

METAMORPHOSING REALITIES: A BAUDRILLARDIAN AND DERRIDEAN RECKON OF *THE METAMORPHOSIS* BY KAFKA

Muhammad Nadeem

M. Phil. Scholar, English Literature, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan

kishwarnadeemchauhan@gmail.com

Humaira Afzal

M. Phil. Scholar, English Literature, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan

humikhan4427@gmail.com

Asad Rasheed

M. Phil. Scholar, English Literature, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan

asadr7504@gmail.com

Abstract

*This paper analyses the fluid identity, emotionless, and materialistic nature of characters in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* through the lens of Baudrillard's hyperreality and simulation and Derrida's metaphysics of Presence and absence. The research aims to analyse the effects of a consumerist society, the fluid and material nature of characters. The research is qualitative, and the tool of research is content analysis. The objectives of the research are to find out the fluid and emotionless behaviour of Gregor's family towards him and the influence of materialistic society on characters. Derrida's concept of Metaphysics of Presence and Absence and Baudrillard's theory of Hyperreality and Simulation provides a valuable framework to analyse the effects of modernist society, the fluid and feelingless behaviour of Gregor's family towards him. When Gregor is no longer able to earn money, his family changes attitude toward him. All the characters run after money, and emotions fade or become unclear in a commodity-based world.*

Keywords: Metaphysics, Hyperreality, Baudrillard, Derrida, emotionless, fluid, Gregor, family

Introduction

This paper has analysed the fluid identity, emotionless, and material nature of modern humans in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* through the lens of Derrida's Metaphysics of Absence and Presence and Baudrillard's Hyperreality and Simulation. Jean Baudrillard and Jacques Derrida are two acknowledged French philosophers, and both are associated with Postmodernism. Baudrillard was primarily concerned with cultural studies, and his most significant contribution is his concept of hyperreality, simulacra, and simulation. He claims that the world is transformed from real to hyperreal; according to him, the postmodern world is based on commodities. He argues that the primitive world was based on gift exchange and reciprocity, where people exchange things as gifts, and in return, people gift more than they were gifted, which is reciprocity, and commodity exchange, where humans exchange things in return for money.

Baudrillard further adds that commodity and gift exchange is absent in the postmodern world; here, only the exchange of signs or symbolic exchange exists. He terms this the Code, and according to the law of value, we codify reality. The world is only based on goods and commodities; there are no emotions and feelings left in this postmodern world.

Jacques Derrida introduced the concept of metaphysics of Presence and Absence, which he defines as meaning that is not fixed but fluid. The Postmodern world is a world of consumerism. Relationships between individuals are based on material things. To prove love and affection,

individuals must depend on money. There is no place for feelings and emotions in this postmodern world. Individuals' characters are not fixed; they change from time to time. As Derrida claims, meaning is not fixed like these fluid characters of the individual.

In the novella *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka, the main character, Gregor Samsa, is the victim of this consumerist world. He has to prove his love and belonging to his family through some financial support. He suddenly gets transformed into a beetle, and the attitude of the family changes toward him after his Metamorphosis. Franz Kafka was born on July 3, 1883, and he was a German-language writer. His works mainly explore the theme of alienation and anxieties suffered by the modern-day man. This modern world has become progressive in the scientific field, and there are many devices for people's information and entertainment. However, due to these relationships, humans are affected. The modern man became feelingless and separated from society. The views of Baudrillard and Derrida provide a valuable lens to scrutinize the effects of postmodern consumerist society on people's lives.

Literature Review

The significant shift in the nature of humans in this age of science and inventions is causing humans a loss in their values and identity. This shift has been of keen interest to novelists and researchers, and significant academic efforts have been allocated to investigate this phenomenon. The works of Kafka provide fertile grounds to study the difficulties faced by humans in this postmodern world as *The Metamorphosis* of Kafka is explored through different frameworks and perspectives as Kohzadi et al. (2012) examined *The Metamorphosis* from philosophical and psychological perspectives. They stated that Gregor Samsa's physical change makes him guilty because it is not in his control. This guilt, they claim, is the main psychological aspect. They further assert that this physical change is also a sign of alienation; due to this metamorphosis, he was separated from his family and society. Gregor's inner self, emotions, feelings, and desires are suppressed. They also maintained that according to Kafka's philosophy, the only solution to this tragedy faced by Gregor is death.

