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From Marx to Myth: The Structure and Function of Self-Alienation in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*

KAFKA'S UNIQUENESS as a narrative author lies, among other things, in the literalness with which the metaphors buried in linguistic usage come alive and are enacted in the scenes he presents. The punishing machine devised by the Old Commander in *The Penal Colony*, for instance, engraves the law that the condemned have transgressed on their minds by imprinting it literally on their flesh. By the appellation "vermin," linguistic usage designates the lowest form of human self-contempt. Seeing himself as vermin, and being treated as such by his business and family, the travelling salesman Gregor Samsa literally turns into vermin.

Kafka's narratives enact not only the metaphors hidden in ordinary speech, but also ideas crucial in the history of thought. *The Metamorphosis* is a striking example. Gregor Samsa's transformation into vermin presents self-alienation in a literal way, not merely a customary metaphor become fictional fact. The travelling salesman wakes up one morning and cannot recognize himself. Seeing himself as a gigantic specimen of vermin, he finds himself in a fundamental sense estranged from himself. No manner more drastic could illustrate the alienation of a consciousness from its own being than Gregor Samsa's startled and startling awakening.

The idea of human self-alienation has played a crucial role in modern thought from German classical Idealism to Marxism and Existentialism. First encountered in the thought of Wilhelm von Humboldt, Schiller, Fichte, and Hegel, and subsequently in Feuerbach and Marx, this idea always implies the individual's estrangement (*Entfremdung*) from his humanity or "human species being," i.e., from the individual's membership in the human species. The individual is estranged from himself insofar as he is alienated from his essential nature as a human being.

Rooted as he was in German Idealism and the tradition of German classical literature, the young Marx saw the essential nature of the human species residing in freely productive activity. Human species-being was for him the production of objects that were literally *Gegen-stände*, things that having issued from the labor of his hands and mind now face their producer as the objects of his world. Thus the human species is defined by world-creating or world-modifying activity. It is an activity that by virtue of its productive inventiveness humanizes nature. In order to be truly human, this praxis must

be, at least partly, self-determined. Work must be engaged in for its own sake. It must have been chosen, partially at least, for its intrinsic pleasure. It must not merely be dictated by external need or the commands of others. In exact analogy to Immanuel Kant's corollary to the categorical imperative, which defines genuine morality, genuinely human labor for Marx must be at least partially its own end, its own freely chosen purpose, and not entirely "a means" for something else such as the satisfaction of extrinsic needs or the insurance of mere survival. To qualify as truly human, labor must always have an element of free choice. It must, at least partly, be its own reward and satisfaction. "At any time" it must "be considered its own purpose, an end in itself."

This freedom of doing one's work for its own sake, for the joy it affords the worker, is the factor that, according to Marx, distinguishes human from animal productivity. Animals, Marx observes, "produce only under the compulsion of physical need. Man, on the other hand, produces even when he is free of physical need, and only in this freedom is he humanly creative. . . . Such production is his active species being. By virtue of it, nature itself appears as man's creation and his reality."[1] Only where work appears as its own reward are human beings truly human. Where it is imposed solely by economic necessity, the worker is not merely alienated from himself as an individual; he is estranged from his humanity. Marx's idea of human self-alienation is not restricted to factory work, but includes any kind of work in which an individual is engaged merely for the wage or income it brings him. The worker is dehumanized wherever his work fails to involve his creative urge and desire.

