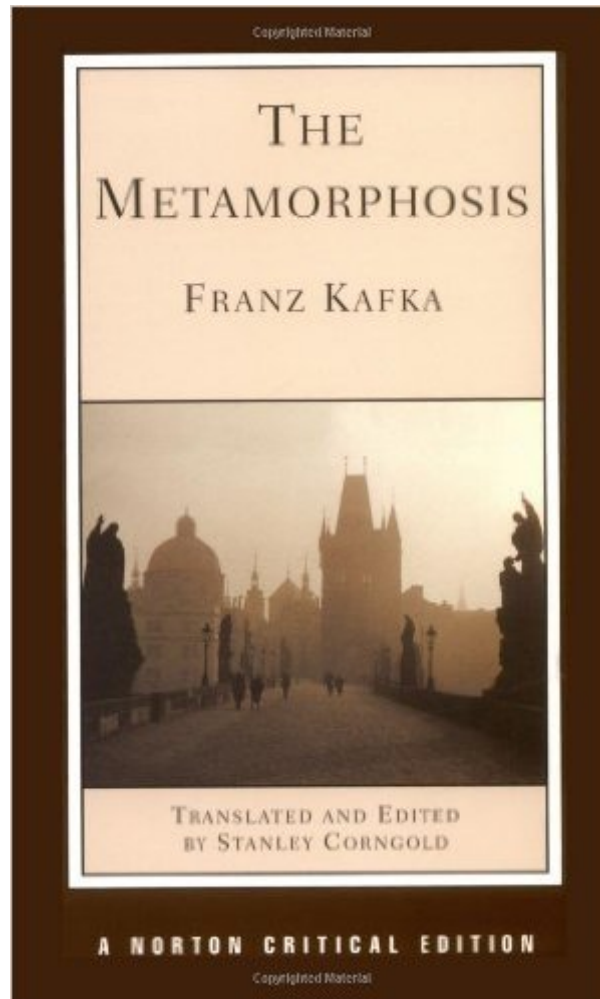


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The Metamorphosis (Norton Critical Editions)



Synopsis

Franz Kafka's 1915 masterpiece is presented in this Norton Critical Edition in the acclaimed translation by Stanley Corngold based on the definitive German edition. The novella is fully annotated and is accompanied by selected textual variants. *Backgrounds and Contexts* introduces readers to *The Metamorphosis* in the richest possible setting. The links between the author's life and his work are explored through an examination of his personal writings. Kafka's letters and diary entries illuminate the creative process behind his portrait of Gregor Samsa, his family, and their nightmarish ordeal. *Criticism* collects seven essays from the period 1970-95 representing the most important currents in literary theory—semiotics, feminism, identity philosophy, New Historicism, and post-Freudian cultural psychoanalysis. The essays offer a variety of perspectives on the novella by Iris Bruce, Nina Pelikan Straus, Kevin W. Sweeney, Mark Anderson, Hartmut Binder, Eric Santner, and Stanley Corngold. A Chronology and Selected Bibliography are also included.

Book Information

Paperback: 232 pages

Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company; New edition edition (February 17, 1996)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0393967972

ISBN-13: 978-0393967975

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.6 x 8.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (909 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

It's fascinating to see the divergent reviews that this book generates; for my part, I couldn't put it down. The book creates a world and atmosphere in which you become completely engrossed - it is a disturbing place to be. The story follows Joseph K while he is on trial by a seemingly arbitrary court system. What starts out feeling like a cautionary tale about misplaced and abused power quickly gets stranger and morphs into a story of a deeper and more personal trial. Before long, you notice that K is the one who seems to be doing the work of trying himself. I was left thinking for a long time

about the meaning behind the story and a lot of its symbols and components - I don't consider the fact that I still had questions to be a bad thing. On the contrary, this one left me feeling strangely energized. Highly recommended for people who like philosophy, examinations of the human condition, or existentialism.

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, infact, 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. I find Kafka himself to be just as interesting as the stories he wrote. People tend to forget or overlook something in Kafka's writing. He WAS funny. His novels all have moments that are truly inspired. One of my favorite chapters in this book deals with "The Painter". What happens has "K." try to leave and the Painter stops him asking him if he wants to buy a painting had me laughing. For those of you who have never read this book, I do completely recommend it. You will find the book to be fascinating. Kafka was a master of thinking up these surreal stories. You may be bothered by the book's conclusion. Not that you'll mind the final act against "K." but, you'll be bothered by the way it happens. You would have expected more of a set-up. I know I did. Others who read the book may feel the book is incomplete. And that may lead them to dislike it. You are right in your judgement that the book is incomplete, but, remember, Kafka never wanted any of his books published. There's actually a chapter in here that was never finished. And, even though it is

incomplete that didn't stop me from truly enjoying this masterpiece. If you have never read anything by Kafka, this is a fine place to start. I hope everyone finds 'The Trial' to be as enjoyable as I did. Bottom-line: One of the great works by Kafka. It touches on themes that were ahead of their time. Themes that are still around us today. An excellent example of the paranoid mind. Everyone should read this!

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. As someone who has selflessly sacrificed whatever independence he may have had to support his uncaring parents and their attempts to live an "upper class" life without actually having to suffer for it, Gregor has already willingly given up all the unique traits that make one a human. For me, even more disturbing than Gregor's fate, is Kafka's concluding suggestions that, now that Gregor has outlived his usefulness, his parents will now move on to his innocent sister. In short, despite the example of Gregor's own terrible fate, society will continue on its way with the majority of us giving up our own humanity to support the whims of a select few. From the brilliant opening lines all the way to its hauntingly deadpan conclusion, *The Metamorphosis* is a powerful and satirical indictment of the bourgeois condition. Over the past few decades, the term Kafkaesque has been tossed around with a

dangerous lack of discretion. It seems any writer who creates an absurd or dark trap for his main character ends up being labeled Kafkaesque. However, as this story especially makes clear, Franz Kafka was more than just an adjective. He was a unique and individual writer whose brilliance cannot be easily duplicated.

Kafka's 'The Metamorphosis' is as an important story as any when it comes to short fiction, but this translation is completely inept. If you're looking into picking up this edition, I assume you know about the story or can at least look up information elsewhere. Let me just warn you that this translation is not even proofread. There are constant typos like "tilted" instead of "titled" and the like. There are also many repeated words and sentences that make no sense no matter how many times you read them. In short, DO NOT BUY THIS EDITION.

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