “Metamorphosis” delineates Marxism, both in its philosophical and its social aspects.

“Metamorphosis” is about a Gregor Samsa, who wakes up one morning to find that he has become a giant insect. This change in his physical form is paralleled by a change in his mental state, as he gradually realizes that he is no longer the autonomous individual he once was. In this novella, Kafka challenges the traditional conceptions of the material world and the individual’s relationship to it.

Actually, “Metamorphosis” is a novella that critiques capitalism. The idea of the working class struggling against the capitalists is a staple of Marxism and is apparent in this novella. Kafka portrays the working class in a negative light, condemning them for their laziness and their lack of identity. He shows that their lives are a complete mess, filled with nothing but work and struggles. This aspect of the novella is very much in line with Marx’s ideas, as he believed that the working class was the most oppressed class in society. Kafka also touches on the issue of identity. The protagonist, Gregor Samsa is suddenly thrust into a new identity and does not know how to deal with his new status. This is a common theme in Marxism, as the working class is often depicted as having little identity or sense of self. They are told that their role is to serve the capitalists and they are deprived of any sense of self-worth. In “Metamorphosis”, Kafka shows that this is not a permanent condition and that the working class can eventually rise up and overthrow the capitalists.

### **Conclusion**

All humans are ultimately shaped by their surrounding social environment and that the individual is actually powerless to change his or her own destiny. Enslaved in the light of Marxist theory, we find that “The Metamorphosis” novella undoubtedly represents the Marxism. The novella is more effective in arguing for the three elements that we find in Marx’s and Engel’s theory analysis. According to the first element, capitalist society is divided into two categories; bourgeoisie proletariat. As we mentioned earlier, in the discussed novella we see two classes, where the manager represents the bourgeois class and on the other hand Gregor himself is the helpless worker of the proletariat. In the second element, just as the bourgeoisie exert excessive pressure on the workers to increase their production, the manager constantly exerts high pressure on workers like Gregor to ready their production through the threat of losing their job, which is consistent with the violent repression of exploitation by the elite owning class. On the contrary, helpless Gregor accepts the unbearable lifestyle of living day after day on minimum wage to avoid the grief of losing his job, because he is the only breadwinner in his family. He is working as a travelling salesman despite many hardships, insults and bullying. In the third element, we find that the bourgeoisie, like managers, control all the juncture of society by their own economic position. But Gregor’s sudden transformation is like a silent protest of working people like Gregor against the monopoly of this bourgeois class.

Finally, we can agree on this argument that Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis” is one of the most influential novellas in 20<sup>th</sup> century literature that flames out Marxism in metaphorical realism. The story is a powerful indictment of the power of the social environment to control and manipulate human being, and of the limitations of human ability to change our destiny. It is not only the story of a traveling salesman, but the story is a reflection of the real life of every working man, who sells his labor to the upper class bourgeoisie to put a smile on the faces of the family by sacrificing their happiness, comfort, convenience and desire. And the bourgeois class acquires social status by increasing production in return for their labor at minimum wages and creating an economic position.

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