Here we have arrived at the pre-history of Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis, as the reader learns from Gregor's reminiscences of and meditations about his job as a travelling salesman. We learn that Gregor had been estranged from himself in his all-consuming work even before he finds himself literally estranged from his bodily being. Gregor had found his work unbearable. He had longed for nothing more passionately than to leave his job, after telling the head of his firm his true opionion of this job. Gregor's profound self-alienation corresponds, with uncanny precision, to Marx's definition of the "externalization" of work under capitalism:

> his work is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not form part of his essential being so that instead of feeling well in his work, he feels unhappy, instead of developing his free physical and mental energy, he abuses his body and ruins his mind. (I, 564)

Gregor Samsa's professional activity has obviously been such purely instrumental work, external to himself, imposed upon him by the necessity of bailing out his bankrupt family, supporting them, and paying back his parents' debt to the boss of his firm. It is not only joyless and uncreative, it is totally determined by needs external to itself and Gregor. Freedom of creativeness—according to Marx the essence of truly human labor—finds an outlet

in Samsa's life, prior to his metamorphosis, only in the carpentry in which he indulges in free evenings. Parenthetically we might recall that Kafka himself hated his bureaucrat's desk job because it served as a mere means to a purpose totally extrinsic to itself, namely a relatively short work day, and found by contrast genuine satisfaction in carpentering and gardening, activities chosen for their own sake, which, like writing, united creativeness with the satisfaction of inner needs.

Compared to accusations of his office work found in his autobiographical documents, Kafka's story, *The Metamorphosis*, "systematizes," as it were, the Marxist factor, not by conscious design, of course, but by virtue of the astonishing parallelism in the point of view, particularly the presentation of self-alienation. Gregor's sole reason for enduring the hated position, the need to pay his parents' "debt" to his boss, drastically highlights the doubly extrinsic purpose of Gregor's work. For not only is his labor alien to his true desires, but its sole purpose, its fruit—the salary or commission that it affords him—does not even belong to him. Gregor's toil does not serve his own existence. It is not his own *Lebensmittel*, to use Marx's term—if left to himself, he would have quit long before—it belongs to and serves another.

This other is Gregor's father. He is the non-working beneficiary and exploiter of Gregor's labor. The product of this labor is the money which Gregor brings home. This money belongs to the other who does not work himself, but enjoys and disposes of the fruits of Gregor's work: "the money which Gregor had brought home every month—he himself had kept only a few pennies to himself—had not been used up completely and had accrued to form a small *capital*" (*E*, 97. Italics mine).[2] Gregor's father had expropriated the "surplus value" of Gregor's labor and formed with it his—to be sure, very modest—"capital." Gregor's relationship to his father thus represents an exact paradigm of the worker's exploitation by his capitalist employer, as described by Marx. The worker is alienated from the product of his labor because he has to yield it to the capitalist. The latter retains the lion's share for himself and returns to the worker only what the latter barely needs to survive. Through this despoiling of the fruits of his work the worker's existence becomes, in the words of Marx, "self-sacrifice and castigation" (I, 546): "In the last analysis, the extrinsic nature of his work is shown to the worker by the fact that his work is not his, but belongs to another. . . . it is the loss of his self" (I, 564f.). Gregor's metamorphosis literally enacts this "loss of self." It makes drastically visible the self-estrangement that existed even before his metamorphosis.

It is the father's "capital" that leaves Gregor tied to his servitude and bondage, for as the narrator says, "with this *surplus money* [Gregor] could have paid back a much larger part of his father's debt to his boss and the day on which he could have freed himself from this job would have been much closer. . . ." (*E*, 97. Italics mine).

The last-mentioned fact represents a point at which an entirely different

interpretative dimension intersects the Marxist framework of self-alienation that we have so far considered by itself. Although we have by no means as yet exhausted the parallelism between the Marxist concept of self-alienation and the structure and function of Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis in Kafka's text, we might state at this point that Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* is by no means completely defined, if merely seen as the literal enactment of self-alienation. Even if we were to restrict ourselves to this aspect, the centrality of the concept of self-alienation in modern thought would demand additional interpretative frameworks from which to approach Kafka's text, such as psychoanalytic, existentialist, biographical, linguistic, and phenomenological systems of reference which all must needs play important parts in a relatively comprehensive interpretation of Kafka's richly referential narrative.

