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blankness of space emphasized by modern critics and philosophers such as Foucault, Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche feeds the modern man's negative attitudes about the surrounding world and deepens his separateness (Quinones, 142). Certainly, Gregor is not an exception.

The act of emptying the room is immediately followed by the dissolution of space. After the appearance of the three lodgers (who are allowed to rent part of the house so that the Samsas could meet the increasing expenses of their lives) the setting becomes more crowded and space shrinks more and more. As a result, everything which is not wanted for the time being would immediately find its way to Gregor's room. "Any kind of useless junk, the ash bucket and rubbish bin from the kitchen" are all flung by the charwoman into Gregor's room (114). Gregor is now caged and can hardly move; he starts to feel that his neck is "growing stiff" and pains are felt all over his body (12). Gregor's body becomes weaker and thinner. His physical deterioration, which has been emphasized earlier in my discussion, corresponds to the narrowness of his room. Thus, a third reading of the title is possible. The story has a third dimension; it introduces another form of transformation that is of the surrounding space. Gregor moves or is being swept away from his overcrowded room to a larger space, the outside world, but as a thin fragile corpse.

According to Iser, this dynamic process of reading makes the construction of meaning open and provisional only at the outset. As we try to establish relations between different aspects of the story (Gregor, the Family, his room) we fill in many blanks and gradually the meaning becomes less open and more definite (Seldon, 124). To achieve this, we need to marry all the previous signifieds which will help us to associate the text with a possible conclusion about human nature, introduced mainly by the character of Gregor. "The Transformation" is about the plight of modern man who has lost his freedom for the sake of materialism, who has lost the gift of communication with the family which is no more a surrogate religion or the emotional center or the shrine of values and attachment. It is about the degeneration of humanity, family relationships and more serious, the degeneration of Man's world. Viewing the text in relation to reality is Iser's way of reconciling modern criticism with more traditional approaches.

this sense, we need to rebuild our provisional interpretation of the title of the story. "The Transformation" is not merely about the repulsive changes to which Gregor has been reduced. It is about the transformation of a whole family. Consequently, the story introduces two kinds of transformation: literal and figurative. On the figurative level, we witness a drastic change in the family's sense of responsibility as they advance from parasitic creatures to independent individuals. On the literal level, it is Gregor's physical transformation or even his degeneration from an individual to a meager insect.

Nonetheless, our construction of meaning is always dynamic. We can hardly reach a final signified without exploring all the aspects of the story and filling in all the available gaps which delay the process of forming the "gestalt" or vision of the whole. The initial interpretation of the title as referring to Gregor's metamorphosis is modified the moment we study closely the family's change and view it as another form of transformation. Yet, we cannot ignore a third aspect of the story which necessitates a second reassessment of the signifieds suggested by the title. The story highlights Gregor's spatial environment, which is mainly restricted to his room. Gregor's room witnesses a similar transformation throughout the story; hence, another form of figurative transformation is suggested here.

The first section of the story portrays Gregor's crowded room along with his physical inflation. The room includes all his dearest possessions: the wardrobe, the writing desk at which he had always done his homework as a student at the commercial academy and as a grammar-school boy, his bed, and his favorite picture of a lady, "all swatched in furs" (105). In the second part of the story, we read about Grete's decision to remove the pieces of furniture in order to provide Gregor with the "maximum crawling space" (102). The evacuation of the room is a symbol of Gregor's freedom from the definition of «human» he has grown up with.

