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## The Graphic Gregor Samsa: Can Kafka's Creature Be Brought to Life?

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The Graphic Gregor Samsa:  
Can Kafka's Creature Be Brought to Life?

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
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## Dedication and Acknowledgements

This project is dedicated to the people in my life who put up with my “kafkaesque” behavior while I was writing this. I’m so thankful to everyone who didn’t act like the Samsa family’s maid while I was going through my own Gregor-like transformation through the course of this project. Thankfully, I was able to go back to being my old self at the end, and not remain a “monstrous vermin.”

Thank you to my project advisor, Éric Trudel, for putting up with me and my unwieldy page counts; thank you to Jonathan Brent for providing me with the original inspiration for my project; thank you to Mathew Mutter for being on my midway board and being a supportive academic advisor during my time at Bard; thank you to Jane Smith for providing me with the strength and knowledge I needed to actually believe that I could complete my senior project; thank you to Betsy and Jeremy for your continued guidance when I needed help with citations; and thank you to Deidre d’Albertis for your constant support during colloquium.

Thank you to my boyfriend, Jesse, who had to put up with me every day and night while I was writing this. I love you so much and I’m sorry for all the craziness. Thank you to my parents, for having faith in me and my education; and thank you to my friends, I REALLY wouldn’t have been able to write this without your distractions.

It’s hard to even begin to explain the amount of work I put into this. It’s a senior project; there isn’t any need for platitudes. *So, here it is.*



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## Introduction

### Gregor's Role in Adaptation Theory

*“What has happened to me? he thought. It was no dream...”*

— Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze graphic versions of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, while taking into account Kafka's own feelings about Gregor being illustrated and the text's plot, themes, and motifs. My goal is to see how much an author can change the original text by way an adaption, appropriation, translation, or interpretation while still having a semblance of Kafka's original work. I want to see if the graphic versions of *The Metamorphosis* can change the way the original text is read and interpreted, or if it is possible for a reader to separate an original text from a group of works that are based off of it.

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There is a complex connection between the descriptive language used in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and the responses that readers have to this language. These responses have the ability to lead to imaginative inferences which, in turn, can create a visual manifestation of what this descriptive language conveys. This connection is taken a step further when we consider how the graphic versions of Kafka's work take ideas that once only existed as text, and turn them into images, transmuting a text that is both resistant and open to interpretation because of the intrinsically difficult nature of the original work.

Kafka's work is difficult for a myriad of reasons, all stemming from how the plot and themes are left ambiguous and open to the reader's imagination. The ambiguity in the text is



primarily centered on Kafka's descriptions of characters, specifically Gregor,<sup>1</sup> and how the various translations change key phrases within the text. The translation choices that were made about Gregor Samsa, the tragic figure the novella is centered on highlights these difficulties; one particular liberty taken during the German-to-English translation process which highlights a change from the German descriptions that are comparatively ambiguous to the English translation of the same description which are much more explicitly factual. In Willa and Edwin Muir's German-to-English translation of *The Metamorphosis*, there is no indication that Gregor is a cockroach, which is a popular interpretation for Gregor's form. The only thing we know about Gregor is that he:

...awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect. He was lying on his hard, as it were armor-plated, back and when he lifted his head a little he could see his domelike brown belly divided into stiff arched segments on top of which the bed quilt could hardly keep in position and was about to slide off completely. His numerous legs, which were pitifully thin compared to the rest of his bulk, waved helplessly before his eyes.<sup>2</sup>

This description of a huge insect with a hard brown shell and multiple thin legs shows the difficulty of translating and interpreting the text. When reading a description like this the immediate thought that jumps into one's head is that Gregor is a cockroach, yet there is no indication that he is. Nothing in this translation specifies what type of insect he is. This is an idea that has been inferred by the public and then made into an accepted assumption over time because of the way different translations, such as the Muirs', influence readers who were not privy to the descriptions in the original text. The issue with this frame of thinking, which is

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<sup>1</sup> This will be explained later on in this section.

<sup>2</sup> Franz Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," trans. Willa Muir and Edwin Muir, in *The Complete Stories*, comp. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1988), 114.

central to this paper’s argument, is that when a reader begins to make assumptions about a text the content of the work will ultimately change and be interpreted differently, especially when ambiguity is essential to the original text. However, when a text is changed—either through adaptation, appropriation, translation, or interpretation—the original text and the ambiguity is lost. When a text is translated from one language to another the original elements have the possibility to stay; for example the translation by Willa and Edwin Muir does not specify what kind of “insect” Gregor is. However, when a text switches mediums the original intentions and any observed ambiguity is nearly impossible to replicate because the majority of the original meaning is inherently lost, especially if what was purposefully ambiguous is now clear.

The interpretation for what Gregor is supposed to be visualized as in the original German is left ambiguous. The original terms that Kafka used to describe Gregor in the 1915 work were “ungeheures Ungeziefer”<sup>3</sup> which translates word for word into “monstrous vermin.” Nowhere in the Muir translation of the first paragraph of Kafka’s work is there any mention of a “monstrous vermin.” Instead, liberties were taken and Gregor was translated directly into an “insect” which assigns an identity to Gregor that was never meant to be so straight forward.

In *Kafka’s Creatures: Animals, Hybrids, and Other Fantastic Beings*, Dean Swinford provides an explanation for two paths of analysis that are used to understand the open ended nature of what Gregor could be. Swinford explains how:

Attempts to uncover the identity of Gregor Samsa in Franz Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis” have tended to follow two trajectories. The first, concerned with the literal representation of a nonhuman body, has focused on the best way to classify or describe that body leaving critics to wonder if Gregor is actually an insect and, if so, what

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<sup>3</sup> Franz Kafka, *Die Verwandlung*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1917), 5, accessed November 17, 2015, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/22367/22367-h/22367-h.htm>.

kind. The second path, less concerned with the specific features of the protagonist's body, seeks to understand and interpret the significance not so much of the body itself, but of the transformation it represents.<sup>4</sup>

This differentiation between two different types of critical understanding of Gregor's form further illustrates the difficulties that encompass trying to imagine a "monstrous vermin." Swinford provides evidence to support the claim that there is no set understanding of because of the multiple ways that it is possible to analyze and interpret Gregor's characteristics. Yet, regardless of the open-ended nature of the text and the abundance of analytical routes that can be taken, interpretations have occurred that are graphic, critical, scientific, and everywhere in-between.

Even literary scholars and authors attempted to uncover the mystery of Kafka's "ungeheures Ungeziefer." In his *Lectures on Literature*, Vladimir Nabokov dedicated a lecture to *The Metamorphosis* which include his own understanding of Kafka's "ungeheures Ungeziefer" and the issues that he views with other interpretations. The notes and drawings that Nabokov made for his lecture allow us to see how he visualized Gregor, regardless of Kafka's purposeful elusiveness. Indeed, Nabokov even provides a scientific illustration of the type of bug he believes Gregor to be.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Dean Swinford, "The Portrait of an Armor-Plated Sign: Reimagining Samsa's Exoskeleton," in *Kafka's Creatures: Animals, Hybrids, and Other Fantastic Beings*, ed. Marc Lucht and Donna Yarri (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 211.

<sup>5</sup> Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 249.

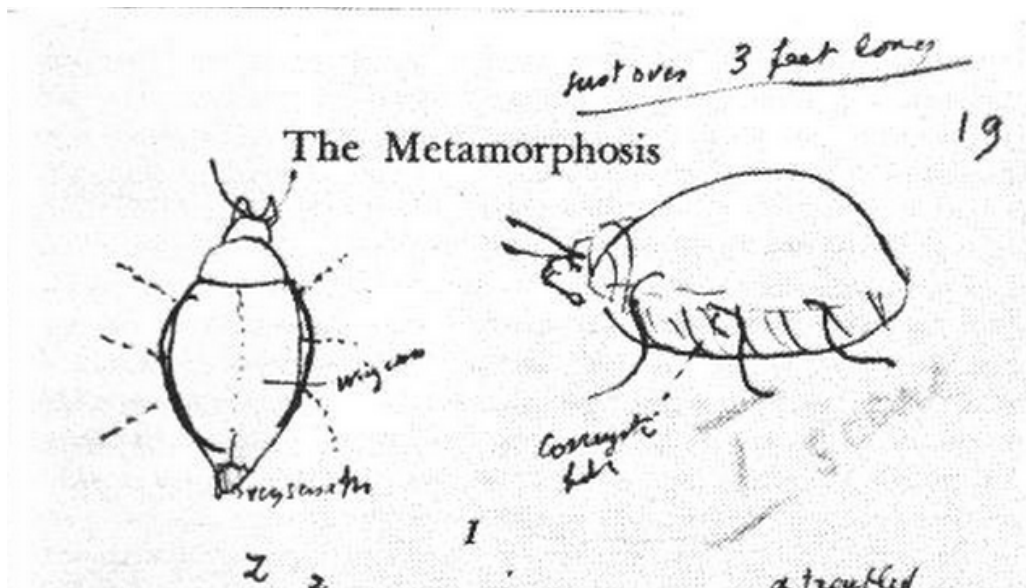


Fig. 1. Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov, "Untitled", 1948.

Nabokov follows the second trajectory outlined by Swinford<sup>6</sup> and uses a somewhat scientific point of view to piece together the physical characteristics of Gregor, his belly and his legs, to provide what he believes to be a concrete explanation for this "monstrous vermin." Nabokov's perceived ability to understand Kafka's description from a science based, analytically driven point of view comes from his background as a well regarded Entomologist<sup>7</sup> who was, "...elected to the Cambridge Entomological Society."<sup>8</sup> However, his scientific qualifications do not entitle him to be able to determine Gregor's identity because he only uses his scientific background after he has made an assumption. Nabokov assumption-influenced, scientifically based explanation of Gregor is that he is "merely a big beetle."<sup>9</sup> He reaches this conclusion through his

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 211.

<sup>7</sup> The branch of natural history which deals with the physiology, distribution, and classification of insects. "entomology, n." OED Online. September 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/62920?redirectedFrom=entomology> (accessed December 06, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 66.

<sup>9</sup> Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 260.

own perception of how to connect a metaphorical set of dots that Kafka provided. He begins by stating that Gregor's physical form, "...belongs to the branch of 'jointed leggers'" (Arthropoda), to which insects, and spiders, and centipedes, and crustaceans belong."<sup>10</sup> Nabokov explains that this is due to Gregor having "numerous little legs,"<sup>11</sup> and:

...if the 'numerous little legs' mentioned in the beginning mean more than six legs, then Gregor would not be an insect from a zoological point of view. But [Nabokov] suggests that a man awakening on his back and finding he has as many as six legs vibrating in the air might feel that six was sufficient to be called numerous. We shall therefore assume that Gregor has six legs, that he is an insect.<sup>12</sup>

Here, Nabokov interjects his own opinions which provide the basis for his explanation of Gregor's form. He makes it clear that Gregor is an insect through assumptions that he makes about the text. Nabokov infers Gregor's insect state through an assumption that the use of "numerous little legs" must mean a specific number —six. He does this by imagining himself in the character's fictional 'shoes' and drawing the conclusion that six equates to numerous and that means Gregor is an insect because when he imagined himself as Gregor he imagined six legs. This logic is flawed because it lacks a clear connection between the conclusion he forms through his interpretation of Kafka's text and the actual words that the text uses. There is no proof in the text that Gregor is in the state that he is directly because he transformed. The text itself gives no reasoning as to what, why, or how he transformed; only that he transformed. Nabokov's illustrative explanation is problematic because he is creating what he believes to be an explanation rooted in concrete scientific evidence which is only made possible through

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 285.

<sup>11</sup> Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," in *The Complete Stories*, 114.

<sup>12</sup> Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 258.

imagining himself as Gregor and understanding of a text that another individual could easily interpret differently. The cause and reasoning behind his transformation is left ambiguous on purpose.

In a letter from Kafka to Georg Heinrich Meyer from October 25, 1915, the purposeful ambiguity in relation to Gregor is discussed. In this letter Kafka makes a point to let Meyer know, that after finding out that the cover of *The Metamorphosis* is going to be illustrated by Ottomar Starke Gregor must not be depicted. In the letter Kafka writes:

You recently mentioned that Ottomar Starke is going to do a drawing for the title page of *Metamorphosis*. Insofar as I know the artist's style from *Napoleon*, this prospect has given me a minor and perhaps unnecessary fright. It struck me that Strake, as an illustrator, might want to draw the insect itself. Not that, please not that! I do not want to restrict him, but only to make this plea out of my deeper knowledge of the story. The insect itself cannot be depicted. It cannot even be shown from a distance.<sup>13</sup>

In this letter, Kafka makes it very clear that Gregor is never meant to be physically illustrated and Starke followed Kafka's wishes. For Kafka, Gregor is only supposed to be visualized through a reader's imagination; letting the purposeful ambiguity create a manifestation of the character that exists in our imaginations. However, illustrations of Gregor exist and will continue to exist because of the popularity of Kafka's novella and its importance in literary history.

The observed change of *The Metamorphosis* from a German Novella into a text that in the twenty-first century has been heavily translated and is recognized as one of the greatest works of literature has created an environment where Gregor's identity as a "monstrous vermin" is no longer textually ambiguous, but is instead established as a beetle or a cockroach. This is also due to the multiple illustrated renderings of Gregor that exist in the literary and cultural

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<sup>13</sup> Franz Kafka, "Kafka, Max Brod, and Editors on *The Metamorphosis*," in *The Metamorphosis: A New Translation, Texts and Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Susan Bernofsky, trans. Mark M. Anderson (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 65.

domains. However, with the establishment of Gregor as something other than the ambiguous creature Kafka intended for, the text and its translations are further removed from the original intentions of the author. Other examples of *The Metamorphosis* that are observed as further distanced from the original work are seen in the graphic novel, comic, and manga adaptations of Kafka work which were based on the already translated texts. These graphic works solidify the image of Gregor into something physical. These versions of an already translated work let us see Gregor through multiple illustrative and interpretive styles, which are contradictory Kafka's intentions to keep Gregor's visual depiction open-ended.

However, even if at times these graphic works seem contradictory to the original intentions of Kafka for showing illustrations of Gregor, it is possible for them to still hold true to other elements of the original text without fully detracting from the work. The graphic novel, comic, and magna versions of *The Metamorphosis* all portray different versions of Gregor and various variations of the plot. The differences between each version are what let us distinguish how far one of these works has changed Kafka's original and let us begin to understand the implications these texts have on a reader's interpretation of both works—independent of one another and combined.

In order to address these concerns, proper establishment of definitions for the following terms in the context of this thesis is necessary. These words are adaptation, interpretation, translation, and appropriation. For the sake of brevity in this exploration of *The Metamorphosis*, these terms will be referred to as a whole under the blanket term of 'adaptation theory.' Once an understanding of the interrelatedness of each of these words is established and how they each differ from one another, the complex relationship between Kafka's original German text, the

German to English translations, and the graphic versions of the text will be able to be fully understood.