However, what we shall consider now is Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* as the telling of a myth, for the mythic dimension relates to the Marxist one the way a picture frame relates to the picture which it contains and transcends, at one and the same time. In order to recognize this relationship, we shall have to consider the *mythos* of *The Metamorphosis*. I use the term "mythos" in the Aristotelian sense as the whole chain of fictive events in their chronological as distinct from their narrated order.

The initial point of the mythos is not Gregor's transformation, but the business failure of Gregor's father five years before. This failure led to the contracting of the burdensome debt to the head of Gregor's firm. Thus the mythos begins with a family's cataclysmic fall into adversity through the fault of the father, more precisely the parents, since the text speaks of "die Schuld der Eltern" and only afterward of "die Schuld des Vaters." The German word *Schuld* signifies debt, guilt, and causative fault. This triple meaning is crucial to the understanding of Kafka's mythos. If understood in the sense of debt, the *Schuld* of Gregor's parents belongs to socio-economic quotidian reality. If understood in the two other senses, *Schuld* belongs to a framework of moral and religious values. The text's repeated use of the singular *Schuld* in contrast to the more customary plural *Schulden* for debt provides a subliminally effective counterpoint to the obvious surface meaning of the word.

This subliminal allusion to guilt receives corroboration from the position of "die Schuld der Eltern" ("the guilt of the parents") at the initial point of the narrative mythos. This position creates a subtle analogy to the fall of mankind as told in Genesis. To be sure, this analogy amounts to the faintest of hints. However, we cannot and must not avoid noting the allusion if we take seriously Kafka's view of language as expressed in one of his aphorisms: "Language can only be used allusively for anything outside the sensory world . . . (*H*, 45).[3]

The son of these guilty parents—Gregor—has to assume their guilt and pay it off "by the sweat of his countenance" (to quote Genesis), by his self-consuming drudgery for his parents' creditor. In the allusive context estab-

lished by the semantic ambiguity of *Schuld*, Gregor's profoundly alienated existence prior to his metamorphosis establishes the parallel to man's fate after the expulsion from paradise. Like the children of Adam and Eve, Gregor through his sonship in the flesh has been condemned to a perennial debtor's existence. The two semantic realms of *Schuld*—debt and guilt—converge in the fateful consequence of the father's debt. With it, the father surrendered his family to a world in which the exploitation of man by man holds infernal sway. The world to which the father's failing has handed over his family is ruled by the principles of capitalist economics. In this world, the family ceases to be a family in the original and ideal sense of a community in which the bonds of blood—the *Blutkreis* to which Kafka in discussing "The Judgment" accords his highest respect—and natural affection prevail. Instead the family falls victim to the egotistical principle of *gegenseitige Übervorteilung* (mutual defrauding) in which Marx saw the governing principle of human life under capitalism.

Precisely because of his self-sacrifice in assuming his father's debt, Gregor rises to power as the breadwinner in his family and threatens to displace his father as the head of the household. This process reverses itself with Gregor's metamorphosis. Gregor's self-inflicted debasement entails his father's rejuvenation and return to power. These successive displacements—first the father's, then the son's—which find their parallel in Grete's ambiguous liberation through her brother's fall, have their contrastive complements in the parasitic exploitation of the winners by the losers. Before Gregor's metamorphosis, the father was the parasite. After the metamorphosis, the son assumes this role.

A world is shown in which the enjoyment of advantages by the one has to be purchased at the cost of the other. This is the world in a fallen state. Gregor's initial self-sacrifice through work whips up his pride in his ability to support his family in style. Those had been "happy times" when he had been able to "amaze and delight" his family by putting his hard-earned money on their table. But his self-surrender to his work causes a twofold alienation. Inwardly he remains estranged from his work because it is the kind of labor that cannot satisfy a human being. Outwardly his rise to power in the family overshadows the other members and results in their alienation from him. "A special warmth toward him was no longer forthcoming," (*E*, 98), so the text informs us. Long before his metamorphosis, Gregor and his family have lived coldly and incommunicatively side by side.