Did he really want this warm room of his, so comfortably fitted with old faith furniture, to be transformed into a care, in which, no doubt, he would be free to crawl about unimpeded in all directions, but only at the price of rapidly and completely forgetting his human past at the same time. (103)

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the room would transform it into an empty hostile "cave." The "ordinary human room" is no more human than Gregor himself (76). Gregor fears losing the last signs of human identity, his dearest possessions. More important is the dread which results from the dissolution of the solid world around him. This fear of emptiness and absolute

bones from last night's supper," «uneatable» cheese and "a slice of dry bread" (94). Actually, Grete's developing intolerable frustration, unbearable disgust with Gregor's new form is highly emphasized in the second section of the story. The moment she gets into his room, she rushes straight to the window and tears it open with "impatient fingers» almost as if she is suffocating (100). She finds it almost impossible to stay in a room occupied by Gregor with the window closed. The father, likewise, will not allow the vermin to rejoin the group. As Gregor tries to reconcile himself with the family by leaving his room to the living room, his father faces him with a bombard of apples and mortally wounds him. Finally, as Gregor becomes absolutely fragile that he can hardly move, the family agrees, although with some hesitation on the mother's part, that Gregor is outside the human circle. The rejection of Gregor the insect is declared by Grete: "I refuse to utter my brother's name in the presence of this monster, and so all I say is: we must try and get rid of it» (119). The family regains peace only after the «creature is dead» (122).

The reader now must question the relation between Gregor's continuous physical deterioration and the family's constant disgust and final rejection of him. Can the family's attitude merely be seen as a reaction to Gregor's ugly sight? An insightful reader can see the significance of the earlier series of events which develop mutually. Kafka's story is not simply about the transformation of Gregor Samsa but the transformation of the whole family, mainly the father and the daughter. Realizing that his son's metamorphosis is a fact that cannot be avoided, the father reassumes his role as the family provider and bread winner. In addition, Grete is now exposed to the outside world. She finds herself a job and declares her financial independence. Besides, Grete's attractive transformation into a woman is highly stressed.

While they were thus conversing, it struck the two Samsa parents almost at the same moment, they observed their daughters increasing liveliness, that despite all the labors which had turned her cheeks pale she had recently blossomed into a pretty and shapely girl. Growing quieter now and coming almost unconsciously to agreement by an exchange of glances, they reflected that the time was also ripe to find her a good husband (126).

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the "new dreams" of the family shall come true through their daughter and only at the expense of Gregor's life. While the daughter is the first to rise on her feet, Gregor is the first to fall down and collapse.

Looking at the family's reaction towards Gregor's metamorphosis as another form of transformation is one way of analyzing the characters and their situation. In

appearance would terrify them so that if they take "fright, then Gregor would have no further responsibility and could rest in peace" (85). Thus, Gregor's sense of responsibility is a serious yoke; it is a figurative form of imprisonment which anticipates the hero's calamity. However, these feelings of a killing burden are expressed in an active manner through the action of closing the door. While critics, Leonard Moss (1990) is one example, show how the constant allusion to doors in «The Transformation» concretizes the progression of the family's attitude towards Gregor from tolerance to disgust and denial (37-42), I see the door image in different terms. It is through the door that the figurative form of confinement becomes literal. The major two incidents of locking the door of his room reflect Gregor's wish to escape the family's dependence on his work to maintain the house, to hold and displace an aged father from that obligation.

In the first section, Gregor insists on locking himself in his room. He has "no intention of opening up, and congratulated himself instead on the prudent habit he had acquired as a commercial traveler of locking all his doors at night, even when at home" (79). Although Gregor's longing for human companionship makes him unlock the door in the second part of the story, he prefers to shut himself off once again. Knowing about his father's not losing all his money in his latest bankruptcy and that he has kept back few coins which Gregor has brought him, relieves and almost releases the latter. The family's present financial situation is the "first encouraging thing" that Gregor learns about since his transformation (79). Released of his heavy burden, Gregor secures the «complicated lock» (97).

It is amazing how the ugliness of Gregor's transformation is seen through the development of the family's feelings towards him. In part one, while Gregor is transformed into a huge insect, we sense the mother's sympathy for her son's plight through her "gentle voice" (78), expressing concern for her son and through Grete's (the sister's) «soft, plaintive voice» (79), inquiring about his health. On the contrary, the father's rigid and exploiting nature is reflected early in this section through the violent knocking at the door of Gregor's bedroom with his strong fist.

