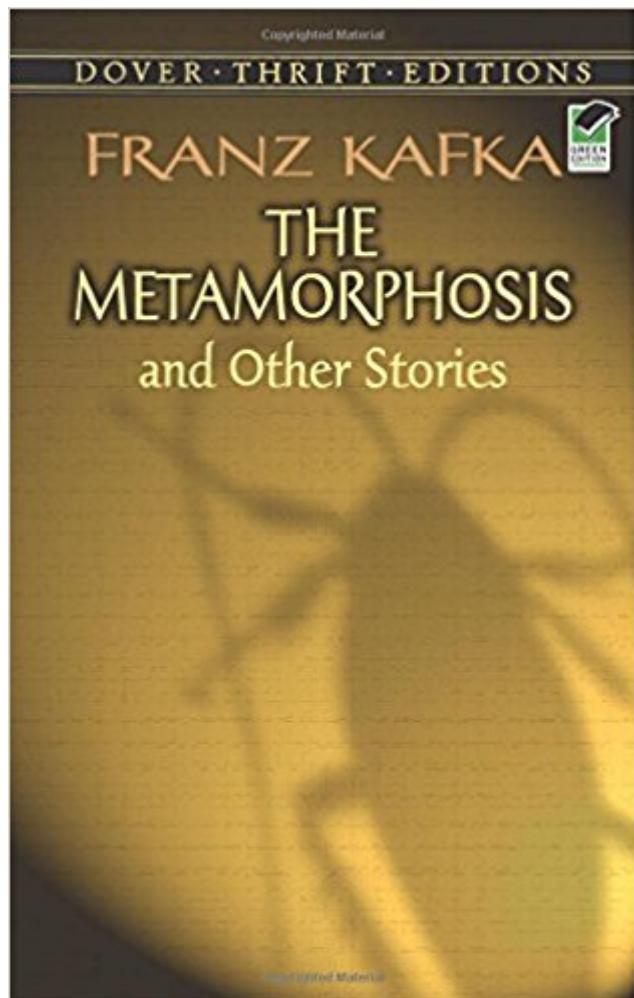


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The Metamorphosis And Other Stories (Dover Thrift Editions)



Synopsis

Since his death in 1924, Kafka has come to be regarded as one of the greatest modern writers, one whose work brilliantly explores the anxiety, futility, and complexity of modern life. The precision and clarity of Kafka's style, its powerful symbolism, and his existential exploration of the human condition have given his work universal significance. In addition to the title selection, considered by many critics Kafka's most perfect work, this collection includes "The Judgment," "In the Penal Colony," "A Country Doctor," and "A Report to an Academy." Stanley Appelbaum has provided excellent new English translation of the stories and a brief Note placing them within Kafka's oeuvre. A selection of the Common Core State Standards Initiative.

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Customer Reviews

We should all know the story concerning one of the greatest novels ever written, about a man being awoken to find out he is under arrest for a crime he knows nothing about, and charged by an unknown person. It's been debated as to what is really Kafka's novel all about. Some say, it's "hero" (?) Joseph K. represents the "every man". Who has been forced to live in a world, where's man's biggest sin is being himself. The character K. like Kafka himself feels they are an outsider in a world they cannot function in. Others still, see the book as merely a semi-autobiography as Kafka's own feelings of worthlessness. We all know Kafka even doubted his own talents as a writer. But, yet again, others think that "K." is not the "every man". That he is guilty of his "sins". So, what does all of

this prove? It simply goes to show you the impact Franz Kafka has left on the world. Here we have a book published in 1925 and still causes debate as to what exactly were Kafka's intentions. If, in fact, he didn't have any intentions! 'The Trial', to me is a story of a man's loneliness. It's a story of man who probably is guilty of what he is charged with. And we slowly read about his descent into a world of paranoia. I've heard some people argue that what happens to "K." is all merely a dream. None of it ever really happened, but, it was "K." himself who brought this punishment on himself. Sort of like how Kafka himself did by never marrying the girl he loved, by living in the shadows of his father, who he adored, and never having an self confidence. If what happens in 'The Trial' is a dream, you can bet "K." learned something. There's something about Kafka that fascinates me. He is one of my favorite authors.

For all the debate and argument over what this story means, the plot of the Metamorphosis is refreshingly simple. Gregor Samsa wakes up one morning and discovers that, over the course of the night, he's been transformed into a giant insect. The rest of this novella deals with Gregor's attempts to adjust to his new condition without providing a burden for his parents (who he has spent his life supporting and, it is made clear, view their son as little more than a commodity to be exploited) or for his sweet younger sister who Gregor views with an almost heart breaking affection. For his efforts to not bother society with his new insect identity, Gregor is both shunned and eventually destroyed by that same society, which of course now has little use for him. As dark as that plot outline may sound, what is often forgotten (or simply ignored) is that the Metamorphosis is -- in many ways -- a comic masterpiece. Instead of engaging in a lot of portentous philosophizing, Kafka tells his bizarre tale in the most deadpan of fashions. Ignoring the temptation to come up with any mystical or scientific explanations, Kafka simply shows us that Gregor has become an insect and explains how the rest of his short life is lived. This detached, amused tone makes the story's brutal conclusion all the more powerful. As well, for all the theories on what Kafka's "saying" with this story, the reasons behind Gregor's transformation are not all that complicated or hard to figure out. Kafka, as opposed to too many other writers since, declines to spell out the specific reasons but still makes it clear that Gregor (and by extension, all the other Gregors in the world) had allowed himself to become a powerless insect long before actually physically turning into one.

"You don't need to accept everything as true, you only need to accept it as necessary." How true, for in this chilling novel, truth and justice cease to exist in a conventional sense. The traditional ideals of law and justice are inverted, as it is the accused who is blind and justice is pre-determined. Indeed,

the courts and law system render an unfathomable, surreal-like existence. The accuser is kept in a dark abyss of ignorance, not only in the actual charges brought forth against him, but in the very foundation of the court system within which he is entrapped. The "Court" operates outside the normal legal system and is a clandestine and faceless bureaucracy. It seems as if everything belongs to the Court, for they can invade the lives of the accused with impunity - in their home, their workplace, and even into the recesses of their mind. Indeed, the psychological torture and self-abasement is one of the key tools of the Court. The only interaction one has with this system is through low-level judges, magistrates, and lawyers in dank, hidden courtrooms. Yet, one has to devote his life (or what's left of it) to seeking influence from mysterious characters. For the actual facts of the case matter none, but the influence of the others matter the most. Yet, any defense is completely futile, for no one can escape their ultimate fate. Judgment is handed down by High Level "deities" who no one knows. It seems as if the best one can hope for is to forestall the trial through an endless cycle of influence peddling and evasive action, for to receive an actual acquittal is only a legend and not within the realm of possibility. In a sense, the accused is condemned as soon as he is arrested.

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