In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon explains how to define and understand the concept of adaptation in relation to the work or selected works from which the adaptation came. Hutcheon explains the most basic definition of adaptation as, "...repetition, but repetition without replication."<sup>14</sup> This definition begins to explain adaptation through broad terms and describes an adaptation as a work that borrows elements from another text but does not copy said elements directly. However, according to Hutcheon how to define something as an adaptation is more complex than simple repetition. She goes on to explain how "adaptation can be defined from three distinct but interrelated perspectives."<sup>15</sup> Hutcheon outlines the first of these three perspectives of adaptation as follows:

...a formal entity or product, an adaptation is an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works. This "transcoding" can involve a shift of medium (a poem to a film) or genre (an epic to a novel), or a change of frame and therefore context: telling the same story from a different point of view, for instance, can create a manifestly different interpretation. Transposition can also mean a shift in ontology from the real to the fictional, from a historical account or biography to a fictionalized narrative or drama.<sup>16</sup>

The first perspective on what an adaptation is presents a set of criteria. According to Hutcheon for a text to be an adaptation it may change the core identity of the source being adapted or be able to potentially be thought of as a different medium or genre, while still remaining remotely faithful to the core ideas of the original text. This perspective will play an important role in how

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<sup>14</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 7.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 7

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 7-8



previously stated theoretical questions will be answered in relationship to the graphic versions of *The Metamorphosis*. The second perspective is explained as:

...a process of creation, the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation; this has been called both appropriation and salvaging, depending on your perspective.<sup>17</sup>

Here Hutcheon characterizes adaptation as a process ‘of creation’ where the end result is a work that has gone through a transformative shift. This idea of transformation stems from Hutcheon’s description of an adaptation as a type of ‘re-creation.’ These adaptations, similar to the explanation from before, base themselves upon an original work, and manipulate and transform said original work through the various ways the work can be ‘re-interpreted.’ Hutcheon also touches upon how adaptation and appropriation are terms that could be used as placeholders for one another.<sup>18</sup> Lastly, the third is:...seen from the perspective of its process of reception, adaptation is a form of intertextuality: we experience adaptations (as adaptations) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation.<sup>19</sup>

This explanation relies on the reader’s perception of the connection between the adaptation and the work being adapted. The connection is specific to a reader’s memory of the original text and how each of the two versions influence one another. This influence provides an opportunity to solidify a connection between the original and the adapted text that is not just reliant on how a text takes material and “reinterprets and recreates” it, but lets this connection occur through a reader’s own perceived and original synthesis of the texts.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 8

<sup>18</sup> This will be discussed when a definition for appropriation is established and the term is analyzed.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 8

Adaptation and appropriation have the greatest amount of similarities of the four terms used to understand graphic versions of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. In Julie Sanders' *Adaptation and Appropriation* these similarities are deconstructed and examined with definitions for adaptation<sup>20</sup> that mirror what Hutcheon used. Sanders' explains appropriation as something that:

...frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain. This may or may not involve a generic shift, and it may still require the intellectual juxtaposition of (at least) one text against another that we have suggested is central to the reading and spectating experience of adaptations. But the appropriated text or texts are not always as clearly signaled or acknowledged as in the adaptive process.<sup>21</sup>

Similar to Hutcheon's, Sanders' definition provides an explanation for appropriation that directly applies to the way multiple author's of the graphic versions of *The Metamorphosis* have changed the original text. According to Sanders, appropriation has more to do with a creation of an almost completely new project that differs from the original instead of re-interpreting and transforming the original into something that is still familiar, but has its own unique characteristics. Analyzing this with the graphic versions, and even the German to English translation in mind, the distinction between these texts being appropriations or adaptations is somewhat unclear. It is possible to argue that these texts, specifically the graphic ones, are appropriated because they are a completely new product in terms of genre and in some cases content. Yet, on the other hand these texts can be characterized as adaptations because their core structure and inspiration, regardless of the shifts made, is the same as the original text.

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<sup>20</sup> The two definitions are similar because they both revolve around the concept of the relationship between texts. Sanders' shortened definition for adaptation is something that, "signals a relationship with an informing source text or original...although clearly reinterpreted..." Julie Sanders, "What is Appropriation?," in *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London: Routledge, 2006), 26.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 26.

However, in order to fully understand the breadth of these four terms and how they can be connected to the five texts, translation and interpretation must be understood as well. Hutcheon provides an explanation to understand translation when thinking about the relationship between the word and adaptation. In order to provide a well-rounded understanding of how translation relates to adaptation, appropriation, interpretation, and how it can be applied to the graphic versions of *The Metamorphosis*, Hutcheon's definition will be used in conjunction with the definition provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Hutcheon's modern definition of the word explains: "...translations in the form of inter-semiotic transpositions from one sign system (for example, words) to another (for example, images). This is translation but in a very specific sense: as transmutation or transcoding, that is, as necessarily a recoding into a new set of conventions as well as signs."<sup>22</sup>

According to Hutcheon, a translation is much more than just a change in languages. This modern definition explains translation as a shift from one format to another, regardless of language. Hutcheon, specifically gives the example of a transition from "words to image." This definition relates directly to the graphic versions of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* because in the most basic sense these works are transitions from "word to image."

The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of translation is, arguably, much more traditional in terms of how translation is usually viewed as a relationship between text and language. The *OED* explains translation as, "the action or process of turning from one language into another; also, the product of this; a version in a different language."<sup>23</sup> This provides an

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<sup>22</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 16.

<sup>23</sup> "translation, n." OED Online. September 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/204844?redirectedFrom=translation> (accessed December 01, 2015).

understanding of translation as a change over from one language to another, for example the change that occurs in language with Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* to Willa and Edwin Muir's version of *The Metamorphosis*. Structurally, this definition is much stricter than the one used in *A Theory of Adaptation* because of the focus on language and text based changes.

Unlike translation, interpretation is not nearly as directly or easily understood through the provided explanation of the term. The major, critical issue that faces the understanding of interpretation in the context of the relationship between Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*, the translation of this text, and the graphic versions of these works is that the majority of the scholarly analysis of this work is focused on viewing interpretation as a type of literary criticism. This is not the correct analysis in order to understand what interpretation means in relationship with adaptation, appropriation, translation, and the textual and visual context that surrounds that six major texts that correspond with these words. Instead, interpretation will be viewed as an extension of these three words from a much more theoretical point of view.

In "The Object of Interpretation and Interpretive Change," James L. Machor provides an explanation, albeit critical of the idea, for a definition of interpretation that acts as an extension of the concepts that make up adaptation, appropriation, and translation. Machor explains this form of interpretation as, "...a process of decoding, of translating one text into another."<sup>24</sup> The critical nature of his explanation is seen through the questions that he raises because of this definition. He goes on to question, "...what is the 'text' that gets decoded in the first place. Translated into another, the 'text itself' remains elusive, mystified as an unknowable yet

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<sup>24</sup> James L. Machor, "The Object of Interpretation and Interpretive Change," in "Comparative Literature," special issue, *MLN* 113, no. 5 (December 1998): 1126.

somehow reassuring presence.”<sup>25</sup> The first part of this definition, before Machor becomes critical, provides an understanding similar to the basis of Hutcheon’s and Sanders’ explanations for adaptation, appropriation, and translation. He explains how interpretation can be understood as the change from one text into another through a process of understanding the nuances of original text and applying them to the new work. This definition shows multiple parallels to the explanations of the three other words. The parallels are seen in way in which each word displays a similar pattern of transition from the original text to the new one.

Along with explaining ‘interpretation,’ Machor asks questions that focus on the issues with defining the word. These problematic ideas are driven by issues of the origin of the text that is being adapted, appropriated, translated, or interpreted. Machor is not questioning where the text actually comes from, the source or origin of the text, but the relationship between the original text and the interpretive process it is going through. He is also questioning the intent behind the process of interpretation and how much of the original text, the text that is being interpreted, actually stays with the new work, instead of acting as an elusive shell to a new text. He does this through stating how the original text, even after going through a transformative process still, “...remains elusive, mystified as an unknowable yet somehow reassuring presence.”<sup>26</sup> Machor explains how the original text is still present in the adapted, appropriated, translated, or interpreted work but is lost or overshadowed by the text that has borrowed from it. When examining the critical components of this definition in relation to the graphic versions of Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, Machor’s concerns about authorial intent and the relationship between

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 1126.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

texts are appropriate in the context of this analysis. To what extent can the adapted, appropriated, translated, or interpreted works still be considered versions of *The Metamorphosis* even if they stay true to some of Kafka's intentions, but at the same time make drastic changes to the plot, themes, or motifs of original text?



## Chapter One

### Re-Creations and Interpretations of Gregor

*“The positive certainty with which these first measures had been taken comforted him. He felt himself drawn once more into the human circle...”*

— Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*

As Graphic Novel and Comix<sup>27</sup> innovators, Robert Crumb, referred to as R. Crumb, and Peter Kuper have created some of the best regarded works in their creative fields. Yet, even with their successes, their individual forays into the universe of graphic novel versions of literary works are distinct from one another. Both Crumb and Kuper who explore the world of adaptation theory in their graphic takes on Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*, do not fully take advantage of the immense and nuanced work that Kafka created. However, to fully and graphically express the intricacies of *The Metamorphosis* is almost impossible when the work is being adapted, appropriated, translated, or interpreted. Instead these two separate succeed in their ability to fully tell Kafka’s story without detracting or changing it, like the pop-culture versions of the original text do. While the pop-culture versions of *The Metamorphosis* display extreme changes to the original text (This will be expanded on in Chapter 2), Crumb and Kuper’s versions still show differences that are notable and potentially influential to a reader’s understanding of core themes and details that have been observed and studied in the original work.

At the root of these changes lies the issue that surrounds every graphic version being studied, how far can an author and/or illustrator go when applying adaptation theory to a work

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<sup>27</sup> “Comix,” which differ from “comics,” are non-traditional, underground works, which depict situations that are forbidden by the Comics Code Authority, such as sex, violence, or drug use. The “x” at the end suggests that x-rated content is present. Les Daniels, *Comix: A History of Comic Books in America* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1971), 98.



without changing the core of the original text and becoming a different plot or story all together for readers?

#### R. Crumb's "Metamorphosis"

R. Crumb's graphic version of *The Metamorphosis*, which is illustrated by Crumb and written by David Zane Mairowitz, uses a distinct format to re-tell Kafka's story. The physical book acts as part Kafka biography and part graphic versions of Kafka's best known works, with the both parts constantly intersecting with one another. Crumb and Mairowitz use elements from the events that took place during Kafka's life and the story he created to present a brief version of *The Metamorphosis*. The actual graphic version, which totals 18 pages in length, incorporates traditional, textual narrative, and comic illustrations to tell Gregor's story.

Crumb and Mairowitz's work is an adaptation, but not through the lens of Hutcheon's first and most broadly applicable definition of the term. Instead their version of *The Metamorphosis* fits within Hutcheon's second definition, which focuses heavily on the idea of "re-creation." This definition describes adaptations as, "...a process of creation, the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation; this has been called both appropriation and salvaging, depending on your perspective."<sup>28</sup> There are two major reasons as to why this definition fits within the term 're-creation' as a type of adaptation. The first, and most crucial of these reasons is that Crumb and Mairowitz use translated excerpts from Kafka's original text to supplement the narrative element of the graphic adaptation so it does not solely rely on the images and conversations between characters. The second element that details the appropriateness of the term 're-creation' is Crumb's inclusion, as illustrator, of the original cover

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<sup>28</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 8.

of *The Metamorphosis* in German as the first illustration in the adaptation. With this illustration Crumb is literally ‘re-creating’ Kafka’s work for direct use in his own version or adaptation of the work. The other components that distinguish this as ‘re-creation’ type of adaptation rather than a work that involves a more drastic “shift in medium...or genre” that, “...can create a manifestly different interpretation,”<sup>29</sup> are present in the specific elements that are present throughout the work as a whole.

Crumb and Mairowitz’s “Metamorphosis” is divided into three different structural components which helps categorize this work as a type of adaptation. In the sample below all three elements are depicted.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 7-8.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Crumb and David Zane Mairowitz, "Metamorphosis," Graphic novel, in *Kafka*, 5th ed. (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics, 2013), 40, originally published as *Introducing Kafka* (Cambridge, England: Icon Books/Totem Books, 1990).

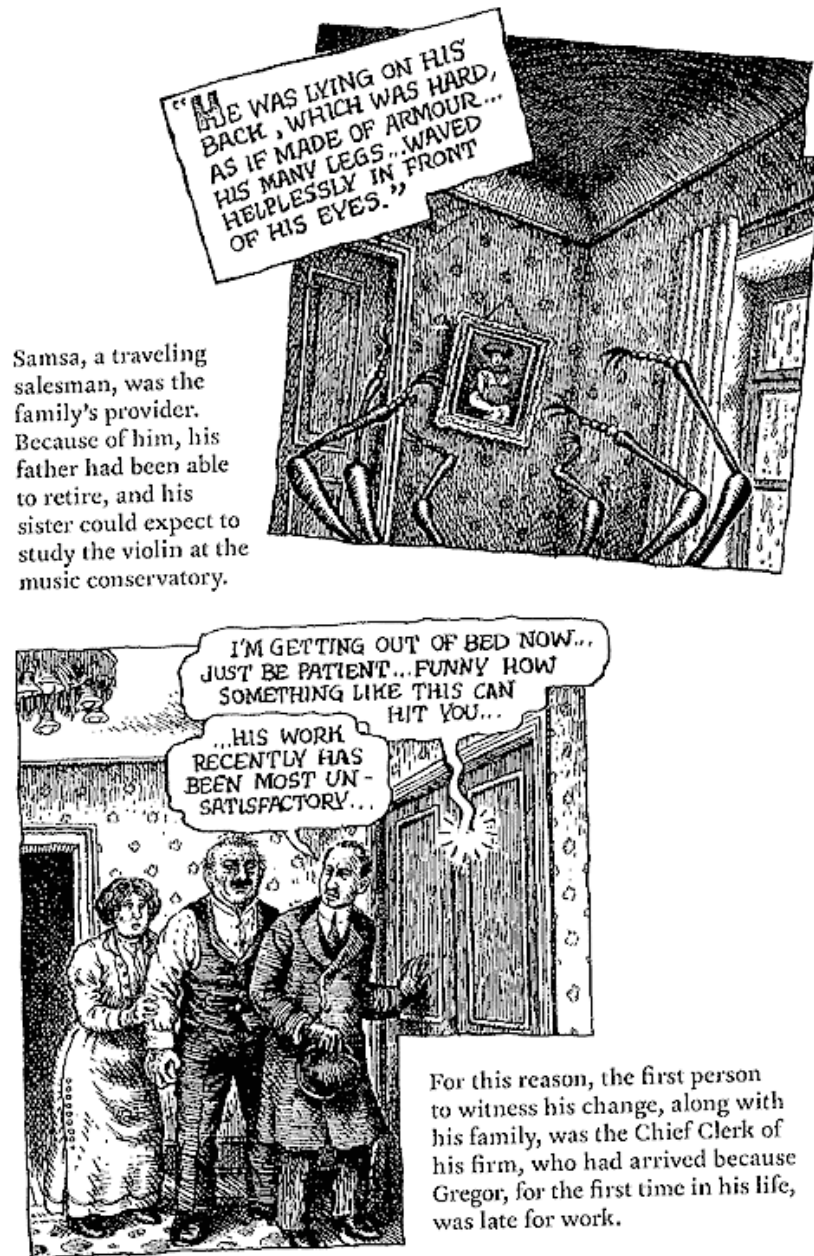


Fig. 2. Robert Crumb, "Metamorphosis", 1990.

This illustration, which depicts the very beginning of the novella when Gregor's new body is being described, is then directly followed by Gregor attempting to get out of bed for work because he is late "for the first time." His tardiness is noticed by work and a representative from his job shows up for the reason. On this page, these events and the accompanying narration for

the events are divided up into three separate sections. The first section is the actual illustrations, which are drawn by Crumb in detail and are separated into two distinct panels. According in Scott McCloud in *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, panels, "...act as sort of general indicator that time and space is being divided."<sup>31</sup> However, in this case the use of the term panels acts synonymously with the term comic, itself. McCloud defines a comic as, "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence intended to convey information and/or to produce and aesthetic response in the viewer."<sup>32</sup> In this case panels are referring to singular images on each page that represent a specific moment in the plot. These panels are broken up by white filler space on each page which creates an environment where this work reads like a graphic novel/book hybrid. This hybrid-like readerly experience has to do with the type-set textual narration on the page. The type-set narration is referring to the blocks of text that are in a uniform and legible font that is not seemingly hand drawn like the other text on the page. This narration differs from the more traditional graphic novel/comic/comix style of text that is also found in this example, but exists as a supplement to Crumb's illustrative adaptation of this moment in the novella. The second section is the narration which is type-set and exists in the filler space between panels. This element acts primarily as the component of the adaptation that keeps the plot moving at a rapid pace. This is because these narrative sections, rather than being excerpts of the original text, are summaries of the events that are occurring. In this re-creation, excerpts from the original text are used, but act as supplements to the narrative summaries. These excerpts are the third component that make up the way this graphic adaptation is divided. In the

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<sup>31</sup> Scott McCloud and Robert Lappan, *Understanding Comics* (New York: Paradox Press, 1999), 99.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 9.

example above, the text excerpt is used to move the plot along, acting as an addition to the narrative in a section where Kafka's original text is more successful in describing Gregor's bodily state than a summary provided by Markowitz. This excerpted description which is drawn into Crumb's illustration also acts as a mirroring description to the image at hand. In this panel, we are shown an image of Gregor's legs pointed toward the ceiling, with the rest of his room—specifically the picture of the woman—facing us directly which provides the illusion that Gregor is playing on his back with his legs up in the air like the excerpt describes. This is a crucial moment in the story, which would be difficult to successfully summarize because the details given by Kafka, such as the way Gregor's, '...many legs...waved helplessly in front of his eyes,' represent the corresponding images.