The mother and the sister's pitiful and compassionate emotions gradually become less until they disappear while Gregor becomes weaker and weaker at the same time. Although anxious to see the door to her son's room open early in the story, Gregor's mother insists later that it must remain closed most of the time. "His mother, pointing towards his room said: 'Shut that door now Grete,' and he was left again in darkness» (111). Similarly, Grete's previous concern about Gregor's food no more exists. Instead of fresh meals, she now provides Gregor with "half- decayed vegetables,

Gregor's shock is sensed in his question "what has happened to me?" (67). He rejects his new hideous shape by trying to move his body in order to leave his bed. This is immediately followed by an account of the way he feels about his profession:

O God, he thought, what an exhausting Job I've chosen! On the move day in, day out. The business worries are far worse than they are on the actual premises at home, and on top of that I'm saddled with the strain of all this traveling, the anxiety about train connections, the bad and irregular meals, the constant stream of changing faces with no chance of any warmer, lasting companionship. The devil take it all. (77)

Gregor's feelings about his profession are very significant. He is a cog in the capitalistic machine; he is so much indulged in a material world of buying and selling in an attempt to pay his father's debt and save the family's status. "If I didn't have to hold back for the sake of my parents" Gregor says, "I'd have handed in my notice long since, I'd have marched in and given the chief a piece of my mind. I'd have made him fall off his desk!" (77). Gregor is entrapped in a profession which he despises. This sense of confinement is emphasized by the incessant ticking of the clock. He is not only enclosed by his new deformed body, trapped by a profession but also imprisoned within the limits of the time. Heinz Politzer (1990) notices that the alarm clock ticking on Gregor's bureau "symbolizes the infinite and irrevocable circle of Gregor's professional life as a traveling salesman, to which he has sold himself" (66).

Gregor wishes to escape his exhaustion, to go beyond limits of time, to regain his freedom, to come out once again under the stars. Such a desire is revealed in his wish to go back to sleep for a man "needs his sleep and especially that other travelers live like harem women" (77). Now, a reader would question the relationship between Gregor's complaints about his job and his transformation! If such a relationship is not figured out, the narrative will be left with a gap which obstructs our understanding of Gregor's situation. It is logical to look at Gregor's change into an insect as an attempt to escape slavery. To escape from the compulsion of his strict job, he allows his body, though unconsciously, to sacrifice its human form. "The transformation", Politzer (1990) suggests, "would be an escapist wish dream come true" (66).

To figure out the real reason behind Gregor's transformation, are we assessed by any textual "triggers", or shall our judgment be subject to criticism for being a personal viewpoint? Repeatedly, the text provides us with statements which reflect Gregor's negative feelings about the family's debt which has been and will remain his responsibility for the coming five or six years. For instance, in one occasion Gregor wishes to appear in front of the whole family hoping that his monstrous dreadful

The title of the story immediately brings to the mind the idea of a possible change, a metamorphosis of someone or even something. The first sentence of the story, which announces the physical transformation of Gregor Samsa is "When Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from troubled dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous insect» (76). The following description of Gregor's new deformed body suggests the transformation of a human body into a huge animal or even a monster. His numerous legs seem to be "pathetically thin compared to the rest of his bulk (76). His lower part, which he cannot see or visualize, turns out to be "too cumbersome» (80). Despite his struggling legs, he is unable to turn his right side or to move his head without hanging it. His new large heavy form almost paralyzes him. The idea of physical inflation, which is emphasized in the first part of the story, is modified or maybe transformed as the story progresses. In part three, the last part of the story, Gregor's enormous body starts to shrink, for he can no more eat fresh food and because of the gradual deterioration caused after his father assaults him with apples. The rotten apple "embedded in his flesh" (109) affects his whole body, which becomes weaker and thinner. "Gregor's body was completely flat and dry, this could really be seen for the first time now that the little legs no longer supported it and there was nothing else to distract the eye" (123). The sense of the situation which we have formed initially about the nature of Gregor's transformation needs to be reassessed now. The transformation of Gregor is not merely an enlargement of his deformed body, but it is a process of deflation into a heap of useless matter, a dead body.