The metamorphosis reveals this alienation in its essence as *den völligen Verlust des Menschen* ("the total dehumanization of man") in which Marx saw the ultimate fate of man under capitalism. But it has another and ultimately more important function. Through it Gregor ceases to treat the *Schuld* of his parents as a debt that can be paid back by work, and assumes the *Schuld* in its deeper meaning. He no longer tries to pay back the *Schuld*; he incorporates it. With his incarnation he raises the narrative mythos from its socio-economic to its mythic meaning.

That Gregor's metamorphosis literally incarnates guilt becomes apparent first of all by the fact that his immediate reaction to his transformation is a guilty conscience. He has missed the hour of his work and feels guilty for it. He feels guilty for having plunged his family into misfortune. He is ashamed. He seeks to hide, to make himself invisible. But even apart from all subjectively felt or morally accountable guilt, guilt becomes evident in him objectively. For his transformation into vermin entails the crassest form of parasitic exploitation, a perfect turning of the tables on his family. His metamorphosis compels them to work for him and in his place. Because of him they will henceforth be "overlooked and overtired" (*E*, 112), condemned to suffer the fate of "paupers." To be sure, his father's bankruptcy five years before had condemned Gregor to an exploited existence. But by his metamorphosis, Gregor himself turns into an arch exploiter, the archetypal parasite which vermin represents. His very appearance as *ungeheueres Ungeziefer* is emblematic and flaunts a gigantic form of parasitism. Even as Gregor's subsequent daydream of declaring his love to his sister constitutes a gruesome parody of bourgeois-sentimental courtship, so his vermin existence as such embodies exploitation as the essence of human relations. By embodying parasitism in his shape, Gregor objectifies the guilt of his entire society. This guilt had originally shown itself in his father when he secretly cheated his son and furtively put aside his son's earnings to form "a modest capital." Reversing their roles, the son now becomes exploitation in its most honest, clearly visible form. To use T. S. Eliot's term, most appropriate to Kafka's tale, Gregor becomes the "objective correlative" of the insight that exploitation is the original guilt of mankind. Gregor literally becomes what his father had committed in stealthily performed acts.

In the narrative mythos of Kafka's tale, the metamorphosis literally takes the place of the father's debt. The text mentions a debt only for the prehistory of *The Metamorphosis*, as a flashback in Gregor's memory. In the action which the reader witnesses, the debt plays no role. The text never mentions it again. It seems that Gregor's *Schreckgestalt*, his new terrifying shape, which the first morning after his awakening had chased away the deputy of the firm, has thereby also cancelled the parents' debt. In place of it, Gregor himself has become "the misfortune" of the Samsa family.

Later, the father wounds Gregor with an apple which rots and festers in Gregor's flesh. This apple functions not only as a renewed allusion to "the guilt of first parents"; it also signifies the function of Gregor's metamorphosis as the literal incorporation of his father's guilt. Gregor, mortally hurt by the blind "rage" of his father, has obviously become his father's victim in the concluding section of the story. Yet this final violation of the son by the father only repeats in a transparent way Gregor's initial victimization. In the beginning, Gregor had to assume his father's debt and thus become its victim. At that time *Schuld* had been understood in the economic and juridical meaning of debt. By his metamorphosis Gregor incorporates this *Schuld* and

transforms it from a legal-contractual concept into its full and profound meaning as the concretely visible form of alienated life. Parenthetically one might say that the *Schuld* which the father bequeathes to the son is in the last analysis life itself. The "rotting apple in the flesh" not only causes, but also embodies Gregor's protracted dying. This seems to suggest that the original "guilt of the parents" was the dubious "gift" of physical existence. This reading would connect *The Metamorphosis* with numerous other works by Kafka and with the spirit of his aphorisms.

In contrast to his father, Gregor does not incur guilt; he is guilt. His incarnation of guilt corresponds to Christ's incarnation of God in man, in one sense only. Like Christ, Gregor takes the cross upon himself to erase "the guilt of the parents." But in contrast to Christ, Gregor does not merely assume suffering by his fellow creatures; he also assumes their guilt. Since he has made guilt identical with himself, he must liberate the world, i.e., his family, from himself.