Barfi et al. (2013) also examined Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* through the lens of Freudian theories of psychology. They maintain that Kafka represented Gregor's inner side and his unconsciousness in the story. He has many desires for love, and a lot of conflicts arise in his mind. They further argue that there is an illness in every man that can only be cured by death. Rhodes and Westhood (2014) scrutinise the relationship between ethics and reciprocity in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. They argue that there is no ethic in the story, but the only ethic that can be found in the story is the ethic of Gregor. He transforms into a bug but never stops his love and care for his family. But his family has no love for him. In every religion, there are some ethics. Kafka represents his religious ethics because he belongs to Judaism.

Khairunnisa (2015) discusses the Jewish image in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, word structure, use of metaphoric symbols, and allusion demonstrate Jewish values. Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* shows the helplessness of humans in front of divine law. Gregor became helpless in front of divine law and ended his journey with unjustified death. Ali et al. (2016) explain the theme of class struggle in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* they assert that conflict can be seen between the upper class and lower class. Gregor, the main character of the story, represents the lower class and is suppressed by the upper class. Salesmen are never considered equal to other humans in a capitalist society, and they are considered 'Harem women'. This class conflict can create shame in the lower class. They start to believe that they deserve all this because they are poor. Sharin and

Sutandio (2017) explore Sartre's concept of shame and alienation in *The Metamorphosis*, highlighting that when a person observes and sees through the eyes of others, then shame and alienation may occur. In the novella, Samsa is seen through the eyes of his family and Sartre to believe that he deserves to live alone. This shame and alienation caused his death.

Dagamsseh and Rawasdeh (2018) explore Grotesque and physical degeneration in *The Metamorphosis*. They highlight that Gregor's physical change is both horrifying and funny; for his family, it's horrifying, but for women who clean the house, it has become comical. Because of his ugly looks, his family wants him to die, and they lament the situation. They further explain that Grotesque is a structure used by Kafka to show the degeneration of modern man. In this situation, individuals want death rather than life. His physical change also causes his alienation. According to Alkhafaji (2020), industrialisation and the socioeconomic system are tragic causes of Samsa's alienation. He examines the separation of individuals from society and financial and economic results effects on Gregor Samsa's life.

Atikah et al. (2021) analyse the psychological condition of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* main character, Gregor, from the perspective of Freud's psychoanalysis theory of Id, ego, and superego. Samsa's id and ego appear when he is turned into a beetle, and his emotions and feelings are repressed. His superego appears when he obeys his parents, parents have a great role in developing the personality of their children. Joshi (2021) studies Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* via a gender lens; he asserts that Kafka builds gender structure through parents; to destroy this structure, he uses their kids. He builds the masculine identity through the image of the father and deviates this identity through the image of the son. He maintains that gender transformation in all the main characters can be seen throughout the text.

Wardani, et al. (2022) studied alienation in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and explained three mechanisms. They describe that an individual uses three mechanisms to escape society: destructiveness, authoritarianism, and conformity. According to them, individuals use these three mechanisms to overcome the fear of loneliness and powerlessness. Gregor Samsa uses this mechanism to escape from reality and society. There is something magical in this story, like Gregor's transformation into an insect and his feelings and desires. *The Metamorphosis* is also examined through the perspective of magical realism. Shahid et al. (2022) examine Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* from the perspective of magical realism. They describe Gregor's transformation to Vermin as magical realism. In reality, it is not possible for a human to transform into an insect.

Research Statement

The problem of research is to examine the effects of a consumerist society on humans. Humans are emotionless and fluid, and their nature changes with the economic status of the individuals in capitalist societies.

