

Metamorphosis

Franz Kafka

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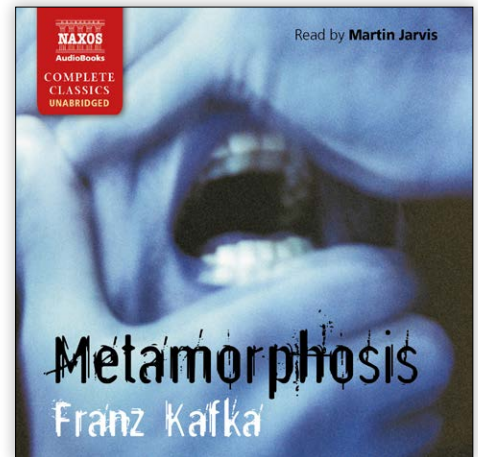
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Read by
Martin Jarvis

Gregor Samsa wakes up one morning to find he has been transformed into a gigantic insect. This extraordinary tale of imagination was written by Kafka against the backdrop of increasing turmoil in central Europe and remains not just an affecting tale but a disturbing allegory.



Martin Jarvis is consistently described in the press as 'King of Audio' and 'Genius of Spoken Word'. TV series include classic dramas and popular British and US series *Taking the Flak*, *Stargate*, *Marple*, *Morse* and *Murder, She Wrote*. Films include *Titanic*, *Framed* and *Buster*. Martin has starred in many West End and RNT productions and won the Theatre World Award for his performance as Jeeves on Broadway. He was awarded an OBE for his services to the arts. Titles he has read for Naxos AudioBooks include *Three Men in a Boat*, *The Diary of a Nobody* and *The Wind in the Willows*.



Total running time: 2:12:23

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1	When Gregor Samsa awoke one morning...	6:12	14	On hearing his mother's words...	4:48
2	While he was considering all this...	3:06	15	And so he broke out...	5:00
3	Discarding the blanket was simple enough	7:01	16	But his father was in no mood...	5:46
4	'Something's fallen in there'	7:51	17	Gregor's severe wound...	3:11
5	'Have you understood a single word?'	4:09	18	As soon as the clock...	7:11
6	By opening it in this way...	4:44	19	But even if his sister...	6:04
7	But the chief clerk...	8:42	20	The family itself...	6:09
8	It was not until dusk...	5:04	21	'Herr Samsa!'	3:58
9	By early next morning...	4:51	22	'Dear parents'	7:28
10	What pretexts had been used...	6:30	23	When the cleaning woman came...	3:53
11	Gregor now became thoroughly acquainted...	4:58	24	Then the bedroom door opened...	5:07
12	Once, it must have been a month...	3:30	25	Then all three of them...	2:18
13	Gregor's wish to see his mother...	4:33			

The music on this recording is taken from the NAXOS catalogue

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8.553895

Music programmed by Sarah Butcher

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Metamorphosis

Franz Kafka

Franz Kafka was born in Prague in 1885 of Jewish parents with whom he lived for almost his entire life. He was the oldest of six children – two boys died in infancy, and three girls were murdered by the Nazis in the early 1940s. His mother, Julie, née Löwy, was the daughter of a prosperous brewer, and Kafka felt a spiritual affinity with the rabbis and Talmudists among her forbears. His father, Hermann, was a successful businessman who had no time for his son's intellectual and literary interests, and insisted on his studying law at university. Kafka completed his studies in 1906, and two years later took up an appointment with an insurance company in Prague. Although he worked in insurance all his life, and rose to a position of considerable authority, being pensioned in 1922, he always resented the time it took away from his writing.

He usually wrote at night, sometimes through the night, thus working himself into a state of exhaustion that must have contributed to his early death. Tuberculosis of the larynx, which was diagnosed in 1917, caused him to leave the Workers' Accident Insurance office and in 1919 he sought a cure in various sanatoria. He spent the final stages of his illness in a nursing home at Kierling, near Vienna, and died on 3 June 1924, aged forty.

He published little in his lifetime and gave instructions in his will that all his unpublished writings should be destroyed. Fortunately for posterity, this directive was ignored by his friend and executor Max Brod, who immediately after Kafka's death prepared both *The Trial* and *The Castle* for publication, in 1925 and 1926 respectively. Kafka himself only published a few shorter works in his lifetime, including *Metamorphosis* (1915) and *In The Penal Colony* (1919).