As mentioned previously, the first page is a major element that helps differentiate this work as a 're-creation' instead of a traditional adaptation that would be a 'manifestly different interpretation' than the original.<sup>33</sup> On this page Crumb and Markowitz not only acknowledge Kafka's role in the new work, but include an illustration of the original cover<sup>34</sup> in German which introduces the importance of the original text into their 're-creation.'

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<sup>33</sup> Crumb and Markowitz, "Metamorphosis," Graphic novel, in *Kafka*, 39.

<sup>34</sup> "The Metamorphosis," in Wikipedia, accessed April 7, 2016, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Metamorphosis#/media/File:Metamorphosis.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Metamorphosis#/media/File:Metamorphosis.jpg).



Fig. 3. Robert Crumb, "Metamorphosis", 1990.

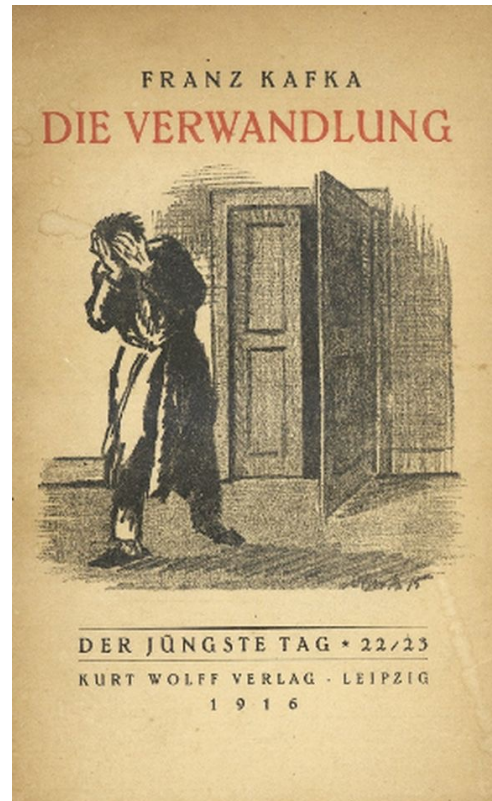


Fig. 4. Ottomar Starke, *The Metamorphosis*, 1914.

Crumb's version of the cover is nearly identical to the original except for a few differences. One of these differences being that Crumb's re-creation is hand drawn—instead of the original title being placed on the page at an angle and being de-saturated. Crumb's illustration has rough, round edges and the illustration of the man is coarser and sharper in terms of the boldness and thickness of the lines that surround the door. The text on the cover page is nearly identical—all of the words, dates, and numbers on the original are present on Crumb's version and are in their original places.

While the preciseness of Crumb's image in comparison to the original is important to this work being classified as a 're-creation,' the overarching importance behind the inclusion of the reproduction of the cover lies in the fact that is this also the first page of the 're-creation.' The

root of this importance comes from how, because of this inclusion, the original *Metamorphosis* is ingrained in a reader's mind from the very beginning of the reading experience—creating an experience that does not let them forget the original text, which lets Crumb's work act as a supplementary 're-creation.'

The original text's prominence on the page is also re-affirmed by the expository commentary that is included as a precursor to the title. Crumb and Markowitz's precursor is the bold statement, "This, very likely the most famous line in modern literature, begins Kafka's masterpiece...."<sup>35</sup> They are referring to the first line in Kafka's text which is included on the first page in the original German and an English translation.<sup>36</sup>

When examining the way Crumb and Markowitz's have adapted Kafka's work, the physical three-part structure they use in their re-creation holds a significant importance for the way the plot and themes in the text are adapted. Throughout the original work the idea of Gregor as an "other" is constantly insinuated.<sup>37</sup> Gregor as an other in the original text is depicted through the non-human description of him at the very beginning, the way the other characters respond to his non-human form, and how Gregor, himself, responds to his new form. Gregor is seen physically as an other from the first sentence when the image of him as a gigantic insect, or bug, or creature is impressed upon readers. The other characters in the Samsa family who are introduced soon after are human and "normal" compared to the tragic protagonist in Kafka's story. With Gregor's physical "otherness" established to the readers, the other characters in the story then

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<sup>35</sup> Crumb and Markowitz, "Metamorphosis," Graphic novel, in *Kafka*, 39.

<sup>36</sup> In their adaptation Crumb and Markowitz do not use the translation by Willa and Edwin Muir. Instead the translations were done by Markowitz.

<sup>37</sup> Martha Kuhlman, "Visualizing the Unrepresentable: Graphic Novel Adaptations of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*," in *Drawn from the Classics: Essays on Graphic Adaptations of Literary Works*, ed. Stephen Ely Tabachnick and Esther Bendit Saltzman (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2015), 207.



begin to establish the same ideas through the way they treat Gregor. However, his family goes a step further when their views of his physical “otherness” manifest into viewing him as a creature instead of human, attempting to strip him of his possessions, and ultimately ostracizing him. As an “other” in the original text Gregor’s tragicness is displayed through his interior monologues but in Crumb and Markowitz’s adaptation there are more options for this “otherness” to be depicted because they are dealing in the visual realm.

In her essay “Visualizing the Unrepresentable: Graphic Novel Adaptations of Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*” Marta Kuhlman discusses “otherness” in both the graphic adaptation and the novella with the use of Charles Hatfield’s definition of the word. Kuhlman explains how:

“Otherness” is a useful point of departure for examining graphic novel adaptations of *The Metamorphosis* both because it signals the difficulty of representing the complexity of Gregor’s narrative position, oscillating as it does between human and non-human perception, and because it alludes to the aesthetic shift entailed in analyzing comics—what Charles Hatfield calls the “otherness” of reading comics...<sup>38</sup>

Kuhlman then goes on to explain Hatfield’s definition of “otherness” in relationship to *The Metamorphosis* as:

The fractured surface of the comics page, with its demarcation into different images, shapes, and symbols, presents the reader with a surfeit of interpretive options, creating an experience that is always de-centered, unstable, unfixable...<sup>39</sup>

With Kuhlman’s explanation of ‘otherness’ in “adaptations of *The Metamorphosis*”<sup>40</sup> supplemented with Hatfield’s definition of the word as a way to read and interpret graphic novels and comics, the specific use of ‘otherness’ in Crumb and Markowitz’s re-creation can be applied to multiple areas of their work. The multi-dimensionality of their work is rooted in the different

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

way in which the re-creation is fractured. Hatfield's definition of 'otherness' focusses on the 'fractured surface' of the comic or the graphic novel—which Crumb and Markowitz's adaptation is, however the fractured nature of their work is much more complicated than just images.

Kuhlman explains how Crumb depicts one element of the 'otherness' through structure.

She states that:

Crumb insinuates Gregor's otherness through the use of off-kilter panels to show the creature's point of view, in contrast to his family, the boarders or his boss, who are represented in panels at conventional right angles. Gregor's panels are not only presented at an angle, but also appear in irregular patchwork shapes like a narrative puzzle that cannot fit together. Captions and word balloons overlap and exceed the panel boundaries as if they were also separate fragments assembled into a kind of destabilized collage.<sup>41</sup>

The physical structural fractured-ness, which has been previously described, is rooted in the multiple ways Gregor's story is told on each page: through images, excerpts from the text, conversations between characters, and textual summaries of the events that are happening. These four elements are meshed together—with different elements being placed at different angles and blank, white filler space existing in the spots between elements. The multi-dimensional aspect of this 'otherness,' which Kuhlman describes Crumb using in the passage above, exists because the structural fractured-ness, how the individual panels and blocks of texts are laid out on each page, represents how the story is fractured through summaries and missing content and how Gregor's character is emotionally fractured. This 'otherness' is related to Gregor's depiction in the individual panels and on each page. Kuhlman explains how compared to the other members of his family and the other characters in his life who are depicted, the depictions of Gregor are deliberately, sloppily placed on each page in order to display a sense of disorder. This disorder is usually mimicked in the text that accompanies the image, like in the first example image used in

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 208.

the chapter. In the panel that is dedicated to Gregor in Fig. 2, both the image and the text are tilted—both are at angles and do not line up with one another compared to the other panel on the page which is in a uniform order and focuses on the other character in the novella.

The multi-dimensional aspect of the fractured element of ‘otherness’ that Kuhlman and Hatfield describe is present within one more element of the adaptation—the summarized segments of text. Throughout Crumb and Markowitz’s adaptation of the text there are summarized segments of the corresponding events that are presented with the images. These summarized segments act as fractured elements of the original text and help contribute to the way the text interprets Gregor’s otherness’ through the specific choices used in each segment and their placements on the page. In the example below, which predominately focuses on Gregor, the text is mostly composed of summaries of the original work.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Crumb and Markowitz, "Metamorphosis," Graphic novel, in *Kafka*, 42.



Fig. 5. Robert Crumb, "Metamorphosis", 1990.

This page, which also depicts the most extreme case of the "patchwork-like," "narrative puzzle"<sup>43</sup> that Kuhlman describes, has four examples of summaries of the original text. These examples range from straightforward summaries to combinations of summary and excerpts. However, even with the use of excerpts the segments of text that contain them are still fragmented and do not explain the full sequence of events that are taking place within that

<sup>43</sup> Kuhlman, "Visualizing the Unrepresentable: Graphic," in *Drawn from the Classics*, 208.

moment in the text—they only cover portions of the textual and thematic nuances in the original work.<sup>44</sup> The text acts as a fragment in two interconnected ways—the content of the text block takes multiple plot points of the original body of work and strings them together, and structurally the full segment is broken up through the use of an ellipsis. Kuhlman describes Crumb using the ‘patchwork-like’ structure to, “...show the [Gregor’s] point of view...” through the use of an ellipsis that continues into the text block on the right, connects the two fragments.<sup>45</sup>

The text in the upper left, in combination with the corresponding image, focuses on a crucial moment in the original text when Gregor begins to understand the realities of his new life. The image directly reflects the content of the summarized text instead of focusing on a segment that was not included in the shortened graphic version for the purposes of covering a wider breadth of material from the original work. This passage and its accompanying visual are faithful to the following segments in the original text. These segments in comparison to the segments for the events that take place on the previous page of Crumb’s version occur much later in the novella. This leads to the conclusion that Crumb and Markowitz along with summarizing segments of the original text, purposefully left out sections of the original text, further undermining Kafka’s authorial intent. This undermining occurs because, not only is Gregor illustrated, which knowingly goes against Kafka’s wishes, but content from the original text is removed from this re-creation and re-ordered. However, even with passages left out of Crumb’s “Metamorphosis,” the core of the plot remains true to Kafka’s original story because the segments that are purposefully left out are touched upon during other instances in the re-creation.

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<sup>44</sup>The first block of text in the upper left hand corner of the page is a summary of the original text.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

The first of the two passages that are summarized in the upper left hand segment of text represents the moment in *The Metamorphosis* when Gregor begins to realize that he is an inconvenience to his family. This occurs in the original text when Gregor:

...stayed there all night, spending the time partly in a light slumber, from which his hunger kept waking him up with a start, and partly in worrying and sketching vague hopes, which all led to the same conclusion, that he must lie low for the present and, by exercising patience and the utmost consideration, help the family to bear the inconvenience he was bound to cause them in his present condition.<sup>46</sup>

The second of the passages that is included in summarized section of text focuses on Gregor, "... listening to his family through the door of his room...."<sup>47</sup> In the original text, this is discussed when:

...Gregor could get no news directly, he overheard a lot from the neighboring rooms, and as soon as voices were audible, he would run to the door of the room concerned and press his whole body against it. In the first few days especially there was no conversation that did not refer to him somehow, even if only indirectly.<sup>48</sup>

While the summarized version of this section in conjunction with the accompanying image provide a fair representation of the original passage and does not include new material, there is another substantial gap between the two passages that make up the first block of text on this page. The events that take place in the subsequent panels on the same page occur in between Gregor's musings about not being an inconvenience to his family and listening to the conversations taking place behind his closed door.<sup>49</sup> In the two pages between these segments the

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<sup>46</sup> Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," in *The Complete Stories*, 132.

<sup>47</sup> Crumb and Markowitz, "Metamorphosis," Graphic novel, in *Kafka*, 42.

<sup>48</sup> Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," in *The Complete Stories*, 134.

<sup>49</sup> Specifically Gregor's feelings about being an inconvenience occur on page 132 in the edition of the translation being used and the paragraph that establishes Gregor listening through his door is on page 134.

specific scene when Grete brings Gregor a “fresh bowl of milk,”<sup>50</sup> notices it is untouched, and proceeds to bring him, “...him a whole selection of food, all set out on an old newspaper,”<sup>51</sup> occurs. This scene places further emphasis on the concept that Crumb and Markowitz’s work is a ‘patchwork-like,’ ‘narrative puzzle’ that manipulates the order of events in the original work while still following the general trajectory of the novella and not detracting from the core plot and themes.

As ‘re-creators’ of *The Metamorphosis*, Crumb and Markowitz are at an intersection between the intentions that Kafka had for his own work and the choices they had to make for their own adaptation which ultimately undermine aspects of the original text. Crumb and Markowitz’s “Metamorphosis,” is less of a traditional adaptation which would equate a ‘change in genre and medium that alters key elements of the original work,’ but is a ‘re-creation’—where aspects of the medium change (there is still a large percentage of the work that is just text), the genre stays the same, and the plot follows the same trajectory. However, even with all of these elements that stay relatively in-sync with Kafka’s text and authorial intentions, the work is still undermined by depicting Gregor visually. The illustrations of Gregor create an experience for the reader that was never meant to occur. Gregor’s image was meant to be left to a readers imagination. However, the question remains if Crumb and Markowitz’s ‘re-creation,’ not only creates a new experience, but influences and changes how the original text is interpreted and understood.

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<sup>50</sup> Crumb and Markowitz, "Metamorphosis," Graphic novel, in *Kafka*, 42.

<sup>51</sup> Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," in *The Complete Stories*, 133.

Peter Kuper's *The Metamorphosis*

On the cover of *The Metamorphosis* by Peter Kuper, the phrase “adapted by” is displayed in big, bold letters.<sup>52</sup> Before we are presented with an opportunity to experience the work and determine for ourselves what category it falls into Kuper has done this for us, instilling into reading experience that this work is an adaptation and should not be viewed as anything else because it goes against his (the author’s) intentions.

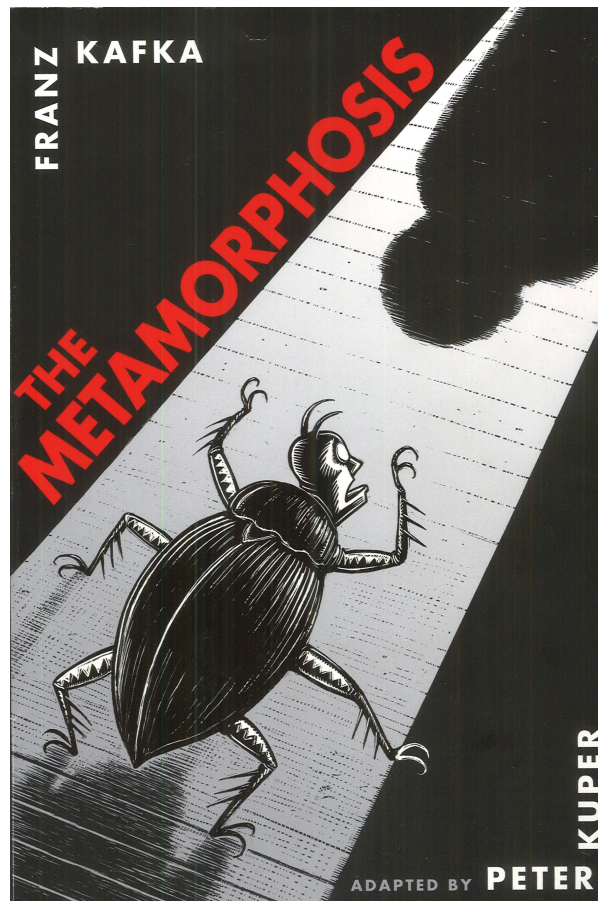


Fig. 6. Peter Kuper, *The Metamorphosis*, 2003.

