

Gregor as Symbol of the Jewish Race in Franz Kafka's Metamorphosis

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For thousands of years, the Jewish People have endured negative stereotypes such as the "insects of humanity." As Sander Gilman pointed out, the Nazi Party labeled Jews as "insects like lice and cockroaches, that generate general disgust among all humanity" (Gilman 80).¹ These derogative stereotypes, although championed by the Nazis, have their origins many centuries earlier and have appeared throughout Western culture for thousands of years. This fierce anti-Semitism specifically surfaced in Europe's large cities in the early twentieth century, partially in conjunction with the growing tide of nationalism, patriotism, and xenophobia that sparked the First World War in 1914. Today, one often learns the history of this critical, pre-WWI era from the perspective of Europe's anti-Semitic population, while the opposite perspective—that of the Jews in early twentieth-century European society—is largely ignored. Questions like: "How did the Jews view and respond to their mistreatment?" and "How were the Jews affected mentally and psychologically by the prejudices against them?" remain largely unanswered. Insight into these perplexing social questions, while not found in most history books, may be

discovered in a complex and highly symbolic story of this era: "The [Metamorphosis](#)" by Franz [Kafka](#). Through the use of an extended metaphor, "The Metamorphosis" provides both a basic summary of the common views held against Jews and offers an insight as to what may be the ultimate result of Europe's anti-Semitism. This work serves as a social commentary and criticism of early twentieth-century Europe. It fulfills two main functions: first, it provides an outline of the s...

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...be destroyed so easily, why cannot another?" and "Who, when, and where will be the next victim?" Thus, by establishing Gregor Samsa as a symbol of the Jewish [Race](#), Kafka uses "The Metamorphosis" as a social critique of the treatment of the Jews in early twentieth-century Europe and raises timeless, complex, and haunting questions about the horrible atrocities of which the human race is capable.

Works Cited

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3. Ritchie Robertson, *Kafka: Judaism, Politics, and Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).
4. Stanley Corngold, *Franz Kafka: The Necessity of Form* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988).

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