Objectives of Research

- To find out the emotionless and materialistic attitude of Gregor's family toward him.
- To identify the fluid nature of Gregor's family in the text.
- To find out the effects of Hyperreal elements in society through the novella.

Questions of Research

- How do Samsa's family members change their attitude toward him after his Metamorphosis and depict the fluidity of identity?
- In what ways modern society is after the material benefits through *The Metamorphosis*?

- How is this postmodern world transformed from reality to hyperreality, and how does it affect the lives of characters?

Significance of Research

This study will contribute to the knowledge of students of English literature, particularly in the field of postmodern metamorphoses. Research will help better understand the changing nature of humans and how relations are commodity-based, ultimately strengthening literary scholarship.

Delimitation

This study is limited to just one novella, *The Metamorphosis*, and its theoretical ideas of metaphysics of absence and presence, as formulated by Derrida and Baudrillard's simulation and hyperreality.

Analysis and Discussion

The Metamorphosis is divided into three chapters and an Epilogue. The story opens in the morning when protagonist Gregor Samsa awakes from a bad and troubling dream. He discovers that he has transformed into a bug. He thinks that it is just a dream and tries to sleep back. This transformation of Gregor causes many problems for him, and Kafka sets Samsa as a window through which to look into the postmodern world. Gregor Samsa starts to contemplate the damage to his job because, if he does not go to his job, he will be fired by his boss. Samsa works as a salesman. He has no peace in his life, and he has no time for himself to eat and sleep. Samsa was stable and could provide what his family needed, and that earned him acceptance and respect in the family. Samsa is a man of the postmodern world, and this world is the world of commodity and consumerism. In this world, machines and robots live, but not humans. "I have to cope with the problems of travelling, the worries about train connections, irregular bad food, temporary and constantly changing human relationships which never come from the heart. To hell with it all!" (Kafka, 1915, p. 3). As a salesman, Samsa has to work a lot as he says, "O God, what a demanding job I've chosen! Day in, day out, on the road" (p. 3). These lines show that modern man works like a robot, like Samsa, who is working hard to earn bread and butter for his family.

After his metamorphosis, he tries to sleep but in vain. He looks at the alarm clock and is worried because it's already 6:30 AM, and his train has left at 5 AM. As he says, "Right now I have to get up. My train leaves at five o'clock" (p. 4). He thinks how his boss will react if he does not attend the office today. He is also worried about his family and how he will take care of them and his sister. As of now, he is unable to reach his workplace. This indicates the machinic mind of modern man. In this hyperreal world, people are deliberately running after matter. For them, their job and business are more prioritised over their health and feelings.

When he is thinking of all this, suddenly, someone knocks at the door. His mother is at the door, and she says, "It's quarter to seven. Don't you want to be on your way?" (p. 5). He hardly answers with a changed voice, saying, "I'm coming outside." In fact, he cannot come out. Meanwhile, his father comes to the door and says with a harsh voice, "Gregor, Gregor, what is going on?" (p. 5).

All of them are not here because they are worried for Gregor but because they are worried that if Gregor doesn't go to work, they will not be able to get money. They are here for their financial worries, not for their son's worries. This indicates the material and emotionless nature of

the postmodern people. His boss, for whom he has been a loyal and punctual worker, is also the same as his parents. He does not care for his workers; Gregor has never taken a day off in the last five years; whatever the case, he is bound to be at work, either because he is ill or has any other difficulty that hurdles him to reach work. For him, his workers are not humans who have feelings and emotions and do feel tired, but for him, they are like robots who can work for several hours without a break.

His boss has sent his office manager to investigate why Gregor has yet to reach the office today. His boss does this not because he is concerned about Gregor but because he is just thinking about his business and his profit. Again, the materialistic nature of postmodern man appears here. When the manager reaches his home, he does not listen to what Gregor's family says, but rather, he says that he wants to meet Gregor. As his father says, "Mr. Manager has come and he wants to speak to you personally" (p. 8). This demonstrates the suspicious behaviour of the man, that they do not trust Gregor's family and urge Gregor to come out. Gregor's mother insists that he is not feeling well today, he is ill. The officer says that he must face difficulties if he does not comes out because "we are commerce people, we have to overcome illness for business purposes" (p. 9). These lines capture the picture of the postmodern man and his feelingless nature; they are just thinking about their business and money, not about the pain Gregor is going through.