"The guilt of the parents" showed itself as indebtedness. It constituted capitulation to the world in its capitalist makeup. In strict consequence, economic determination inserts itself now into the myth as Kafka presents it. This insertion can be understood in socio-cultural and, indeed, Marxist categories. The plot inserted into the mythic events depicts a classic case of the proletarianization of a petty-bourgeois household. The "modest capital" created by the father's exploitation of Gregor's work for the firm "sufficed . . . not at all to permit the family to live on its interests" (*E*, 97). In consequence the family loses its bourgeois status, its economic independence. Father Samsa remains the omnipotent potentate in his family. But in the world outside, he toils as a humble bank messenger. By the self-elimination of her brother as a human being, Grete rises to monopolistic eminence and privilege in her family. But in the outside world, she has to serve strangers as a poor sales girl. Gregor's mother is reduced to taking sewing and dress-making work home. In regard to the socio-economic world of exploited labor, Gregor, by the horrible paradox that is his metamorphosis, is now the only "free" member of the family, the only one who does not have to labor and let himself be exploited by the world outside.

The family's proletarianization reaches its nadir when it has to yield the control over its household to the three lodgers. According to Marx, as capitalism increasingly absorbs all pre-capitalistic forms of human life, "the contrast between natural and social existence becomes progressively more extreme." In Kafka's tale, the displacement of the "natural," traditional head of the family, the father, by the three strangers exemplifies the development described by Marx. The three lodgers assume the dominant place in the household merely by virtue of their paying power. Kafka's plot mimetically conforms to and expresses Marx's observation of the historic change from blood kinship to money as the determining element in all human relationships. *The Metamorphosis* shows how the basis of power, even within the "natural"

unit of the family, slips from blood, age, and sex, the foundations of the father's dominance, to money which makes the unrelated strangers the rulers of the family. The family forfeits its autonomy even within its own walls. Of course, even prior to this loss, the family's independence had been appearance only since the father's debt to Gregor's firm had handed it over to the tyranny of the business world, represented by the creditor's firm. The lodgers' invasion of the household and their assumption of absolute control over it thus, in Marx's words, only "brings to a head" (I, 578) what had been inherent in the family's enslavement to the capitalist world through the father's original guilt.

Since his metamorphosis, however, Gregor must assume the blame for this state of affairs. He alone now appears to be the cause of the whole "misfortune" of his family—unique as it is "in the entire circle of their relatives and acquaintances" (*E*, 112). He is guilty in a manner which lifts his "guilt" completely out of the sphere in which a socio-economic interpretation could still be relevant. To be sure, in consequence of its economic impoverishment, the family disintegrates as a natural community. So far the analogy to Marx's world view holds. However, the limits of such an analogy are reached as soon as we realize that the ultimate cause of this proletarianization is a circumstance that transcends the observable laws of nature. In the midst of an environment which otherwise seems to be wholly determined by socio-economic factors, Gregor's metamorphosis supplies the evidence of something inexplicable in, and therefore transcendent of, the terms of that *Weltbild*.

Mythic thinking also underlies Marx's view of history. Behind Marx's economic determinism one can glimpse the messianic martyr-savior's part played by the proletariat. In the world view of the young Marx especially, the proletariat suffers the fate and assumes the task of Christ. Today the proletariat is the scapegoat of humanity; tomorrow it will be its redeemer. So runs the Marxist myth. The proletariat will save the very society that has victimized it and committed the worst injustice against it. In his Preface to his "Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Law*," Marx states:

> in order that *one single estate* may stand for the condition of the whole society, all the defects of that society must be concentrated in one . . . class; a particular estate must be the estate of general offense, must be the embodiment of all frustrations; one particular social class must be seen as the *notorious crime* of the whole society, so that liberation of this class will appear to be the universal self-liberation (I, 501).

