

Fragmented Bodies, Fragmented Selves: Disability and Identity in Kafka's Universe

This paper examines the complex interplay between disability and existential identity in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, foregrounding how Kafka's narrative, despite predating the formal emergence of Disability Studies as an academic field, engages profoundly with questions of alienation, social exclusion, and the fragile construction of identity. Gregor Samsa's inexplicable transformation into an insect functions as a powerful symbolic analogue for the lived realities of persons with disabilities, particularly in the way bodily difference precipitates social withdrawal, familial rejection, and the erosion of personhood. Kafka offers a scathing critique of capitalist ideologies that equate human worth with economic productivity and functional efficiency, revealing how such value systems marginalize those who fall outside normative standards of bodily capability. Gregor's sudden inability to work renders him disposable within both his family and society, exposing the conditional nature of care and belonging. Through this portrayal, the narrative destabilizes conventional assumptions about normalcy, functionality, and value, inviting a reconsideration of disability not as personal tragedy but as a condition shaped by social expectations and institutional barriers. The paper further explores the modernist dimensions of Kafka's work, particularly the narrative's ambiguity and its alignment with critiques of fragmented discourse and meaning. The breakdown of communication between Gregor and the outside world underscores the isolation experienced by marginalized bodies, while the absurdity of his condition reflects broader existential anxieties about vulnerability, contingency, and the loss of agency. Kafka's portrayal of bodily transformation and social exclusion mirrors cultural fears surrounding illness, impairment, and dependency, situating disability within a larger philosophical inquiry into the human condition. By emphasizing the interaction between bodily difference and social response, the paper advocates for understanding disability as a socially constructed phenomenon rather than an inherent deficit. Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* thus remains profoundly relevant to contemporary discussions on identity, embodiment, and power, offering a nuanced exploration of fragmented selves in an indifferent world. The narrative operates both as an incisive critique of alienation and as a broader commentary on societal values, resonating strongly with ongoing debates about humanity, dignity, and the politics of inclusion.