Yet, if Kuper wants us (the reader) to follow his authorial intentions, is it fair that he did not, as a reader, follow the intentions of the author he is adapting from? To implicate and assume that a

<sup>52</sup> Peter Kuper, *The Metamorphosis*, trans. Kerstin Hasenpusch (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004), Front cover.



reader will agree with an author who has already labeled and analyzed their own work, takes away from both the reader's experience and their role in a book's inherent need for critique and criticism. However, to regain our power of analysis as readers we must look past the author's pre-existing labels and examine the work ourselves.

At first glance, Kuper's work is a much darker representation of *The Metamorphosis* than Crumb's and the other works that will be discussed in the next chapter. This overwhelming darkness is primarily due to the stark color contrasts that permeate each panel, the predominant use of the color black more than white, and the thick, harsh lines that are present on every page. However, this darkness is not just a feature of the work that is present on the surface—it is present in throughout the plot and themes of this *Metamorphosis*. Kuper's version of events is the closest of the five to the original text in terms of following the plot and including small details. However, we can attribute this to the fact that Kuper's *Metamorphosis* is the longest of the graphic works in question and is even longer than the original text. One element that is difficult to attribute to page length and has more to do with the way Kuper follows the original text carefully, in terms of the plot, is how this work is separated into three parts like the original text. Part one begins, "when Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from disturbing dreams, he found himself transformed...."<sup>53</sup> Part two separates the point crucial point when Gregor's father violently pushes him back into his room and Gregor begins to realize that the things he once enjoyed, such as bread and milk, are now disgusting to him.<sup>54</sup> Finally part three separates the point from when the fatal apple is lodged into Gregor's back and how he is coping with the

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<sup>53</sup> Kuper, *The Metamorphosis*, 7.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 28-31.

accident one month later.<sup>55</sup> This version of *The Metamorphosis* is the only one that includes a separation between the sections—directly as Kafka intended it.<sup>56</sup>

While Kuper's *Metamorphosis* includes elements of the original text that are not present in other graphic versions, there are considerable themes and motifs that are not focused on, such as questions of identity and the human condition, where the focus is placed instead on other aspects of the original text, specifically critiques on capitalism. Even though this shift in focus is up to Kuper's authorial discretion, this places us as readers, yet again, at crossroads between the original author's intentions and how far the "adapting" author can go when changing the themes, content, and medium without fully changing the way a reader may interpret the original text.

In the case of Kuper's version, two major changes occur that are not present in Crumb's re-creation. While these changes do not detract from the actual plot, they inherently change the way the original story is viewed because in order to understand Kuper's work prior knowledge of *The Metamorphosis* is necessary. The way Kuper structures his pages and the order of the panels on each page make it difficult to understand the order of events without having read *The Metamorphosis* before and retaining a substantial level of knowledge about the original text. Like in Crumb's version, the "patchwork-like," "narrative puzzle"<sup>57</sup> is present, but the order of

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 50-52

<sup>56</sup> In a letter to Felice Bauer, written between November 30th and December 1st 1912, Kafka explains the structure of the novella. He explains how the work is structured by sections by telling Bauer that, "...the final section is beginning to take shape." This leads us to conclude that the three sections were put in place by Kafka and an editor instead of a translator taking liberties with a subsequent edition or translation. Kuper structures his version of *The Metamorphosis* into three sections. Kafka, "Kafka, Max Brod, and Editors," in *The Metamorphosis: A New Translation*, 58.

<sup>57</sup> Kuhlman, "Visualizing the Unrepresentable: Graphic," in *Drawn from the Classics*, 208.

panels and sections of text cannot be differentiated because, at first glance, there is no clear reading pattern. The example below shows the extent of this entanglement.<sup>58</sup>

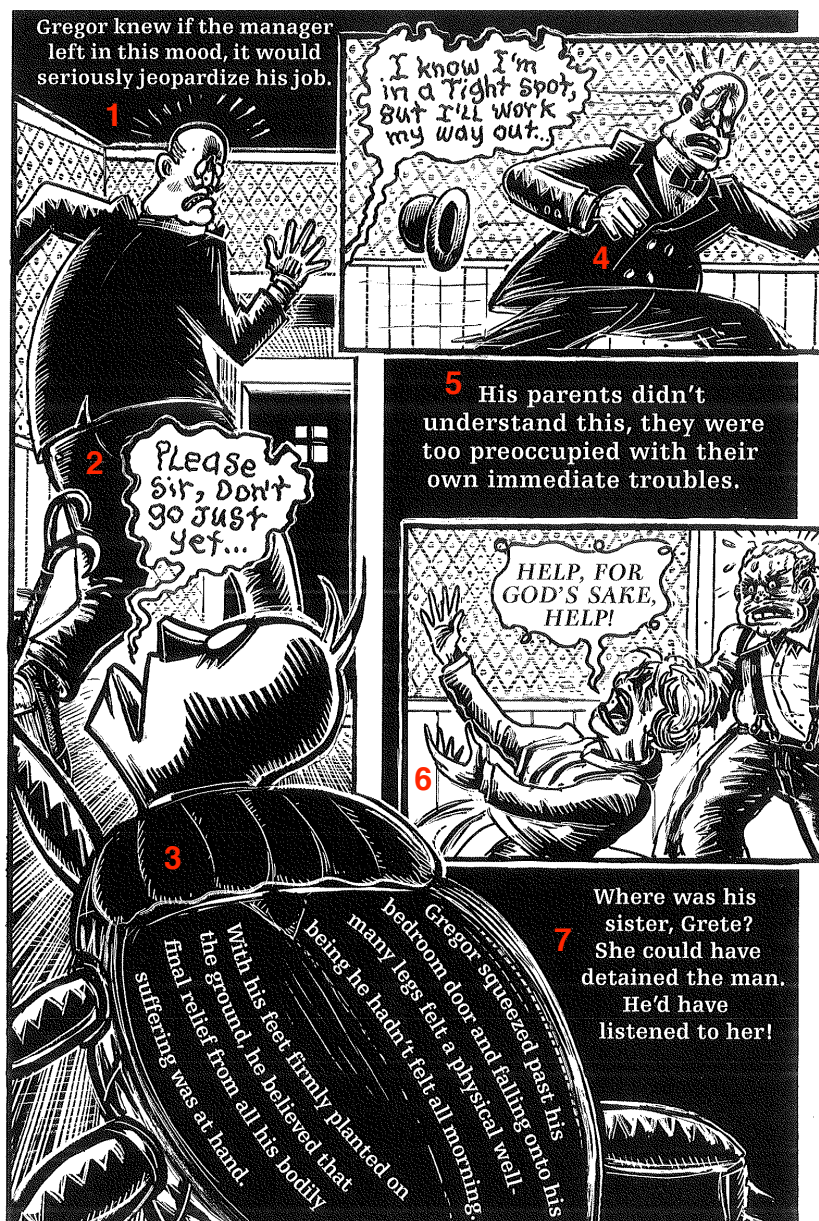


Fig. 7. Peter Kuper, *The Metamorphosis*, 2003.

At first glance, the page above could be read like a traditional page in a graphic novel or comic book—from left to right and reading the images and the text bubbles at the same time. However,

<sup>58</sup> Kuper, *The Metamorphosis*, 26.

when taking a detailed look at the order and placement of the individual panels on this page, a traditional reading pattern cannot be upheld because the sequential order panels and narrative blocks of text is indistinguishable without prior knowledge of the order of events.

Without a prior knowledge of the events that take place on this page, from the original text, there is no basis for knowing the designated order of reading because there are multiple orders of events that could potentially make sense when using context clues from the previous page and the page that follows it. On the previous page Gregor's Parents and Boss open his bedroom door and see him for the first time and on the following page Gregor tries to convince his Boss that he can still do his job. Therefore, when focusing on the page in question a number of different reading patterns would make sense, without those patterns being correct. By assigning a number to each panel or narrative block of text different possibilities can be surmised. In the example the panels are numbered in order, however this amendment is not present in the text—creating an opportunity for multiple orders to be thought of as correct. Without the prior context that the original text provides one of these orders could be: 2,1,4,3,5,6,7. Another potential order that does not detract from the context of the previous page and the page that follows is: 1,4,2,5,6,3,7. There are surely other possibilities that could be constructed.

With the need for prior knowledge in order to fully understand Kuper's version of the text established, we can analyze how Kuper has drastically changed the original text in two ways without detracting from the plot. Both changes are related to the way Kuper's images reflect something that is different than in the text. The first change that is reflective of a fundamental difference between the two works is the way Gregor is depicted. This is not related to Kuper

having illustrated Gregor, which we have already established as a fact that goes against Kafka's wishes, but is related to the way Gregor is illustrated in comparison to Crumb's re-creation.

Both Kuper and Crumb depict Gregor as a 'monstrous vermin,' but in the case of Kuper's *Metamorphosis* this 'vermin' has the body of a bug and a head that belongs to the Gregor that is depicted in pre-transformation flashbacks. In a visual version of original text, this 'monstrous vermin' being a bug-human hybrid is completely acceptable because we have know way of knowing if Gregor had a bug-human hybrid head. In Kafka's original text only a description of Gregor's body is mentioned without any specific details that point to what his head may look like. However, this visualization of Gregor only works up until a certain point in the text, when Gregor stops viewing himself as human, but Kuper depicts Gregor as this hybrid up until the very end; which causes this issue to be raised. In the example below, which depicts the moment before Gregor dies, his human head and his bug-human hybrid head are shown.<sup>59</sup> This crucial moment in Kuper's version shows the lack of transition that Gregor went through in comparison to the original work.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 70.



Fig. 8. Peter Kuper, *The Metamorphosis*, 2003.

In the upper left hand corner of this example, Gregor is depicted with the previously mentioned bug-human hybrid head and the indistinguishable bug body. In the lower right hand corner there is a painting that shows Gregor pre-transformation with the same head and facial features. The only difference between the pre and post-transformation Gregor, besides his gaunt face and antennae, is that he is wearing glasses.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup> In the original text, Kafka never mentions Gregor's appearance prior to his transformation or that he wears glasses.

The issue with the lack of change in Gregor's face is that it erases the emotional transformation that he goes through. Instead of showing a further visual transformation that parallels the emotional transformation, which would happen by finally changing Gregor's human face into one that is full that of a bug, Kuper keeps this fundamental human visual characteristic which stunts Gregor's emotional development in this version of the text.

In Kuhlman's analysis of Kuper's *The Metamorphosis*, the use of human head characteristics is explained as an instance of metaphor. Kuhlman expounds on this idea by exploring how:

Kuper decides on a compromise between the literal and figurative interpretations of Kafka's metaphor by depicting Gregor as an insect with a human head. Gregor's split subjectivity is expressed both through the incommensurability between his thoughts (in speech balloons and captions) and his insect incarnation, and through the play between his human facial expressions and his insect body. The decision to use a human head—albeit spiked with antennae—is a savvy one since it allows Kuper to show a range of emotions of Gregor's face as he grapples with his situation. His insect-human hybrid body, drawn with dramatic striations and triangles to emphasize his exoskeleton, contrasts with the memories of his former self...<sup>61</sup>

While Kuhlman aptly describes how Gregor's bug-human hybrid head is representative of his own inner dilemma—how he feels human on the inside, but his outer appearance does not represent this—they do not explain why later on in Kuper's version, Gregor's own feelings about his dilemma change and the visual manifestation of his original feelings does not. Kuhlman's position is Kuper's decision is a savvy one. However, this lack of change prevents readers from understanding the full range of Gregor's emotional responses in Kuper's version. This is due to the fact that the plot, themes, and motifs are not solely represented through the textual component of Kuper's work—but the visual as well. The majority of the plot is in fact represented by the

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<sup>61</sup> Kuhlman, "Visualizing the Unrepresentable: Graphic," in *Drawn from the Classics*, 211.

visual elements, with dialogue and supplementary text added for necessary progression. Due to this, Gregor's lack of change in appearance prevents this progression because the reader is not granted the opportunity to understand his major emotional change visually. This emotional change is instead presented to us through context clues in Kuper's version, where in Kafka's original text Gregor's emotional transformation is explicitly noted.

In the original text, the crucial moment where Gregor's emotional transformation takes place occurs just before the fatal apple becomes lodged in his back. This moment, where Gregor fully views himself as a shell of who he used to be intersects with Gregor seeing his father in his work clothes and acting as a responsible provider to their family. In this moment, Gregor and his father switch roles—Gregor can no longer be his family's provider so the his Father must take over the role. This switch takes an emotional toll on Gregor that is not explicit in Kuper's version. In the original text, this moment is explicitly highlighted when Gregor:

...was already beginning to feel breathless, just as in his former life his lungs had not been very dependable. As he was staggering along, trying to concentrate his energy on running, hardly keeping his eyes open; in his dazed state never even thinking of any other escape than simply going forward; and having almost forgotten that the walls were free to him, which in this room were well provided with finely carved pieces of furniture full of knobs and crevices —suddenly something lightly flung landed close behind him and rolled before him.<sup>62</sup>

Gregor's emotional transformation is clearly outlined in this excerpt through the use of "former life," "never even thinking of any other escape," and "forgotten." These words and phrases emphasizes Gregor's apathetic feelings about the life he used to have and how he has given up on the idea that this is not permanent. In Kuper's version none of this is clear, which prevents readers from fully grasping the emotional transformation that occurs without, again, having to

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<sup>62</sup> Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," in *The Complete Stories*, 146.



refer back to the original text. Instead Kuper's version, like previously mentioned, visually represents the opposite of this emotional change because he does not depict Gregor's human-bug hybrid head finally transforming into a head that better represents the characters emotions at this crucial point.

Along with the problematic visual representation of Gregor as a bug-human hybrid throughout Kuper's version, instead of stopping at a crucial point, Kuper visually focuses on themes of capitalism and the how the worker is taken advantage of much more so than Gregor's own emotional crises—as previously noted. Kuper's change in focal point defers the meaning behind the text from a story that largely focuses on the human condition to a critique on capitalism. While, these themes are undeniably present in the original text, there are not whole sections dedicated to them. In Kuper's version the full page panels that are dedicated to capitalism creates an environment for the reader where these themes take precedence over the human condition. This is not only through the dedicated panels to these themes, but the already established lack of physical change we see when Gregor begins to feel like a shell of his old self.

The panels that focus on a critique capitalism are overwhelmingly physical and intricate. Kuper's visual interpretations of these themes are boisterous and clear—there is no question as to what these illustrations are about. They feature money, a large version of his boss pointing to a small version of him and vice versa, alarm clocks and other references to time, and Gregor running around a clock.<sup>63</sup> Unlike some of Kuper's other illustrations which only allude to themes in the original text, such as Gregor's feeling about his Mother and Sister removing his furniture,

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<sup>63</sup> Kuper, *The Metamorphosis*, 12-15.

these illustrations are clear in their themes and purpose. This clarity is what switches the focus of Kuper's version to something different than Kafka's original text. The example below shows the moment in Kuper's version where Gregor's former self is depicted "running around a clock."<sup>64</sup>



Fig. 9. Peter Kuper, *The Metamorphosis*, 2003.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.15.

Textually, the example above does not change in content from the original text, albeit for this portion of the story being slightly condensed. What does change is the meaning behind the text because of the visual representations that are attached. These visual representations are what solidify the critique on capitalism that is not as overtly present in the original text as it is in Kuper's version.

While there are many different interpretations by scholars of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, the text is not usually considered a critique of capitalism. Instead, the more common understanding of the text is that it is about the human condition and identity. Kuper's focus on the evils of capitalism inform for how both his text and the original text are to be read and understood because, as previously established, knowledge of the original text is needed to full understand Kuper's version. The influence that Kuper's text has unto the original is problematic because it further prevents a separation between the two texts—where they could exist indecent of one another—but instead creates an environment for the reader where Kuper's version, even after establishing a “adaptation” that closely follows the original, is still dependent on the original text to establish structure and plot points.