Kafka suffered throughout his life from a feeling of estrangement and inadequacy. Although he lived in Prague, he was German, and therefore cut off from the Czechs who formed the majority of the country's population. Being a Jew in Prague also caused identity problems, to such an extent that many of Kafka's friends and relatives distanced themselves from Judaism in an attempt to become more fully assimilated in Czech society. The Czechs, however, tended to associate the Jews with the prosperous German minority in their midst; while that same German minority tended to perceive Jews as Jews – a race apart despite their linguistic links. As an official in a workers' insurance society, he did not entirely belong to the middle class; and as the son of a middle-class family, he didn't entirely belong to the working class either. Nor was his confidence boosted by being an artist in what was predominantly a business world.

This feeling of being an outsider would have mattered less if Kafka had found support within his family. As an infant, however, he saw very little of his mother; both his brothers died before he was six years old and by the time he started school he was already identified as a child who was used to solitude. His father, probably unwittingly, filled him with a strong sense of inadequacy and guilt, and this was to become one of the themes of *The Trial*, *The Castle* and many of his shorter works of fiction.

Although the theme of the father also plays a prominent part in *Metamorphosis*, Kafka's often symbolical and oblique style of writing has caused this and many other of his works to be interpreted in widely different ways. The American scholar Professor Stanley Corngold published a volume in

1973 called *The Commentators' Despair* which lists over one hundred and thirty interpretations of *Metamorphosis*. The work can be seen as: a struggle between father and son, whose metamorphosis represents a kind of self-punishment for his competitive striving against his father; a parable on human reactions to suffering and disease; a protest against the way in which industrialisation dehumanises human relationships; a punishment meted out to Gregor Samsa for leading an emotionally unfulfilled life. There have also been religious interpretations that view Gregor as a false messiah, and others that interpret Gregor's transformation as something positive and spiritually valuable. Throughout Kafka's diaries there are continual references to his conviction that his work as a writer is incompatible with family life, marriage or his career as an insurance expert. 'He felt as if he were being shown the way to the unknown nourishment that he so craved,' is the way that Kafka describes Gregor's reaction to his sister's violin-playing; it is as though true spirituality can only be achieved when he has assumed the shape of a verminous insect and rejected all materialistic values.

There are some thorny problems that face any translator of Kafka, including the title of *Die Verwandlung*, his most celebrated story. In his letters to Felice Bauer – there is a detailed description of the genesis of the work in their correspondence – he also mentions the title without the definite article, 'Metamorphosis' instead of 'The Metamorphosis'. The concept of metamorphosis, however, is too slow for what actually happens to Gregor, who is transformed overnight into a monstrous verminous insect. 'The Transformation', though it has little of the sensational ring of 'Metamorphosis', is arguably a more accurate transformation.

The word 'Ungeziefer' also raises problems. The opening sentence of Kafka's story reads: 'Als Gregor Samsa eines Morgens aus unruhigen Träumen erwachte, fand er sich zu einem ungeheuren Ungeziefer verwandelt' (When Gregor Samsa woke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous insect.). The threefold use of the prefix 'un' is impossible to render into English and the word 'Ungeziefer' has proved a stumbling block ever since the publication of Willa and Edwin Muir's translation. The traditional rendering of 'Ungeziefer' as 'beetle' is misleading, since 'Ungeziefer' is a generic term, a collective noun meaning, quite simply, 'vermin'. Kafka never once reveals the kind of insect into which Gregor has been transformed, and though the cleaning woman calls Gregor 'an old dung-beetle' ('alte Mistkäufer') she is not attempting any etymological description but merely engaging in friendly banter. It should also be added that when Kurt Wolff, the publisher, submitted a sketch of the title page which depicted Gregor as a beetle, Kafka was adamant that the insect could not be designed nor its shape disclosed. Though the OUE lists several examples of 'vermin' used ungenerically and in the singular, it sounds odd nevertheless, and the best solution is probably to translate 'Ungeziefer' as 'insect'.

My translations have been made from the Kritische Ausgabe which corrected the many faulty readings of Kafka's handwriting that had blighted the earlier editions on which the first translations were based.

Richard Stokes 2002