However, the story opens with a big gap created by many questions: why and how does the transformation take place? Why does it happen to Gregor and not to anyone else? Why not his sister or his parents? The story begins with the last step of the hero's ordeal. His transformation is completed even before the first sentence ends: "When Gregor Samsa awoke one morning, from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous insect" (77).

In other words, the transformation is taken for granted and the reader is forced to accept its premise as unquestionable. The previous questions are never openly posed, yet to answer them we need to move in a retrospective manner beyond the first sentence. Unfortunately, this backward movement is in the void since the story begins only after the transformation is complete. So, the only way to find an access to possible answers is to read forward.

Literature, which Iser (1978) identifies with fiction, is not seen as an opposition to reality, rather, it is "a means of telling us something about reality» by ordering the conventions of the text (35). These conventions constitute what Holub calls title «repertoire of the text» which is the territory on which text and reader meet to communicate (86). Iser (1978) states that this "repertoire" forms "a background for the process of communication, and it provides a general framework within which the message or meaning of the text can be organized" (81).

Finally, Iser's theory merges modernism with more traditional views. Iser (1978) talks about the morale or the message behind the text. He affirms that in seeing through social pretenses, the reader discovers basic dispositions of human nature (142-6). Holub refers to Iser's belief that "literature helps us to lead better, more productive lives even if its pedagogical method is conceived as originating in negativity" (97). The reader in this sense, must be attuned to the social and literary norms of the day. On the other hand, Iser's reader is given certain "liberalism". He/she must get rid of ideological biases before approaching the text. Iser tries to take a middle position on this matter by claiming that the meaning the reader reaches is constituted under the guidance of the text itself. Readers are free to concretize in different fashions or to create different meanings but this concretization is related to the text's "response-inviting structures," or it is directed by textual "triggers" (Seldon, 123).

The following discussion of "The Transformation" will show how a reader's communication with the text is a process of self-correction. The initial viewpoints, expectations or signifieds undergo a process of revision. To construct a meaning of the text or to reach at an interpretation of the characters and their situation, forward and backward readings are necessary to build what Iser calls the 'gestalt' or the image of the whole which may be challenged or revised by other readers as well.

Finally, this paper attempts show to what extent the text has a connection with reality and how much it tells us about the dispositions of human nature which may be a key to a possible meaning of the text.

"The Transformation" is a strange story about a commercial traveler, Gregor Samsa, who awakens to the painful realization that he has turned into an enormous vermin. As he tries to abandon his bed, he is driven back by his heavy "hard shell-like back" (76). He tries his best to accommodate himself to his hideous predicament while the family, except for the father, do all they can to offer comfort and love. Recognizing their failure, Gregor becomes a burden and only after his death do they turn with relief to the happier life that now awaits them.

views» or "schematized aspects" which give the text its concrete form, that the reader is supposed to contemplate (Iser, 1971, 229). In other words, the reader fills in the gaps and tries to interpret the specific way in which the various views can be connected with one another. However, the more "schematized views" the text offers, that is to say, the more it tries to be precise, the greater will be the number of gaps between the views. These gaps give the reader a chance to build up his own bridges, relating different aspects of the object.