Again, Kuhlman establishes how Kuper's thematic change informs a reader's interpretation of his version of the text. Kuhlman explains how Kuper's version is:

...most inclined towards a Marxist reading of Gregor as an alienated worker in the modern world, defeated by the equation of time and money. Kuper emphasizes how Gregor's life is dominated by the tyranny of his boss, his crushing debt, and a constant anxiety about time—a clock appears on six out of the seven first pages. A wide range of inventive page layouts and visual metaphors express his despair: in one instance, Gregor is depicted trapped in an hourglass, just keeping his head above the mass of bills that trickles away beneath him; on another page, he is running around the face of a clock like a hamster in a wheel. His desperate pursuit of money is exposed as futile and worthless

when his family manages to survive without him thanks to their thrift and ingenuity, thus rendering his alienation from his job and his family complete.<sup>65</sup>

While, this ‘marxist’ ideology is informed in Kuper’s version of the text through the use of images, in the original text this is not as clear because there are no supplemental images to enforce this idea. In the example above, the visual interpretation of Kafka’s marxism is what emphasizes this as a theme within Kuper’s version. Without the visual marxist ideology, the original text and Kuper’s *Metamorphosis* would have similar amounts of content that focuses on a capitalist critique. However, the lack of direct content on marxism and capitalism did not stop theorists like Theodor Adorno from viewing the original text as a marxist critique. Like Kuper’s problematic theme change in his version of *The Metamorphosis*, Stanley Corngold highlights how Adorno’s reading of the original text as marxist is problematic.

In “Reconstructing Adorno On Kafka,” Corngold examines Adorno’s reading of *The Metamorphosis* as a critique of capitalism and underlines how Adorno’s focus on this singular facet of a multi-dimensional and complicated text is problematic. Corngold explains how Adorno interprets the purpose of specific imagery in Kafka’s text as, “...a reject of capitalism... to exploit the mad, carnivalesque humor of the moment...”<sup>66</sup> The moment in question is referring to the point in the original text when the picture of Gregor, pre-transformation, in his lieutenant’s uniform is seen.<sup>67</sup> Corngold goes on to explain how Adorno’ interprets this moment as, “...having Lieutenant Samsa demand respect from the very bug into which he has been

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<sup>65</sup> Kuhlman, "Visualizing the Unrepresentable: Graphic," in *Drawn from the Classics*, 211-12.

<sup>66</sup> Stanley Corngold, "Adorno's 'Notes on Kafka': A Critical Reconstruction," in *Lambent Traces: Franz Kafka* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 162.

<sup>67</sup> Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," in *The Complete Stories*, 126.

changed.”<sup>68</sup> He goes on to show that Adorno’s view of the “motive” behind this specific imagery, “lies far to one side of the Marxist parable that [he] wants to illustrate.”<sup>69</sup> Specifically, this ‘marxist parable’ refers to Adorno interpreting Kafka’s stories as, “...capitalist reification[s] of human consciousness.”<sup>70</sup> Viewing *The Metamorphosis* as a marxist parable is problematic because content in the text does not support these ideas. Instead, like Kuper, Adorno is projecting a set of themes on to the text that are not explicitly highlighted.

Adorno’s interpretation of the text as a problematic marxist parable helps us conclude where Kuper’s version of Kafka’s text fits under the umbrella of adaptation theory. As previously noted, Kuper identifies his *Metamorphosis* as an adaptation. However when taking Adorno’s views on the original text into account, Kuper’s work is an interpretation. Taking Machor’s definition of interpretation into account,<sup>71</sup> this definition is the most appropriation to classify Kuper’s work because of the complex choices that are made in regard to the themes, visual depictions of characters, and need for an understanding original text to fully understand Kuper’s choices. Adaptation is not an appropriate term for this text because it is too complicated and does not fully represent all of the changes made. Instead, interpretation is appropriate because of the broadness of the term.

Kuper’s interpretation of Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* presents a problematic, yet nuanced critique of capitalism that redirects the trajectory of the story, but at the same time neglects the emotional transformation that Gregor goes through. This multifaceted interpretation

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<sup>68</sup> Corngold, "Adorno's 'Notes on Kafka,'" in *Lambent Traces: Franz Kafka*, 162.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 160.

<sup>71</sup> Machor explains interpretation as, “...a process of decoding, of translating one text into another.”Machor, "The Object of Interpretation," 1126.

provides a different way too look at the themes and motifs in Kafka's story than Crumb and Markowitz's 're-creation.' However, what both versions of *The Metamorphosis* do, that is equally problematic, is that they undermine Kafka's authorial intentions by not only illustrating Gregor, but removing and rearranging sections of text, and pushing important themes, such as identity and the human condition, from the foreground to the background.



## Chapter Two

### Gregor Samsa's Role in Pop-Culture

“Not until it was twilight did Gregor awake out of a deep sleep, more like a swoon than a sleep.”

— Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*

The “Metamorphsimpsons” and “Good Ol’ Gregor Brown” are versions of *The Metamorphosis* that bring a unique perspective to the realm of adaptation theory.<sup>72</sup> The “Metamorphsimpsons,” which Peter Kuper wrote as well, and “Good Ol’ Gregor Brown” by Robert Sikoryak embrace the absurdity of Kafka’s *Die Verwandlung*, like the previous two adaptations, but present a new element from the various possibilities of adaptation. The “Metamorphsimpsons” employs the illustrative style and characters found in Matt Groening’s *The Simpsons* universe and “Good Ol’ Gregor Brown” uses the same characteristics that are found in Charles Schulz’s *Peanuts* universe. These two universes use both popular culture and Kafka to create multi-level interpretive versions of both the pop-culture they are based on and the narrative they take from Kafka’s work.

However, while these two take aspects of two well-known pre-formed worlds and mesh them with Kafka’s world there is one major difference that changes our understanding of each specific interpretive version. In the “Metamorphsimpsons,” which combines the world of *The Simpsons*, created by Matt Groening, and *The Metamorphosis*, Matt Groening has a role in the creation of this version.<sup>73</sup> In the case of Robert Sikoryak’s “Good Ol’ Gregor Brown” he is an outsider to both the *Peanuts*’ universe and *The Metamorphosis*’ universe. Sikoryak’s

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<sup>72</sup> This perspective is not seen in the more stylistically darker versions; Peter Kuper’s *The Metamorphosis* and R. Crumb and Mairowitz’s *Kafka*.

<sup>73</sup> While Peter Kuper is the creative force behind it, Groening is the one who publishes it in a *Simpsons* themed anthology.



combination of these two universes creates a third universe, where both *Peanuts* and *The Metamorphosis* are both changed to form the third. Groening and Kuper do not create a third universe because they are not outsiders to *The Simpsons'* universe; instead they adapt Kafka within it. In Sikoryak's version he takes two universes that he has no connection to. Instead of having at least one half of the original creators behind one of these pre-formed worlds and them being potentially able to give creative input, he takes content that already exists in the public sphere and creates something that is unique to his own artistic vision.

These two versions use popular culture as a tool to establish a connection between the highly esteemed literary nature of *The Metamorphosis* and the more accessible and comparatively low-brow; *The Simpsons* and *Peanuts*. The connection between the two individual pop-culture works and Kafka creates an environment where there are elements of each individual component; i.e., *The Simpsons*, *Peanuts*, and *The Metamorphosis*, that are lost within the adaptation process and elements that are gained as well. Specifically, in the "Metamorphsimpsons" there are characters that are added to *The Metamorphosis* storyline that are crucial to *The Simpsons* universe. These additions contribute to the plot being told successfully through the lens of *The Simpsons*. While, in "Good Ol' Gregor Brown" crucial characters from *The Metamorphosis* are left out to conform to the pre-existing universe of *Peanuts*.

### Kuper's "Metamorphsimpsons"

At the core of the text, the "Metamorphsimpsons" is an *adaptation*.<sup>74</sup> Staying true to this definition, The "Metamorphsimpsons" remains faithful to the core of the text and the plot while still having a drastic contextual change. This change occurs for two major reasons; this version of *The Metamorphosis* is told in a pre-formed universe and major plot details are replaced by those already present in this universe. Kuper places *The Metamorphosis* in a universe that exists, primarily, within pop-culture. He establishes the world of "Gregor Samsa" within the world of Homer Simpson<sup>75</sup> and Springfield<sup>76</sup> which creates obvious changes within the story. However, these changes do not take away from the larger plot that Kafka established in the original work.

The obvious changes that occur between Kafka's written text and Kuper's graphic text are the result of the overlapping of both universes. For instance, in the "Metamorphsimpsons" not only do the characters found in *The Metamorphosis* exhibit their own behavioral traits, but the characters from *The Simpsons* show their own pre-existing character dynamics and qualities. Kuper's graphic adaptation changes the world we as readers are familiar with, being Gregor Samsa, to Homer Simpson. Kuper's graphic work displays Kafka's world in the likeness of *The Simpsons*, with the characters that play crucial roles in the original story being replaced with characters that are already present within the new, adaptive universe. The same specific roles,

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<sup>74</sup> Again, Hutcheon describes this type of adaptation as, "...a formal entity or product, an adaptation is an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works. This "transcoding" can involve a shift of medium (a poem to a film) or genre (an epic to a novel), or a change of frame and therefore context: telling the same story from a different point of view, for instance, can create a manifestly different interpretation. Transposition can also mean a shift in ontology from the real to the fictional, from a historical account or biography to a fictionalized narrative or drama." Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 7-8.

<sup>75</sup> He is the main protagonist of the TV Show. "Homer Simpson," Simpsons Wikia, accessed February 24, 2016, [http://simpsons.wikia.com/wiki/Homer\\_Simpson](http://simpsons.wikia.com/wiki/Homer_Simpson).

<sup>76</sup> "Springfield is the fictional town/city in Springfield County, Springfield's State, United States. In which the Simpson family lives." "Springfield," Simpsons Wikia, accessed February 24, 2016, <http://simpsons.wikia.com/wiki/Springfield>.

such as mother and father, do not switch over between characters in each universe, instead the character's within Kuper's adaptive world replace the behaviors of Kafka's characters.<sup>77</sup> Kuper also introduces an array of new secondary characters that are crucial to his specific adaptation of Kafka's storyline.<sup>78</sup> The roles of the boss who shows up to Gregor's home and the Lodgers, they are called Tenants in Kuper's adaptation play the same crucial roles, but are portrayed by their equivalent in *The Simpsons* universe.

Another core change that connects back to the tremendous differences between Kuper's "Metamorphsimpsons" and Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* is that it is an adaptation told through a popular culture vessel, not the combination of two familiar worlds in order to tell a story like "Good Ol' Gregor Brown." While Kuper's work still contains words that help further the plot and explain details within the story, the majority of "Metamorphsimpsons" is told through the physical images on the page. In *The Metamorphosis* we are provided with a description of Gregor, while in the "Metamorphsimpsons" the description is replaced with an image.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Within the "Metamorphsimpsons" there is no mother, father, Grete, or the Maid. Instead these characters are Marge Simpson, Bart Simpson, Lisa Simpson, and "Grampa" Abraham Simpson. Marge Simpson is Homer Simpson's wife, Bart is their son, Lisa is their daughter, and "Grampa" Abraham is Homer's father. "Simpson Family," Simpson's Wikia, accessed February 24, 2016, [http://simpsons.wikia.com/wiki/Simpson\\_family](http://simpsons.wikia.com/wiki/Simpson_family).

<sup>78</sup> They are Maggie Simpson, Ned Flanders, and Patty and Selma Bouvier. Maggie Simpson is Homer and Marge's newborn daughter, Ned Flanders is their next door neighbor, and Patty and Selma Bouvier as Marge's sisters. Ibid; "Bouvier Family," Simpsons Wikia, accessed February 24, 2016, [http://simpsons.wikia.com/wiki/Bouvier\\_family](http://simpsons.wikia.com/wiki/Bouvier_family); "Homer Simpson."

<sup>79</sup> Peter Kuper, "Metamorphsimpsons," in *Bart Simpson's Treehouse of Horror Spine-tingling Spooktacular*, by Matt Groening (NY: Harper Collins, 1998), 29.

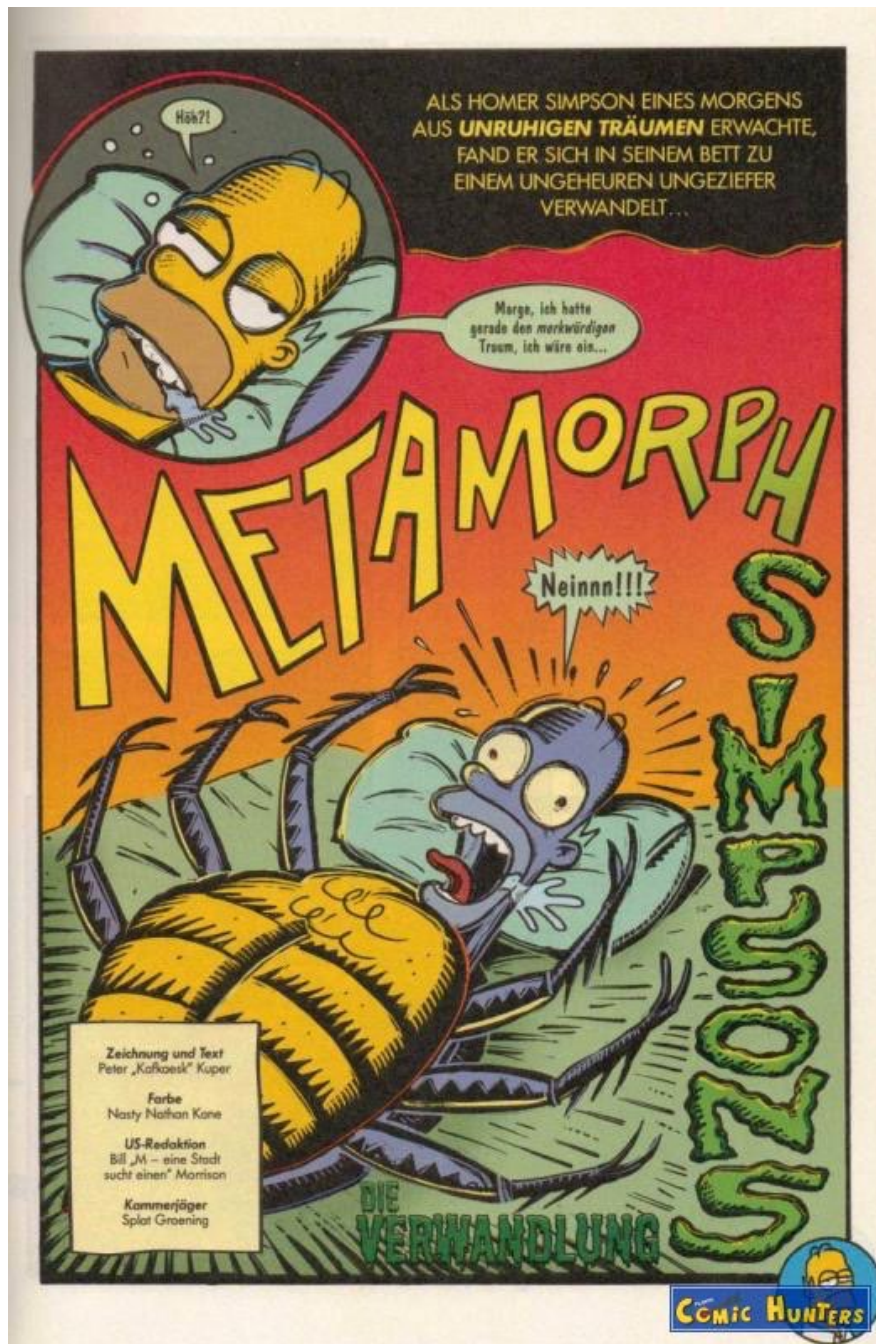


Fig. 10. Peter Kuper, “Metamorphs Simpsons”, 1998.

The figure above displays what we are supposed to picture Gregor to look like within the pre-formed universe that Kuper adapted. Now, this image of Gregor, while meaning to be unique to the world that the “Metamorphs Simpsons” exists in, is problematic. As previously discussed, the problem stems from the barrier between the original work being solely textual and the adapted

work being textual and visual. The visual element incorporates an image of Gregor that not only perpetuates the idea of him as a cockroach in the consciousness of anyone who reads this work. The visual component appropriates<sup>80</sup> the idea of Gregor from Kafka's story. Through the image that heavily relies on caricature, Kuper is acknowledging that Gregor is already commonly viewed as a roach by exaggerating the bug-like features and putting an emphasis on the cartoon-like nature of the first page. This image also creates a phenomenon of disjuncture which further contributes to Kuper's imagining of Gregor being an appropriation.<sup>81</sup> The idea of disjuncture is interesting in considering the connection between Gregor's identity and Homer Simpson's. Homer is a character who has little to do with both Samsa and Kafka, yet this image depicts the two of them as one, showing a *metamorphosis* within itself.