This incident also shows the fluidity of human nature; their behaviour changes in different situations. When Gregor was working for them and earning profit for them, they treated him in a good manner, but their behaviour changed, and they behaved awkwardly when one day he was unable to work for them. When Gregor does not answer them and does not come out, then, the manager threatens him, "Why you are making serious troubles for your family" (p. 9). They assume that Gregor is making them fool and has no medical issues. How can someone be so feelingless that he is threatening a person who is already in huge pain? So, we can say that man living in a hyperreal world exchanging his feelings for money and goods. He is swapping his peace with a few pennies.

The use of language also shifts from caring to harsh as the change happens. Before the discovery of metamorphosis, people around Gregor were polite as the manager speaks "Good morning, Mr. Samsa." But as the scene shifts and Gregor does not open the door, the voices are raised: "Mr. Samsa, the manager was now shouting, his voice raised" (p. 9).

After all, Gregor somehow opens the door and comes out; while he comes out of the door, his mother faints and his father cries with anger. The manager moves backwards and leaves the house immediately as he is frightened. As soon as they see the transformed Gregor, they change their attitude all of a sudden. So, here once more Kafka depicts the fluid and feelingless nature of postmodern man. Instead of moving forward to Gregor and looking into the situation, they move back. The struggle that Samsa had to open the door can be metaphorically seen as a move to cope with society.

Things change with this reveal of metamorphosis, as in this line: "Then his father gave him a strong liberating push from behind" (p. 17). His father's inhuman treatment toward his son shows the fluid identity of human beings. When his father learns that his son will not be able to earn commodities for them, he pushes him with his foot. This also demonstrates the emotionless nature and materialistic behaviour; in the postmodern world, the father is causing pain to his son rather than reducing the pain and suffering.

After being alone in the room, Gregor wakes up from a deep sleep. He finds his favourite dish and milk in his room, but he feels that he no longer likes this dish. As time passes, Gregor is alienated from his family, and he is quarantined in his room. His family parted ways: they did not discuss anything with him, and they did not even talk to him because they believed that he was not able to listen to them because he was a bug and could not understand human language. His family now starts to stand on their own feet, and everyone finds a job to earn bread and butter. The postmodern world is fuelled with materialistic benefits, as the family of Gregor is running for money. When Gregor used to earn money for his family, they do not show any affection toward him rather, "They took the money with thanks, and he happily surrendered it, but the special warmth was no longer present." (p. 23) So, for them, money is the only thing they care about, and what their son feels is no longer meaningful, and they never bother to ask. This hyperreal society causes alienation among the affected people.

Gregor's parents stopped visiting him, and all the furniture in his room was taken away; everything there changed, and his room was not cleaned for days. No one in the family is taking care of him, and each is running to earn money. This shows the fluid nature of humans; before metamorphosis, they all used to sit together and chat about different things, but now they do not talk to each other; each has become silent and alienated. Gregor is alienated from his family, which leads him to sadness; he stops eating because his family is consistently ignoring him. He is useless to them as he is not generating any money.

On one occasion, his father throws "apple after apple, on Gregor and one apple drove into Gregor's back hard" (p. 33), and his family now turned as an enemy for him, which shows them as emotionless beings. We notice the caring nature of Gregor's sister at the start, but now, "she had grown tired of caring for Gregor" (p. 37). This portrays the fluid nature of his sister, who is transformed into a new person. With metamorphosis of Gregor into a beetle, his family is also changing with him; now Gregor has become a burden for them, as his sister says, "I will not utter my brother's name in front of this monster" she further adds, "We must try to get rid of it" (p. 43). This shows how fluid the nature of human is; their nature is changed, and the reason is that money or commodities are everything they want. They show a materialist attitude, as many of the postmodern characters show. With this painful behaviour, Gregor seems unfit to adjust to this atmosphere, and he ends his life himself. This clearly indicates that commodity takes over emotions and life. Human nature is never really fixed; it changes from time to time, from situation to situation.