When we read a text, we continuously evaluate and perceive a certain event with regard to our expectations for the future and against a background of the past. Any unexpected occurrence will therefore make us reformulate our expectations in accordance with this event and to reinterpret the significance we have reached previously. "A second reading of a piece of literature often produces a different impression from the first" (Iser, 229). As a result, the viewpoint of the reader differs repeatedly; it wanders freely as it is modified frequently by the text. The wandering viewpoint thus "permits the reader to travel through the text unfolding the multiplicity of interconnecting perspectives which are offset whenever there is a switch from one to another" (Iser, 1978, 118). Another idea which Iser (1978) includes within the process of reading is the image-making activity. While we read, we continuously and unconsciously construct images in a process Iser calls "passive synthesis" (135). These images have no empirical reality; they "transcend" the sensory. They are something which accompany reading, something "not yet fully conceptualized" (136). The essential part of creative imagination is known as "ideation," which presupposes the absence or nonexistence of an object and ultimately produces an aesthetic object. Reading entails "ideation" because the reader must bring forth or ideate the object.

The reading process in this sense is a form of what Iser (1978) calls "consistency-building." He assumes that while the reader tries to establish connections between schemata of the text, he will form "gestalt" in the process of producing meaning. If something occurs that is at odds with an imagined "gestalt," then the reader tries to make things consistent through a series of revisions. "The dialectic between fusion-making and fusion-breaking" is fundamental for the constitution of an aesthetic object and accounts for the experience of the text as a "living event" (118).

Not only does Iser (1978) show how reading affects the object, but he also shows how it may influence the subject. Iser talks about the «bifurcation» of the subject in reading (152). When we encounter an alien experience in the text, we background our own experiences. In assimilating the new one, we alienate part of ourselves. In other words, we bring forth this "alien" meaning which is viewed as part of our unrecognized consciousness. Thus reading in this sense has a therapeutic effect. It highlights "self-awareness;" "it enables us to formulate and thus discover an inner world of which we had hitherto not been conscious" (158). As we read we learn not only about the text but also about ourselves.

experienced", not an "object to be defined" (10). Iser believes that a text can only come to life when it is read, and if it is to be examined, it must therefore be studied through the eyes of the reader (Iser, 1971, 227). To discuss the interaction between the text and the reader, Iser introduces the concept of the "implied reader" who has a bifunction as both "a textual structure" and "a structural act". The "implied reader is the reader whom the text creates for itself and amounts to a "network of response-inviting structures" which predispose us to read in certain ways (Selden, 1997,56). The term incorporates both "the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualization of what is potential through the reading process" (Iser, 1974, xii). In other words, the roots of the 'implied reader" are "firmly planted in the structure of the text" (34); the text creates the "implied reader" for itself through "response- inviting structures" which urge us to read the text in a certain way (Seldon, 12).

Like Roman Ingarden, Iser switches the focus to the process of reading. The literary work for Iser is a combination of the objectivity of the text and the subjectivity of the reader at the same time. Accordingly, Iser emphasizes three domains of exploration. The First is the text itself, which is regarded by Iser and Ingarden as a skeleton of "schematized aspects' that must be actualized or concretized by the reader. The second is the process of reading, and the third is the communicatory structure of literature which helps in examining the conditions that give rise to and govern the text-reader interaction.

In "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response"(1971), Iser shows how the text raises a certain amount of indeterminacy, which results in "gaps" or blanks that must be filled by the reader. One way of filling these "gaps" is to reduce the text to the level of the reader's own experiences; "he projects his own standards into the text in order to grasp its specific meaning" (228). Establishing such a connection between one's own experience and what the text aims at conveying constitutes a way of removing indeterminacy. In Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction (1984), R.C. Holub discusses one example of the gaps created on the level of plot. In most narratives, the line of a story may suddenly break off and continue from another perspective or in an unexpected direction. The result is a blank that the reader must complete by joining together the unconnected segments (123).