Another key element of Kuper's adaptive world, that more directly lends itself from Kafka's purely textual world, is the written element on the page. Kuper's version of Kafka's text is represented as a cross between Hutcheon's idea of *adaptation* and the much more abstract concept of *interpretation*. James L. Machor's definition of interpretation that was provided in chapter one applies here.<sup>82</sup> In the case of the "Metamorphsimpsions," the use of interpretation is

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<sup>80</sup> Using the definition provided in the introduction, Appropriation is "...frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain. This may or may not involve a generic shift, and it may still require the intellectual juxtaposition of (at least) one text against another that we have suggested is central to the reading and spectating experience of adaptations. But the appropriated text or texts are not always as clearly signaled or acknowledged as in the adaptive process." Sanders, "What is Appropriation?," in *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 26.

<sup>81</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, disjuncture is defined as, "A juncture or condition of affairs involving disunion; a perplexed or disjointed state of things." "disjuncture, n." OED Online. December 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/54662?redirectedFrom=disjuncture> (accessed February 26, 2016).

<sup>82</sup> According to Machor interpretation is, "...a process of decoding, of translating one text into another." Machor, "The Object of Interpretation," 1126.

not because of this text was originally published in another language,<sup>83</sup> but because of the specific differences in word choice from the translations that have existed prior to 1998 publishing of this work. While there is no indication of what specific translation was used, if we compare the Willa and Edwin Muir translation, the translation that Kuper used while writing his 2001 work, *The Metamorphosis*, and the “Metamorphsimpsons” there are obvious differences that provide evidence to support the claim that this is a cross between an *adaptation* and an *interpretation*.

To begin, we must first establish the translation done by Willa and Edwin Muir as our basis for comparison. This translation, as previously established, is being used as the baseline for the others as a tool for comparative analysis, understanding Kafka’s text in English, and as a primary source. This translation is also well regarded by the public because of the amount of years it has been around for and the continuous republication of it in Kafka anthologies and as a stand-alone work. The beginning of the Muir’s translation of *The Metamorphosis* starts with, “As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed....”<sup>84</sup> Using this as a baseline we can now view the specific difference between the three versions and show how the text is an interpretation of Kafka, while the graphic work is an adaptation, and the specific imagining of Gregor is an appropriation.

Kuper’s textual interpretation in “Metamorphsimpsons” strays greatly from the Willa and Edwin Muir translation. Kuper uses, “As Homer Simpson awoke one morning after *disturbing*

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<sup>83</sup> The example shown in Fig. 1 depicts the “Metamorphsimpsons” in German. While comparing the two texts, the German version of this adaptation is the exact same as the original German text written by Kafka.

<sup>84</sup> Kafka, “The Metamorphosis,” in *The Complete Stories*, 114.

*dreams*, he found himself transformed in his bed into....”<sup>85</sup> The major difference is the use of Homer Simpson instead of Gregor Samsa, but that is to be expected. What is truly interesting about this interpretive change is the difference between uneasy dreams and disturbing dreams. While these two phrases largely mean the same thing there is a difference between the meaning of the two specific words in regard to the larger context of Kafka’s story. This difference creates a change in meaning that sets up the rest of the story. Through the use of uneasy dreams in our base text, there is an inkling that something may not be right, yet there is not specific connect to what until we learn of Gregor’s new state.<sup>86</sup> Yet, in the translation Kuper uses, the wording of “disturbing dreams” sets up a much harsher more direct link to a problem. This use of disturbing rather than “uneasy” strays away from mysteriousness of Kafka’s story and makes Gregor problems more obvious, similarly to the use of an image to display the transformation instead of cleverly chosen words.

Kuper’s choice of fonts also show another element of how his translation choice make the transformation more obvious. The font used for the title switches from a computer-generated sans-serif into one that is hand drawn and changes mid-word. This clever disjuncture is also seen in the written element on the page, specifically with the word “Metamorphsimpsons.” There is an obvious mesh of these two words, that like the idea of Gregor and Homer, are not meant to be together. The title is a clumsy, comical hybrid; like the image. The word transitions between fonts and colors between “metamorph” and “simpsons.” There is an indication of a distinct difference between the words due to the change in fonts, yet the color gradation from yellow to

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<sup>85</sup> Kuper, "The Metamorphsimpsons," in *Bart Simpson's Treehouse of Horror*, 29.

<sup>86</sup> Due to the other two translations omitting the description of him as an insect, creature, or bug it is not necessary for our comparative purposes.

green during the letters “ph” indicates a bond. Various elements of a *metamorphosis* are depicted all over the page; from the image of Homer/Gregor to the title to the text itself. This block of text is established on the page as omniscient narration,<sup>87</sup> where Kuper’s insertion of the text comes before Homer realizing what has happened to him is another instance of this *metamorphosis*. This instance of narration, that specifically borrows from Kafka’s text, establishes a changing dynamic; where the rest of the story will then shift into a *Simpsons* based narrative style. The other panel on the page that is duo-specific<sup>88</sup> to the text-narration that Kuper uses to introduce shows this *metamorphosis* as well because it establishes that the story is now shown through the world of *The Simpsons* and is no longer borrowing text directly from Kafka. This section of text also transitions using “...” into the term “Metamorphsimpsons.” This is another example of a *metamorphosis* on the page. This duo-specific panel shows Homer telling Marge, “[he] just had the weirdest dream that [he] turned into a...,”<sup>89</sup> and then realizing that such a transformation occurred. The two instances of “...” are also key examples of moments of suspension within the graphic work, where they both point to key element of surprise in Kafka’s work. Specifically, when we read that Gregor has been, “...transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect.”<sup>90</sup> However, instead of writing about his transformation Kuper stops at the threshold of difficulty, in regard to descriptions, and illustrates the change.

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<sup>87</sup> In Literary Theory, ‘omniscient narration’ is defined as, “...as an attribute of the author or a third-person narrator: a full and complete knowledge concerning all the events of a narrative, and the private motives, thoughts, etc., of all the characters.”

"omniscience, n." OED Online. March 2016. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/131254> (accessed March 13, 2016).

<sup>88</sup> According in Scott McCloud in *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, panels that are *duo specific* are where, “both words and pictures essentially send the same message.” McCloud and Lappan, *Understanding Comics*, 153.

<sup>89</sup> Kuper, "The Metamorphsimpsons," in *Bart Simpson's Treehouse of Horror*, 29.

<sup>90</sup> Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," in *The Complete Stories*, 114.



The first full page of the “Metamorphsimpsons,” which includes the only real instance of text that is directly linked to *The Metamorphosis*, displays panels that interdependent of the other images on page. In *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud explains the structure behind interdependent panels as, “...the most common type of word picture combination is the interdependent, where words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone.”<sup>91</sup> Without the text that Kuper borrows from Kafka or the images that he adapts from Matt Groening, our understanding of Homer’s experience would be different. While the image provides us with an idea of what has happened, because of the previous knowledge we have of *The Metamorphosis*, the textual translation that Kuper provides both restates and strengthens what one may already know about the text, or if this is a reader’s first introduction into Kafka’s story it provides an introduction to both the original text and an introductory structure to what the story is about. However as strong and important as the words that Kuper includes in the title page are, he does not provide a description of Gregor’s new body like Kafka does, and we have to rely on the images provided to fully understand the transformation that has taken place.<sup>92</sup>

The beginning of Kuper’s other graphic version begins the exact same way as the “Metamorphsimpsons.” He writes, “When Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from disturbing dreams, he found himself transformed...”<sup>93</sup> This word for word text comparison leads us to

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<sup>91</sup> McCloud and Lappan, *Understanding Comics*, 155.

<sup>92</sup> The presence of interdependency within this section further amplifies how this is a cross between an adaptation and an interpretation through the way in which Kuper has to combine mediums to make sure that his unique material is fully developed and understood. However, we cannot just rely on the primary textual example of “the difference between uneasy and disturbing dreams” in order to understand its interpretive value. It is important to continue comparing the “Metamorphsimpsons” to Kuper’s other work and the already established translation by Willa and Edwin Muir.

<sup>93</sup> Kuper, *The Metamorphosis*, 7.

believe that Kuper used the same translator for this text and the “Metamorphsimpsons” even though they were five years apart. By using his own personal translator in these cases, rather than a more widely recognized example of translation we are presented with a piece that strays away from the norm. These texts, regardless of the accuracy of the translations used, act as outliers to the versions that use more widely circulated translations. This is because the other translations used have been critiqued and acclaimed by the public which gives them a level trust. By Kuper using a translator, the “Metamorphsimpsons” is a combination of an adaptation of images and an interpretation of the text because the images already exist and are understood by the public, while the text is being freshly decoded by the minds of the public.

Specifically within the “Metamorphsimpsons” there are direct representations of events that occur within the plot of the original text. These events occur through a *Simpsons* style of narration and with *Simpsons*-specific plot details further establishes how this text is an adaptation; albeit for the specific text borrowed from Kafka and the physical image of Gregor in relation to the textual description of him. One specific example of a plot point in *The Metamorphosis* that is directly carried over to the “Metamorphsimpsons” is the crucial moment in which Grete and Gregor’s mother attempt to remove his furniture and belongings and Gregor protests by attaching himself to a picture of a woman that he has hanging on his wall. In the “Metamorphsimpsons” the complexities that are present in this scene are abbreviated or left out in favor of a comic element and *Simpsons* specific plot characteristics. The image below shows the specific scene in the “Metamorphsimpsons” that parallels the same crucial moment in *The Metamorphosis*.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Kuper, "The Metamorphsimpsons," in *Bart Simpson's Treehouse of Horror*, 35.

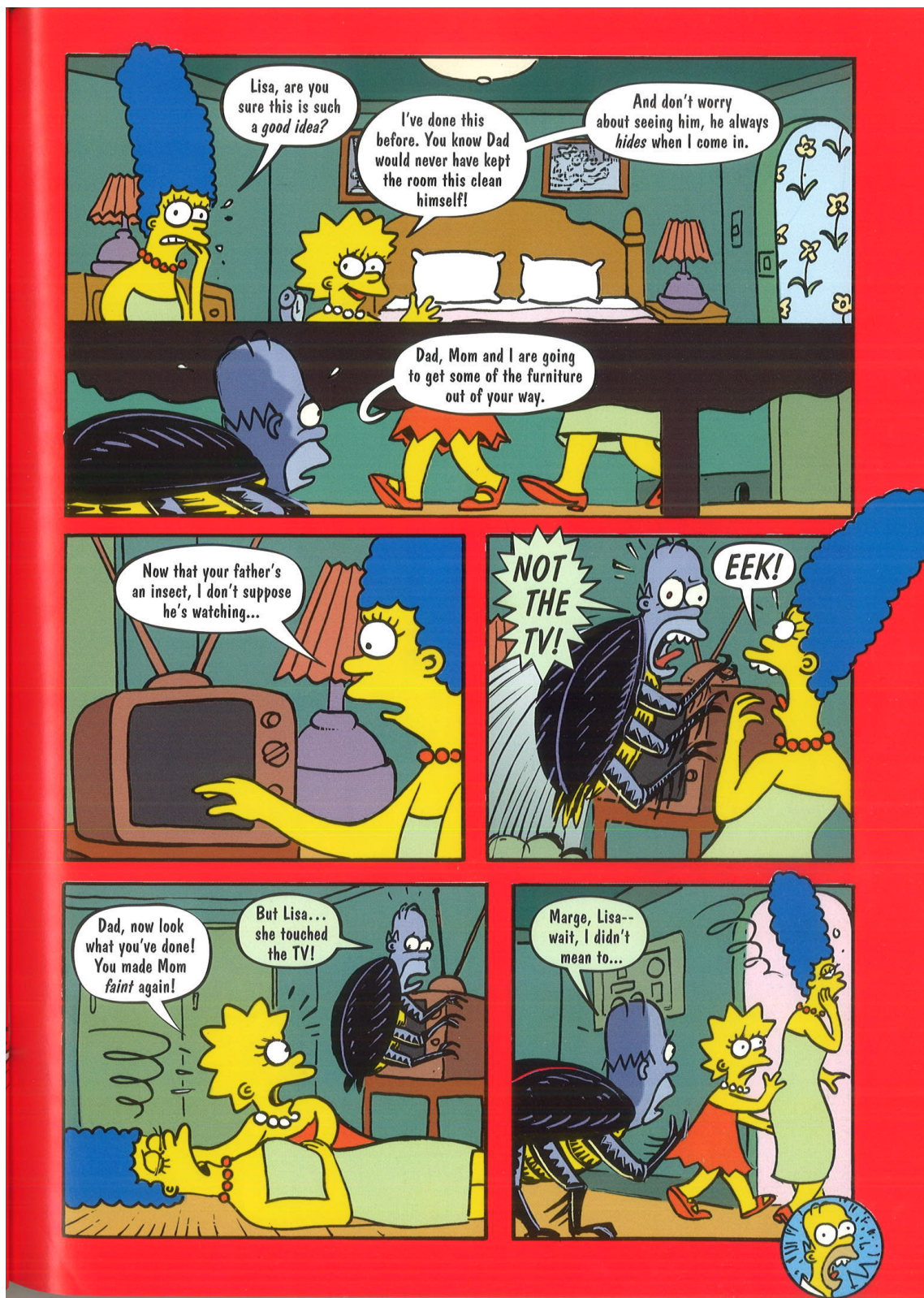


Fig. 11. Peter Kuper, "Metamorphsimpsons", 1998.

The examination and comparison of the two works will begin with the first half of the panel that takes up the top-third of the page.<sup>95</sup> This illustration shows Marge and Lisa Simpson speaking in Homer's room. We are only shown their heads and shoulder's in this part of the panel. The rest of their bodies are cut off. In the second half of the panel, which still takes place in Homer's room, we are shown them speaking from Homer's perspective and only their legs are depicted. The top half of this panel introduces us to key elements of this scene, specifically the introduction of Marge and Lisa, or the Mother and Grete into Homer/Gregor's space with the intention of removing furniture and various personal items. This a gesture that Homer/Gregor views as an attack on his humanity.

The first section of text from this panel is a conversation between Marge and Lisa.<sup>96</sup> The direct text example of this scene in *The Metamorphosis* occurs in a much more textually complicated and emotionally heightened manner than the "Metamorphsimpsons." Kuper's version downplays the anxiety and precariousness of the situation that can be felt through a close reading and textual analysis of the situation between Grete, the Mother, and Gregor. Kafka's text reads:

Gregor's sister, of course, went in first, to see that everything was in order before letting his mother enter. In great haste Gregor pulled the sheet lower and tucked it more in folds so that it really looked as if it had been thrown accidentally over the sofa. And this time he did not peer out from under it; he renounced the pleasure of seeing his mother on this

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<sup>95</sup> The immense differences and similarities between these five panels section that is the equivalent of these panels in Kafka's text will be difficult to analyze as one full and cohesive moment within each text. For the sake of a coherent analysis, I will be comparing the two works through the events that happen in each panel and the mirroring events that happen in the text . This will be done by thoroughly examining and explaining what is left out and has been changed by Kuper. I will also be using specific examples of known traits of character's from *The Simpsons* that are present in this scene.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 35

occasion and was only glad that she had come at all. "Come in, he's out of sight," said his sister, obviously leading her mother in by the hand.<sup>97</sup>

Firstly, a difference that is observed right away is that in Kafka's text Grete goes in first and makes sure that everything is in order, removing a level of anxiety for both Gregor and their mother before she has their mother enter the room, while in the Kuper version Marge and Lisa enter first. In the "Metamorphsimpsons" both Homer and Marge have less time to prepare for them meeting face to face again, which on one had helps move the plot along because we do not have to bear witness to Lisa's preparations, but leaves out important textual details that help establish the mood of each character that are not fully explained by their faces in each illustration. Instead, the illustration depicts Lisa with a slight smile, which we can presume is an indication of her lack of anxiety about the situation that is about to occur. Marge's face shows both anxiety and fear, through her biting on her nails and sweat dripping off her face. While looking at these graphics it is possible to see that Marge is scared and Lisa is not, there is a lack of insight into the true extent of their feelings and emotions that can only be discovered through text-based descriptions.