In the microscopic society of his petty-bourgeois household, Gregor Samsa plays the same role that the proletariat, in Marx's vision, performs in the macroscopic social and universal society of the bourgeois-capitalist system.

The analogy between Gregor and the proletariat becomes clearer when we realize that Gregor's metamorphosis is bound up with "guilt" in a two-

fold way. The "guilt of the parents" is embodied *in* him; but it is also perpetrated *on* him. Insofar as his vermin appearance is the incarnation of parasitic selfishness, their guilt is embodied in him. However, insofar as he serves as the butt of the injustice and cruelty of his family, insofar as he suffers their total neglect and withdrawal of love, their guilt is perpetrated on him. As the unrecognized member of his family, Gregor corresponds to that universal victim of the capitalist order—the proletariat.

Gregor also exercises its eschatological function as the liberator and savior of his society. The "notorious crime" of society diagnosed by Marx as the surrender of man to inhumanity is embodied in the hero of Kafka's tale much more literally even than in the hero of Marx's view of history. Like the proletariat for Marx, Gregor bears in his family "radical chains." His existence, like the proletariat's, represents "the universal sorrows" of mankind. "No particular injustice," but "injustice as such" is committed against him. His very being, like that of the proletariat, proclaims "the total loss of humanity"—a loss that in his case manifests itself of course in its most literal meaning. Finally, like the proletariat in Marx's eschatological view of history, Gregor can regain his own humanity only by the liberation of his whole community.

However, in sharp contrast to Marx, the optimistic "synthesis" of self-liberation and liberation of all others is totally lacking in Kafka's world. Marx's proletariat redeems itself by redeeming mankind. In Kafka, liberation can be achieved only by the total sacrifice, the self-eradication of the scapegoat. Only by vanishing completely can Gregor save his family and himself.

While Marx's messianic view of the proletariat represents a secularized version of the Judaeo-Christian eschatology, the mythic dimension of Kafka's tale contradicts the latter. In the Christian version of the scapegoat myth, the savior's self-sacrifice is merely temporary. He arises again and takes the redeemed with him to eternal bliss. Kafka's myth follows the more primitive and universal "transference" myth which James George Frazer in *The Golden Bough* calls the myth of "the assassination of the god":

> The accumulated misfortunes and sins of the whole people are sometimes laid upon the dying god, who is supposed to bear them away for ever, leaving the people innocent and happy. . . . It is not necessary that the evil should be transferred from the culprit or sufferer to a person; it may equally well be transferred to an animal or a thing.[4]

In *The Metamorphosis*, "the guilt of the parents" has been transferred to Gregor. He is the scapegoat on whom the refuse, the filth, the "sin," of the whole community is deposited. This transference appears in him not only physically and externally as when the *Unrat* of the whole apartment is thrown into his room. It also shows itself inwardly as the—temporary—reprehensible and shocking deterioration of Gregor's character makes clear.

What remains for Gregor to do is to recognize that it is his role and mis-

sion "to bear away forever . . . the accumulated misfortunes and sins" of his family by removing himself in whom they are incarnated. In this lies the inner meaning of his metamorphosis which his sister's words make clear to him. "His opinion that he must disappear was if anything even more decided than his sister's" (*E*, 125).

He literally carries out the "turning," the spatial "return" "back into his room" (*E*, 124) that transposes *The Metamorphosis* from its economically determined foreground plot into the mythic frame from which it had issued. Hitherto intent on breaking out and returning to power, influence, love, and life, Gregor now withdraws forever into his room, into himself. He gives himself up to death by which he liberates not only the world from himself, but more importantly for Kafka, himself from the world.