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الملخص:

يُعنى هذا البحث بنظرية "التلقي" عند وولفجانج آيزر والمتعلقة بدور القارئ في تحليل النص. وسُتستخدم هذه النظرية في محاولة للوصول لقراءات محتملة لقصة "التحول" "The Transformation" للكاتب الألماني فرانز كافكا. يوضح آيزر في نظريته أن الحياة لا تدب في النص إلا عندما يقوم القارئ بقراءة النص وتحليله الذي يقوم بإعادة تركيب بنيته كمحاولة للوصول إلى معناه الافتراضي. ومن هنا، فإن النص بالنسبة لآيزر عبارة عن هيكل من "عوامل مخططة" أو "فجوات" يقوم القارئ بملئها بالمعنى المقبول. وينتج عن ذلك أن المعنى الأولي الذي يتم التوصل إليه يتم تعديله باستمرار أثناء عملية القراءة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإن قراءة النص تتضمن عملية متواصلة ولا شعورية من تشكيل صور ذات معنى منطقي مرتبطة بالمعنى العام للنص.

يوضح البحث من خلال مناقشة قصة "التحول" "The Transformation" أن التوقعات الأولى للمعنى تخضع إلى عملية مراجعة دائمة، فعلى سبيل المثال يوضح البحث أن معنى عنوان القصة والمتعلق بالفكرة الرئيسية، سيتغير بشكل مستمر، إذ أن التحليل المطروح يسعى إلى الكشف عن الفجوات الموجودة في القصة المسرودة، وإلى محاولة استخدام "دلائل" ملء تلك الفجوات. فإذا تعاملنا مع المعنى الحرفي المباشر للعنوان سنجد أنه يعبر عن التحول الجسدي للبطل من كائن بشري إلى حشرة ضخمة. ومن ناحية أخرى، فإن قراءة ثانية لدلائل النص توحى بالتحول المجازي للشخصيات الأخرى من كائنات طفيلية معتمدة على البطل إلى أفراد مستقلين. هذا بالإضافة إلى التحول المكاني للمحيط من غرفة مزدحمة يقطنها البطل إلى العالم الخارجي حيث ينعم بالحرية ولكن كجثة هامدة. وهكذا كلما حاولنا أن نخلق علاقة بين عناصر القصة المختلفة (البطل، الأسرة، والمكان) فإننا بذلك نُقلص عدد الفجوات الموجودة في النص، ومن هنا يصبح المعنى العام أكثر تجلياً.

*Reading Kafka's "The Transformation"
in the Light of Iser's Reception Theory*

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Abstract

Reading Kafka's "The Transformation" in the Light of Iser's Reception Theory

This paper discusses Wolfgang Iser's reception theory, which is concerned with the individual text and how readers relate to it. Iser's ideas will be used to reach at a possible reading of Franz Kafka's story "The Transformation." Iser shows that the text comes to life only if read and examined by an implied reader who prestructures and actualizes the potential meaning of the text. The text for Iser is a skeleton of "schematized aspects" and "gaps" that must be concretized and filled by the reader. However, the reader's initial interpretation of the text is repeatedly modified by the text itself. The process of reading includes an image-making activity which is a continuous and unconscious process. These images are not fully conceptualized because reading is a "consistency-building" process.

A discussion of Kafka's "The Transformation" will show how the initial viewpoints or expectations undergo a process of revision. My analysis of the story seeks to point out the gaps in plot and to use textual "triggers" to fill them. As a result, the provisional interpretation of the title will change continuously. On the literal level, the title suggests Gregor's physical transformation and his degeneration from an individual into a meager insect. Another careful reading of the triggers of the text shows that on the figurative level, we witness a drastic change in the family's sense of responsibility as they advance from parasitic creatures to independent individuals. Yet, a third reading of the title is possible because the story introduces another form of transformation, that is of the surrounding space. Gregor moves or is being swept from his overcrowded room to a larger space, the outside world, but as a fragile dead corpse. As we try to establish relations between different aspects of the story (Gregor, the family, his room), we fill in many gaps, and gradually the meaning becomes less open and more definite. The construction of the meaning of the story will always be dynamic, for the final signified will be reached at through a concretization of all the available gaps. It is only then that a vision of the whole is formed.