By observing the minutiae expressions that can be seen on the characters faces, the static nature each picture plane is unearthed. The static nature of each image is specific to the movement and flow of the narrative. In *The Metamorphosis* we move along with the events as we read them. We are able to know the emotional details of both Grete and the Mother because of the details Kafka provides and the context clues he establishes to aid the readers inferences. In the panels the ability to read a characters emotions works differently. In the panels we are provided with a still images, where everything is told on one picture plane. Within the image, the

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<sup>97</sup> Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," in *The Complete Stories*, 140.

details that are depicted in the background, foreground, and everywhere in between are what provide us with the same details we are able to get from Kafka's strictly textual version that continually moves.

The second half of the first panel continues the scene where Marge and Lisa enter Gregor's room. This time we are presented with an image that was drawn from Homer's perspective, however we are not privy to the full emotional reaction that Homer has to them entering his room. This reaction is present in the text, but in the picture plane we are only shown Homer with his eyes and his mouth open. At this juncture in *The Metamorphosis*, Homer reacts with a much stronger sense of surprise and fear than is depicted here. This section only shows Lisa talking at her father.<sup>98</sup> This brief statement, where Lisa is talking at her father instead of to him does not fully represent, or even begin to represent a concentrated of the thoughts and emotions that Gregor goes through in the panel's mirroring passages.

The textual equivalent to this in *The Metamorphosis* is from the same passage as before, specifically where, "In great haste Gregor pulled the sheet lower and tucked it more in folds so that it really looked as if it had been thrown accidentally over the sofa."<sup>99</sup> However, while this is a minor difference, Gregor is under a table not buried into the sofa. What is truly important with the material in this panel is the way in which Lisa tells her father what they are going to do; this is something that is not present in the original text. The question is then raised of why did Kuper insert this? The reasoning behind this choice that I observe is that in Kafka's text we are able to understand what is going on by the actions that both Grete and the Mother are taking and how

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<sup>98</sup> Kuper, "The Metamorphosimpsons," in *Bart Simpson's Treehouse of Horror*, 35.

<sup>99</sup> Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," in *The Complete Stories*, 140.

their choices are continuous because the text does not stop. We are able to know what is going to happen next because we can read it, which lets this scene flow coherently. In the “Metamorphsimpsions,” this is not the case. The actions of each character are separated by gutters<sup>100</sup> between panels. This again, has to do with the static nature of each panel plane. The events that are depicted in each image are flat and have to be summarized within one illustration. However, the break between panels, or gutters, provides a free space where events occur but are not seen. In graphic novels and comics the narration of each text does not stop and start between each image, but the story continues in the dead space.<sup>101</sup> While it is possible to perceive what happens in this dead space, in the case of Kuper’s adaptation this is difficult to do because of how this text differs from the original, especially in this specific section. In order to understand what is fully happening, Kuper has used Lisa as both a narrator and as a character. She is telling us what is going to happen and is taking part in the events she is talking about. Kafka does not need this narration because *The Metamorphosis* is told in third person.

The next panel jumps to a later point in this section where Marge considers getting rid of Homer’s TV. In Kafka’s original text this scene does not fully exist. The Mother is never the one making choices about what items to remove or keep; it is only Grete. Grete makes the specific decisions to remove, “...not only of the chest and the writing desk, which had been her first intention, but of all the furniture except the indispensable sofa.”<sup>102</sup> Grete is determined to change Gregor’s room without any regard for Gregor and their Mother’s feelings. It is also important to

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<sup>100</sup> In *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud explains that gutters are, “...the space between panels...” McCloud and Lappan, *Understanding Comics*, 66.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 70.

<sup>102</sup> Kafka, “The Metamorphosis,” in *The Complete Stories*, 142.

note that in *The Metamorphosis* the Mother is apprehensive about removing any of Gregor's furniture and makes a point to let Grete know that she believes everything should remain in place, but in the "Metamorphsimpsons," Marge shows authority and a want to change Homer's room instead of remaining docile and letting Grete make the decisions for both her and Gregor about what stays and goes. The agency that Marge exhibits here compared to the lack of agency that the Mother shows has to do with Marge's personality from *The Simpsons* being carried over.

In *The Metamorphosis*, the Mother thinks that, "...the sight of the naked walls made her own heart heavy, and why shouldn't Gregor have the same feeling, considering that he had been used to his furniture for so long and might feel forlorn without it."<sup>103</sup> This compassion for Gregor and wanting him to still have a connection to his human past is the antithesis of how Marge acts in the "Metamorphsimpsons." Instead, she says, "Now that your father's an insect, I don't suppose he's watching..." while pointing to the TV she is referring to.<sup>104</sup> She is acting like Grete, who holds little reservations about removing furniture, and is further removed from being able to see Gregor as a human than their mother is. In *The Metamorphosis* the mirroring equivalent of the TV for Gregor is the picture of the woman with a fur stole that is hanging on his wall. This picture holds great importance to him, like the TV for Homer, and is something that we learn about early on in the text. The picture depicts, "...a lady, with a fur cap on and a fur stole, sitting upright and holding out to the spectator a huge fur muff into which the whole of her forearm had vanished!"<sup>105</sup> The image of this woman, specifically as the first thing Gregor looks

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 141.

<sup>104</sup> Kuper, "The Metamorphsimpsons," in *Bart Simpson's Treehouse of Horror*, 35.

<sup>105</sup> Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," in *The Complete Stories*, 114.



too after his transformation, has been thought of as a direct link to Gregor's sexuality.<sup>106</sup> This picture, along the belongings that help connect him to his humanity, is something that Gregor does not want to lose. In "'The Metamorphosis,' Freud and the Chains of Odysseus," David Eggenschwiler explains how:

...when Gregor's sister and mother are removing his furniture in order to give him more crawling space, he suddenly realizes that he is losing his human past, and, as a gesture of opposition, he places himself over the picture of the woman described so obtrusively in the opening paragraphs. His choice of human object seems inevitable for a physiological reading; he is momentarily trying to preserve a symbol of his sexually repressed and socially acceptable past in order to resist further surrender to the primitive instincts that are controlling him.<sup>107</sup>

While Gregor's emotions are not depicted in the "Metamorphsimpsons" version of this scene, we now are able to understand the full importance of the picture for Gregor and how debilitating it is for Gregor when the Mother and Grete try to remove it because the image facilitates one of the last connections Gregor has to his human identity and independency. The picture provides an outlet for Gregor's last links to sexual needs and desires because it shows the woman as an object for Gregor to stare at, even in his new form, without any repercussions. This is until Grete and their Mother try to remove it as a way to make room for his new self because Grete believes she now knows what is best for him. In the "Metamorphsimpsons" Homer's connection to his television is similar to that of Gregor's. The TV acted as an object of distraction when he was a human which created a bond between Homer and the object. Like the image of the woman, the TV provides a form of distraction without any repercussions, even after his "metamorphosis," until Lisa and Marge attempt to remove it.

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<sup>106</sup> David Eggenschwiler, "'The Metamorphosis,' Freud and the Chains of Odysseus," in *Franz Kafka*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), 204.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

The next panel and the gutter that separates this panel and the previous one are important in regard to the actions that Homer takes to protect his television. In this panel an angry Homer is depicted as being latched on to the TV screen, exclaiming, “NOT THE TV!” with a swoosh of air under him showing that he had just jumped. Marge is in the frame as well, yelling “EEK!” and looking both scared and shocked at the sight of her husband.<sup>108</sup> There is a passage in *The Metamorphosis* that directly mirrors Homer’s behavior, and shows Gregor attached to the picture of the woman.<sup>109</sup>

In the “Metamorphsimpsons” the scene that takes place in the gutter between the two panels that focus on Homer’s relationship to the TV, explains Homer’s internal thoughts about Marge and Lisa’s actions is represented in *The Metamorphosis* when Gregor:

...did not know what to rescue first, then on the wall opposite, which was already otherwise cleared, he was struck by the picture of the lady muffled in so much fur and quickly crawled up to it and pressed himself to the glass, which was a good surface to hold on to and comforted his hot belly. This picture at least, which was entirely hidden beneath him, was going to be removed by nobody.<sup>110</sup>

Kuper’s version does now show Homer’s emotions and the thought process he went through to understand what was happening. Instead, the realization that the TV needs to be protected takes place in the gutter and the actual panels show the fight-or-flight response that Homer has to save his TV. The television acts as a surrogate for the humanity he has left.

Within the panel, the reaction that Marge has to Homer is as sensationalized and drastic as it is in the original text. However, the outcry that Marge shouts is akin to the character traits

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<sup>108</sup> Kuper, "The Metamorphsimpsons," in *Bart Simpson's Treehouse of Horror*, 35.

<sup>109</sup> However, in this panel the reason behind Gregor/Homer’s brash actions surrounding the picture/TV is not depicted and takes place in the gutter. The scene that takes place between panels is responsible for the set up of panel that shows Homer’s flight or flight response.

<sup>110</sup> Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," in *The Complete Stories*, 143.

and behavior that she exhibits in *The Simpsons*. In Kafka's original version, the Mother screams, "Oh God, oh God!"<sup>111</sup> This is on par with the reaction that Marge has. However, instead of writing how Marge "screams" Kuper depicts it through her mannerisms and the large outcry of emotion that is represented by her mouth being wide and her hand either reaching to cover it or her engaging in the motion of biting her nails. The same can be said for the way in which Homer's emotions are shown. Instead of us being privy to Gregor's internal monologue through Homer's response, we are shown it through the visual depiction of him. Specifically through Kuper's choice of word balloon, Homer's mouth being open in exclamation, and the intense and disconcerting look in his eyes. The word balloon that Kuper uses to have Homer shout, "NOT THE TV,"<sup>112</sup> is different from all the others on the page. This exclamation by Homer is also the only example of a character shouting in anger. Homer's exclamation is also encompassed within a "scream bubble."

In the next section we see the results of Homer attaching himself to the TV and frightening Marge. The illustrated actions that Homer takes in order protect his TV cause Marge to faint. The Mother in *The Metamorphosis* faints as well. The panel depicts Lisa comforting a fainted Marge in the foreground saying, "Dad, now look what you've done! You made mom *faint* again!" and Homer in the background, still attached to the TV, responding to Lisa's accusation with, "But Lisa...she touched the TV!"<sup>113</sup> This section shows Marge laying on the ground with her mouth open and a spiral floating over her head, indicating to us, through the use of a

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Kuper, "The Metamorphsimpsons," in *Bart Simpson's Treehouse of Horror*, 35.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

symbol,<sup>114</sup> that she has fainted. However, Lisa's statement explaining that her mother has fainted further explains the use the symbol and what it means, but the explanation is not fully needed in order to understand what happened to Marge. The illustration of Lisa shows a deep sense of anger through her mouth being open, the symbolic use of lines surrounding her face, and her furrowed brow. We can see that this anger is directly aimed toward Homer because she is staring straight at him. In this panel Lisa is acting as a protector, she is caring for her mother while simultaneously showing anger and resentment toward the person who caused the undue harm.

Homer's depiction in this section shows him feeling an overwhelming amount of emotions. This is seen through the use of an ellipsis in his response to Lisa, his facial expression, and the symbol that surrounds his face. Through the use of an ellipsis in response to Lisa's anger towards him lets us infer that Homer's answer has two sides to it. When he says, "But, Lisa..." Homer is trying to explain what happened and absolve himself of the guilt he feels for making his wife faint. The guilt is shown in his face, his mouth is open wide, but his lower lip is pulled up, looking as if it is quivering in both shock and fear/sadness. His body language also shows this mix of emotions. His head is turned toward Marge and Lisa, but his body is still attach to the TV and turned away. The second half of Homer's answer that comes after the ellipsis is where he does make an excuse for his actions, saying that he reason he scared her was because, "...she touched the TV!" This response shows both the importance of the TV to Homer, as it is one of the last connections he has to his humanity, but also how far away he has strayed from who he once was. The Homer that is attached to the TV is not able to recognize fully that he has hurt Marge because his flight or fight response took over the rationality he once carried with him. In

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<sup>114</sup> McCloud and Lappan, *Understanding Comics*, 128-29.

*The Simpsons*' universe the TV is a constant within episodes and Homer constantly watches it as a distraction and an escape from reality. It is prominently shown in the opening sequence, where the family is seen sitting in front of it—acting as a focal point on the screen. Yet, the Homer that is attached to the TV in those moments has not gone through a “metamorphosis” like the Homer who responds defensively when the TV is being threatened. Like Gregor and his picture, this Homer interprets the TV as one of the remaining connections to both his human identity and his independency to be able to watch TV without repercussions and intrusions from those around him. This is until Marge and Lisa attempt to take away Homer's TV which illicit his response.

In the original text a similar pattern of behavior and chronological order of events is observed. In *The Metamorphosis* Gregor's mother, “...fell with outspread arms over the sofa as if giving up, and did not move. ‘Gregor!’ cried his sister, shaking her fist and glaring at him.”<sup>115</sup> While, Grete's response is much shorter and in the panel Marge faints in the gutter between panels, the same sentiment is felt. Both Grete and Lisa hold the same anger and resentment toward Gregor and Homer. Lisa's response is longer than her original counterparts because, like before, she is acting both as the narrator to the events that are occurring and as a character who is taking part in the events. Gregor's emotional response comes later in the original text and overlaps with the material in the next panel and the continuation of his reaction that occurs there.

In the final panel in this sequence of events surrounding the TV/picture of the woman we are finally witness to a glimmer of Homer's humanity through his apology to Marge. In the panel before, this Homer's emotional response to Marge fainting is still based upon the flight-or-fight instinct that was triggered by the urge to protect the remainder of his humanity. This panel bears

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<sup>115</sup> Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," in *The Complete Stories*, 144.

witness to his humanity in a different way. Instead on Homer acting on instinct, we are shown him acting his fear that he has hurt Marge and his empathetic reaction make sure that she is okay. In this section Homer has detached himself from the TV and is following Marge, who has woken up, and Lisa out the door of his room. Homer is telling them, “Marge, Lisa— wait, I didn’t mean to...,” but it is too late. Homer’s humanity is also seen in his gestures. This is the first time on the page he is not standing on or using all of his legs. Instead, he is holding one of them up, trying to reach out to Marge and Lisa.

The body language that Kuper uses for Marge and Lisa shows them looking away from Homer and facing the area outside his room. Lisa is looking up her mother with her eyes open wide and a worried look on her face. Her brow is still furrowed but her expression has changed from anger to fear. She is holding onto her mother with both hands, helping guide her out to a safe place. Marge is not paying attention to anything. She is looking ahead of herself, her eyes are half open, and the symbol that denotes she fainted is still next to her head. This time it is floating behind her instead of above her. One of Marge’s hands is resting on her face and the other is extending out in front of her, as if she is trying to feel her way out.

In *The Metamorphosis*, the response that Gregor has overlaps between this panel and the panel that is directly before it. These panels take from the section in the text when Gregor is, “... harassed by self-reproach and worry.”<sup>116</sup> While this section in Kafka’s text is not a direct parallel to Kuper’s version of events, the specific occurrences mirroring one another do not matter in this case as much as the emotions do. Kuper is not directly copying *The Metamorphosis*. He is borrowing from it in order to create an adaptation that is grounded in the pre-existing *Simpsons*’

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

universe. In the case of these two particular panels, Kuper is borrowing Gregor's emotional response from the original text; not the actual sequence of events.

Comparing this sequence of events in *The Metamorphosis* to the graphic equivalent in the "Metamorphsimpsons," Peter Kuper's use of *The Simpsons* universe as a vehicle for telling the story of Gregor Samsa is shown. Kuper's adaption of Kafka's story creates a universe, with appropriations and interpretations present within it, that exists within a pre-formed pop culture world. Kuper creates appropriations within his adaption through his imaginative illustrations of Gregor Samsa as Homer Simpson and interpretations are seen through his translation choices for the opening sentence of the text. Kuper uses the plot and ideas found in Kafka's work and combines it with Matt Groening's pre-formed world thus unifying two universes. The result of this unification lets us observe *The Simpsons*' characters behaving like themselves, in terms of character traits and responding to already established relationships within an amalgamation of universes. However, while these characters are still left with the majority of their own original traits, Kuper has them taking on the roles of the new characters with regard to emotional responses and how they are supposed to act according to the already established plot that is being adapted.