The death of Gregor Samsa is self-imposed in the literal sense that it occurs only after the consent of the "hero." Gregor carries out the death sentence on himself that his sister, as the representative of the family and of life, has pronounced against him. He executes it by virtue of what can only be considered psychic power. He kills himself simply by his will—resembling in this respect Kleist's *Penthesilea*. His will is to obey the "law" which has chosen him for sacrifice so that his family can live free of *Schuld*, and the formulation of this will is immediately followed by its fulfillment—Gregor's death. It is a sacrificial death for the family of whom he thinks "with tenderness and love" (*E*, 125).

Kafka was satisfied with this death of his "hero," as his letter to Felice Bauer composed immediately after the writing of Gregor's death scene shows:

> Cry, Dearest, cry; now is the time for weeping! The hero of my little story died a short while ago. If it can console you, I shall tell you that he died quite peacefully and *reconciled* with all.[5] (Italics mine)

The rhythm and the anaphoric structure of that first sentence resemble the lament for the "hero" of an epic of universal, at any rate of collective, significance. The "synthesis" expressed by the "consolation" of the third sentence is, in contrast to Marx's view of history, not the synthesis of fulfillment, but that of tragedy. Death as reconciliation implies not only the ancient idea of "atonement," but also the even more basic idea of the tragic as the sacrificial defeat of the individual in his ancient and eternal agon with the collective. This idea emerges as the "meaning" of the myth embedded in Kafka's story. The individual's extinction is balanced by his elevation and "eternalization" in the lament ("Now is the time for weeping") in which the intention of Kafka's "little story" appears to be summed up. Conversely, the sacrifice of the individual in whom "guilt" has become embodied, allows the community to enter upon a new life and entertain "new dreams." At the conclusion of the narrative text, Gregor's parents had grown

> more quiet and half unconsciously exchanging glances of agreement, that it would soon be time to find a good husband for [Grete]. And it was like a confirmation of their *new dreams* and *good intentions* that at the last stop of their trip their daughter got up first and stretched her young body. (*E*, 130) [Italics mine]

No matter how cruel and illusory the "new dreams" for the life of the daughter, purchased by the carcass of the son, may appear to be, about Kafka's unqualifiedly affirmative evaluation of his "hero's" sacrificial death his letter to Felice leaves no doubt.

Kafka's definition of the writer's relationship to mankind applies to Gregor's role in the deliverance of his family:

> The writer is the scapegoat of humanity; he allows human beings to enjoy sin guiltlessly, almost guiltlessly.

In this sense, and in this sense alone, the mythos of *The Metamorphosis* describes a myth of literature. Gregor allows his family, as the writer allows humanity, to enjoy their guilt guiltlessly, which does *not* mean that he restores to them their innocence. They remain guilty, but they can now enjoy the fruits of this guilt without being held accountable. For the scapegoat who embodies their conscience makes them free of it.

[1]Karl Marx, *Frühe Schriften*, Erster Band, ed. Hans-Joachim Lieber and Peter Furth (Stuttgart: Cotta Verlag, 1962) [Karl Marx Ausgabe. Werke Schriften Briefe. Bd. I], p. 567. My translation. All further quotations from Marx are taken from this edition and translated by me. Volume and page are cited in parentheses in the text immediately following the quotation.

[2]Franz Kafka, *Erzählungen und kleine Prosa*, Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. I, ed. Max Brod, 2d. ed. (New York, Schocken Books, 1946 [1935]), p. 97. My translation. All subsequent quotations from Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* are taken from this edition in my translation. The page is indicated in brackets in the text immediately following the quotation.

[3]Franz Kafka, *Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande und andere Prosa aus dem Nachlass*, Gesammelte Werke, ed. Max Brod (New York: Schocken Books, 1953), p. 45. My translation.

[4]Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 3d. ed., Part VI: The Scapegoat (New York: MacMillan, 1935 [1913]), p. 1.

[5]Franz Kafka, *Briefe an Felice und andere Korrespondenz aus der Verlobungszeit*, ed. Erich Heller and Jurgen Born, Gesammelte Werke, ed. Max Brod (Frankfurt am Main: Lizenausgabe, New York: Schocken Books, 1967), p. 160. My translation.

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