"The Metamorphosis" by Franz Kafka

Literary Analysis: Literature of the Fantastic

Literature of the fantastic blends together realistic and unrealistic elements to express truths that more conventional narratives would not readily communicate. For example, in "The Metamorphosis," Kafka combines such realistic details as Gregor's living at home with his family and holding down a boring job with the wildly unrealistic circumstance of Gregor's transformation into a huge insect. One of Kafka's signature traits is his careful attention to ordinary, humdrum details within bizarre circumstances. Gregor may have fallen outside the bounds of normal reality by being changed into an insect overnight, but he is still subject to the physical and social conventions that govern normal reality. Kafka's fantastic story is both darkly comic and deeply sad, for it creates a world in which humans have little or no control over what happens to them and yet are still expected to play by the rules.

- **A. Directions:** On a separate sheet of paper, discuss how each of the following quotations from the story combines the familiar and the fantastic.
 - 1. "'Mr. Samsa,' the manager now called, . . . 'what's the matter? You barricade yourself in your room, answer only 'yes' and 'no,' cause your parents serious, unnecessary worry, and you neglect—I mention this only in passing—your duties to the firm in a really shocking manner.'"
 - 2. "Gregor wanted to help too—there was time to rescue the picture—but he was stuck to the glass and had to tear himself loose by force; then he too ran into the next room, as if he could give his sister some sort of advice, as in the old days; but . . . a bottle fell on the floor and broke, a splinter of glass wounded Gregor in the face, some kind of corrosive medicine flowed around him."
 - 3. "But Gregor understood easily that it was not only consideration for him which prevented their moving, for he could easily have been transported in a suitable crate with a few air holes; what mainly prevented the family from moving was their complete hopelessness and the thought that they had been struck by a misfortune as none of their relatives and acquaintances had ever been hit. What the world demands of poor people they did to the utmost of their ability."
 - 4. "'Where's breakfast?' the middle roomer grumpily asked the cleaning woman. But she put her finger to her lips and then hastily and silently beckoned the boarders to follow her into Gregor's room. They came willingly and then stood, their hands in the pockets of their somewhat shabby jackets, in the now already very bright room, surrounding Gregor's corpse."

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