This hyperreal, commodity-based world causes loneliness and alienates people, and this alienated life ultimately leads to the end of life. In the contemporary world, we see humans running after money and commodities and ignoring feelings, emotions, family, and relations.

Conclusion

The study analysed the effects of a consumerist society on Gregor and his family. It also examined the emotionless and fluid nature of Gregor's family and their feelingless behaviour towards Gregor. Derrida's concept of Metaphysics of Presence and Absence provided a crucial lens to analyse the fluid nature of Gregor's family. When Gregor transforms into a bug and is unable to earn money, his parents change their behaviour towards him. First, they behave well, but they realise that he is useless and a burden to them, so they want to get rid of him. Baudrillard's

theory of hyperreality and simulation also provided a significant lens through which to analyse the effects of consumerist society on the characters. Gregor and his parents work like robots in the consumerist society. Gregor's family does not pity Gregor. They become emotionless and run after money only. For them, money is more important than relationships, family and their metamorphosed son.

References

- Ali, S. S., Ullah, A., Khalid, S., & Faruk, A. (2016). THEME OF CLASS STRUGGLE IN FRANZ KAFKA'S NOVELLA, *THE METAMORPHOSIS*. *AL-Qalam*, 21(2), 30-42.
- Alkhafaji, W. M. (2020). A STUDY OF ALIENATION IN KAFKA'S *THE METAMORPHOSIS* AS A MORAL GUIDE FOR THE NEW ENERATION. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 17(6), 16027-16036.
- Atikah, N. (2021). A PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN CHARACTER IN FRANZ KAFKA'S *METAMORPHOSIS*. *MEDIOVA: Journal of Islamic Media Studies*, 1(2), 150-166, <https://doi.org/10.32923/medio.v1i2.1914>.
- Barfi, Z., Azizmohammadi, F., & Kohzadi, H. (2013). A study of Kafka's *the metamorphosis* in the light of Freudian psychological theory. *Research Journal of Recent Sciences*, 2(10), 107-109.
- Dagamseh, A. M., & Rawashdeh, F. (2018). The Grotesque and Physical Degeneration in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 10(3), 169-178, <https://dx.doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v10n3.14>.
- Joshi, S. (2021). A Gender Study of Franz Kafka and His Work *The Metamorphosis*. *Contemporary Literary Review India*, 8(2), 57-90.
- Khairunnisa, A. F. (2018). Malformation and Isolation: Critique to Jewish Orthodoxy Found in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. *Lexicon*, 4(1), 69-80, <https://doi.org/10.22146/lexicon.v4i1.42137>.
- Kohzadi, H., Azizmohammadi, F., & Nouri, M. (2012). A study of Franz Kafka's *the metamorphosis*. *Journal of Basic and Applied Scientific Research*, 2(2), 1600-1607.
- Minar, K. S., & Sutandio, A. (2017). Shame and alienation in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. *Poetika: Jurnal Ilmu Sastra*, 5(2), 123-133, <http://dx.doi.org/10.22146/poetika.27100>.
- Rhodes, C., & Westwood, R. (2016). The limits of generosity: Lessons on ethics, economy, and reciprocity in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 133, 235-248.
- Shahid, M. A., Mahmood, A., & Maryam, H. S. (2022). Review of the Transformed Characters in the *Metamorphosis* by Kafka, *Theoretical studies in Literature and Art*, 42(8).
- Wardani, D. P., Pratiwi, D. A., Basuki, I., Cahyawati, E., & Murti, G. H. (2022). Effect of Alienation in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. *Sch Int J Linguist Lit*, 5(11), 387-394, 10.36348/sijll.2022.v05i11.003.