#### Sikoryak's "Good Ol' Gregor Brown"

While The "Metamorphsimpsons" tells the story of Gregor Samsa through the world of Homer Simpson, the second graphic pop-culture version of Kafka's work borrows elements from *Peanuts*' Charlie Brown. Robert Sikoryak's "Good Ol' Gregor Brown" appropriates both Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and Charles Schulz's *Peanuts*. The appropriation of both works is directly linked to Sikoryak's independent combination of two worlds he has no direct involvement with

in order to create a third world. This third world is unique to Sikoryak, and only exists within the two page spread of “Good Ol’ Gregor Brown.”

Julie Sanders’ definition of appropriation is relevant to the context that surrounds Sikoryak’s combination of works.<sup>117</sup> What distinguishes “Good Ol’ Gregor Brown” as an appropriation, rather than an adaptation, is that the synthesis of *Peanuts* and *The Metamorphosis* creates a new, separate work. If it was an adaptation, like the “Metamorphsimpsons” one of the two works would be absorbed by the other. Sikoryak’s work still has elements of both *The Metamorphosis* and *Peanuts*, but through the combination of the two separate universes a new work is created, that digresses from the core of both works. In the case of the “Metamorphsimpsons,” this digression does not exist because it is not a combination of two worlds that forms a third, instead we have a pre-formed world, *The Simpsons*, that is being adapted by Kuper deliberately having Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* being absorbed into it.

This version of *The Metamorphosis*, unlike the “Metamorphsimpsons” cannot be fully understood without a previous knowledge of the original text. This previous knowledge is not needed for the same reason’s as Kuper’s first interpretation of *The Metamorphosis*, but because this appropriation only focuses on moments in the original text are convenient to the constraints imposed by the universe Charlie Brown exists in. For example, in “Good Ol’ Gregor Brown,” there are no adult characters, even though in the original text Gregor Samsa is an adult. Instead, he and Charlie Brown mesh together into Gregor Brown, who is assumed to be a child, like

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<sup>117</sup> Again, according to Sanders, an appropriation is something that...frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain. This may or may not involve a generic shift, and it may still require the intellectual juxtaposition of (at least) one text against another that we have suggested is central to the reading and spectating experience of adaptations. But the appropriated text or texts are not always as clearly signaled or acknowledged as in the adaptive process. Sanders, "What is Appropriation?," in *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 26.



Charlie. This is not the case for the elements of this appropriation that are attributed to *Peanuts* because all the of the necessary knowledge that a reader needs to understand the elements taken from Schulz are already present within the work.

Sikoryak sums up the story of Gregor Samsa, which he tells in the style of *Peanuts*, in two pages. The appropriation stays true to the *Peanuts*-style of a comic strip format and is published in the anthology in black and white. He uses the characters from *Peanuts* in order to tell Gregor's story and omits all parents and adult figures, staying true to the constraints of Schulz's world.<sup>118</sup> The four character's that are appropriated are Charlie Brown, Linus, Lucy, and Snoopy. As the title infers, Charlie Brown is combined with Gregor. Sikoryak takes parts of each character in order to form a third, which further indicates that this is a third world. The idea of a monstrous creature is taken from Kafka and the instantly recognizable yellow shirt with a black zig-zag stripe is taken from Schulz. Through the meshing of these elements Gregor Brown is formed. The *Peanuts* specific character of Linus is given the role of Gregor's boss. Nothing about Linus's appearance changes drastically, except for him not carrying his blanket.<sup>119</sup> The character of Lucy, like Linus, stays the same in appearance. However, in this universe Linus and Lucy are not siblings.<sup>120</sup> Through our knowledge of *The Metamorphosis*, we are able to infer that Gregor Brown and Lucy are siblings instead. The character of Snoopy, who is given the role of the maid, does not change in appearance. In *Peanuts*, like in "Good Ol' Gregor Brown," Snoopy is seen wearing ridiculous things, so a maid outfit is not unheard of. However, Snoopy plays a

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<sup>118</sup> Stephanie Emerson, ed., *Masters of American Comics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 91.

<sup>119</sup> Linus' blanket is prop that, while not always, he usually carries with him as a way to feel safe. "Linus," *Peanuts by Schulz*, accessed March 2, 2016, <http://www.peanuts.com/characters/linus/#.VtdNSpMrJE5>.

<sup>120</sup> In *Peanuts*, Lucy is Linus' older sister. Ibid.

role that is unlike any of the other characters. They act as a narrator to events that are about to occur and events that have just occurred through their thoughts.

Sikoryak's title panel sets up the relationship between *The Metamorphosis*, *Peanuts*, and his own comic strip.<sup>121</sup>



Fig. 12. Robert Sikoryak, “Good Ol’ Gregor Brown”, 1990.

The title, which he cleverly establishes as “Good Ol’ Gregor Brown,” is an appropriation of both Kafka and Schulz. He uses Gregor Samsa’s name in combination with familiar nickname that is given to Charlie Brown and is displayed in the various title panels of Schulz’s comic.<sup>122</sup>

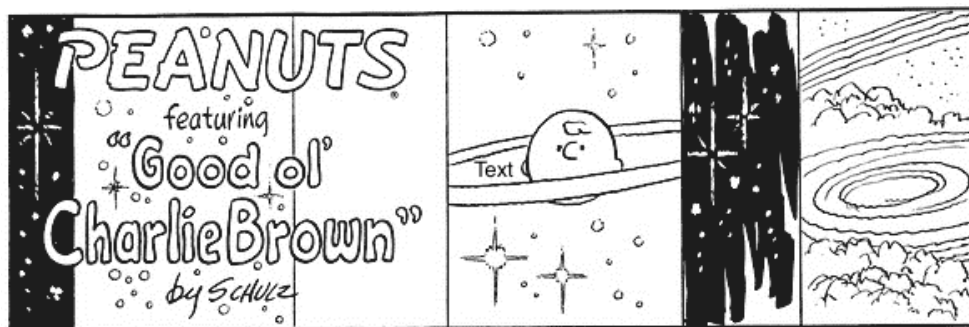


Fig. 13. Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, February 15, 1981.

The graphic set-up of Sikoryak’s title panel in comparison to the original title panel style by Schulz is an exact stylistic replica. Sikoryak only omits the word *Peanuts*. “Good Ol’ Gregor

<sup>121</sup> Robert Sikoryak, "Good 'Ol Gregor Brown," comic strip, *Raw*, May 15, 1990, 178.

<sup>122</sup> Charles Schulz, "Peanuts," comic strip, in *The Graphic Art of Charles Schulz*, comp. The Oakland Museum (Oakland, CA: Oakland Museum, 1985), 53.

Samsa” is in the same font and “by Sikoryak” is in the same location as Robert Sikoryak, who in his other works stylizes his name as “R. Sikoryak” forgoes the first name initial and only uses his last name, like Schulz. The illustration that sets up the style of Sikoryak’s graphic appropriation is in the same location as the introductory illustration in the original comics. These direct parallels show how intensely Sikoryak is establishing the use of Peanuts in his work and how closely he is following Schulz universe. However, the parallels act as less of a tool for understanding the difference between the three worlds, but as another way to observe how this synthesis occurred. This is seen by how closely he tries to follow what has been established within Charlie Brown’s world and Kafka’s story through his amalgamation of the two realms into a separate universe and creation and redistribution of characters, which will be shown specifically through the way Sikoryak handles the opening sequence of the novel.

Sikoryak, again, limits himself to Schulz’s rules through character’s speech patterns. The Snoopy that exists in the “Good Ol’ Gregor Brown” universe does not speak, just like his *Peanuts* counterpart. Gregor Brown, however, takes on the speaking patterns and quirks of Charlie Brown but displays the behavior and thought process of Gregor Samsa. On each page there are five individual strips, totaling ten, each with four individual panels in each; albeit for the title which is just one large panel. The first four panels, excluding the title, show the extent to which Gregor Brown speaks like Charlie Brown but thinks and behaves like Gregor Samsa.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Sikoryak, "Good 'Ol Gregor Brown," comic strip, 178.



Fig. 14. Robert Sikoryak, “Good Ol’ Gregor Brown”, 1990.

The first panel in this strip begins with Gregor Brown using a phrase that is culturally synonymous with Schulz’s “Charlie Brown.” Gregor says, “Good Grief! What’s happened to me?”<sup>124</sup> Sikoryak’s use of “good grief” immediately establishes a textual connection between this comic and *Peanuts*,<sup>125</sup> by showing how the character of Gregor Brown speaks with the same mannerisms and uses the same phrases as “Charlie Brown.” However, the events that take place in the first panel and the three subsequent panels in the strip all follow the beginning of *The Metamorphosis* directly.

This first strip<sup>126</sup> establishes Gregor Brown experiencing a sense of shock and fear over his new situation in the same manner that Gregor Samsa does. Gregor Brown begins with waking up in the title panel and sensing that something is wrong. We are able to see the fear through Sikoryak’s use of three sweat droplets jumping off of Gregor’s head and because of our pre-existing knowledge of what is happening.<sup>127</sup> In the next panel his fear and shock are confirmed

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> M. Thomas Inge, “Peanuts and American Culture,” in *The Graphic Art of Charles Schulz*, comp. The Oakland Museum (Oakland, CA: Oakland Museum, 1985), 56.

<sup>126</sup> The first strip must be viewed as a whole in order to compare its relevance to the events in *The Metamorphosis*.

<sup>127</sup> Sikoryak’s “Good Ol’ Gregor Brown” is missing various important plot points from *The Metamorphosis* because he confines himself to the constraints that are imposed by the *Peanuts* universe. In order to fully understand what is happening it is necessary to refer back to our pre-existing knowledge of *The Metamorphosis*.

through his exclamation of, “Good Grief! What’s happened to me?”<sup>128</sup> The next panel is a close-up of Gregor’s head, with his body being in the same position it was in as the previous panel. Sikoryak continues using Charlie Brown’s mannerisms in combination with Kafka’s plot. He proceeds with Gregor Brown saying, “I went to bed feeling okay, but now...! What an awful life I have!”<sup>129</sup> The next panel continues Gregor Brown’s fearful outcries with, “Maybe if I rest here for a few minutes, everything will go back to normal...”<sup>130</sup> The strip then breaks from Gregor Brown’s first moments of hazy realization that something has changed into a concrete reality that he still has responsibilities. This is also the first instance of another voice in the comic appropriation. From outside of the frame an unidentified voice awakes Gregor, this is displayed by his upper body rising up from its lowered position, and the voice yelling, “Gregor! Wake Up! You’re Late For Work!”<sup>131</sup> This exclamation is in a larger and bolder font than the other three examples, showing both that it is another voice and that this is urgent, rather than a group of hazy thoughts that Gregor speaks out loud. While Sikoryak tells the beginning of Gregor Brown’s story by using the specific characteristics of Charlie Brown and the larger *Peanuts* universe, the plot material is entirely appropriated from *The Metamorphosis*.

In the original text, Gregor Samsa’s outcry and show of surprise are similar to sentiments shown by Gregor Brown. In Sikoryak’s representation of Gregor Samsa, the actions and reactions are more condensed, yet the story is still clear because you are able to get the same effect that you get from the text in terms of the story’s progression. Each panel, including the

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<sup>128</sup> Sikoryak, "Good 'Ol Gregor Brown," comic strip, 178.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

title, is representative of different events that take place in succession within Gregor Samsa's opening reaction. While the comic itself has no mention of Gregor Brown awaking from "uneasy dreams" like the majority of the other graphic versions, Sikoryak's appropriation has no need for this. The opening paragraph, where we are introduced to Gregor Samsa, what he is thought to look like, and the predicament he finds himself in, is all introduced in the title panel. In one illustration, Sikoryak establishes the opening sequence of the story through illustrating emotion. In this singular panel we are presented with Gregor in a bed with an uncomfortable or scared look on his face. The sight of him still in bed lets us conclude that Gregor has just woken up. However, we are aware of this not only because of the illustration, but because our knowledge of the original text, which is necessary for fully understanding Sikoryak's version. The original text is necessary for fully understanding this appropriation because of the amount of material that is left out. The context clues that Sikoryak provides are not enough to be able to fully understand his appropriation in its entirety. The emotions depicted on Gregor Brown's face, however, are what create the connection to the "uneasy dreams" and negate the use of the narrative element. This is where we first see what he looks like, which represents the description of his body in Kafka's text and shows us how the graphic visualization of his body displays the problem he faces in the text as 'monstrous vermin.' We are introduced to Gregor Brown as half creature-half human through the depiction of him having a bug-like body but wearing the clothes of Charlie Brown.

Sections of the next two paragraphs in Kafka's text are directly appropriated in the next three panels in Sikoryak's comic strip. The details that are left out from the original text have to do with Sikoryak staying true to the *Peanuts* universe. In Schulz's comics there was rarely, if

ever, instances of background details.<sup>132</sup> Everything is centered on the characters and events takes place in the foreground. Sikoryak's stays true to this by omitting details that are important in other versions, such as the picture of the woman. The panels that represent Gregor Brown's frightened proclamations jump from paragraph to paragraph but stay in line with the order of events in *The Metamorphosis*. The first panel in the strip represents, "What has happened to me? He thought. It was no dream."<sup>133</sup> The second and third panel then skip to the next paragraph in *The Metamorphosis* and relay Gregor Samsa's thoughts, "...about sleeping a little longer and forgetting all this nonsense, he thought...."<sup>134</sup> Sikoryak's appropriation of the original text, while omitting details, stay true to Gregor's linear continuation of thoughts and responses to his new-found transformation. However, These thoughts and responses stay constricted within the character traits that Charles Schulz created for Charlie Brown.

While the first three panels in the opening strip exhibit the nuanced behavioral patterns and character traits of Charlie Brown the fourth panel introduces a new voice that breaks the series of illustrations that show Gregor Brown being consumed by his interior thoughts. In this picture plane we are presented with the crucial moment of when Gregor is reminded that he is going to be late for work. In the original text Gregor's Mother is the one who reminds him.<sup>135</sup> However, in "Good Ol' Gregor Brown" the voice is coming from out of the frame which raises an interesting question. In *Peanuts* the character's parents have only been illustrated or mentioned a handful of times, so in order to stay true to the plot of *The Metamorphosis* and the

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<sup>132</sup> "Often Schulz left out backgrounds altogether to center the strip on the world of little kids he created." Emerson, *Masters of American Comics*, 88.

<sup>133</sup> Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," in *The Complete Stories*, 114.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. 115.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid. 116.

constraints of *Peanuts* does Sikoryak have Gregor's Mother speak from out of frame? Later in the comic Gregor Brown notes that his "Father" is coming, who then proceeds to throw the apple that lodges onto him, so this is possible. However, the Father never speaks.<sup>136</sup>



Fig. 15. Robert Sikoryak, "Good Ol' Gregor Brown", 1990.

The only other possible character who could be yelling at him is Lucy. However, looking at how closely Sikoryak follows Kafka's text it is difficult to believe that he would have a completely different character, who he has already assigned the role of Grete, fill the role of both the Mother and the sister. Instead, the logical assumption is that Sikoryak is taking a slight liberty with Schulz structure and having an adult speak off screen, which was not unheard of in specific instances in the *Peanuts* universe.<sup>137</sup> The idea that an adult is speaking outside of the panel raises yet another question about Sikoryak's intention. How successfully is Sikoryak suggesting an idea or character without fully showing it in a panel? If he was successfully implying who is speaking in this instance why would we have to question it? In the continued conversation about graphics used in the adaptations, appropriations, translations, and interpretations that have been

<sup>136</sup> Sikoryak, "Good 'Ol Gregor Brown," comic strip, 179.

<sup>137</sup> In early *Peanuts* comics, such as the strip from May 16, 1954, the parents of Charlie Brown and Lucy van Pelt were featured from the torso down. Other adult figures would also be mentioned from time to time. In the animated versions of *Peanuts*, such as *Bon Voyage*, *Charlie Brown (And Don't Come Back!)*, *What Have We Learned*, *Charlie Brown?*, and others, adult voices are heard. "Adults," *Peanuts* Wikia, accessed March 14, 2016, <http://peanuts.wikia.com/wiki/Adults>.



previously discussed, a reminder about how the authors and illustrators are constantly being forced to show something visually because it is difficult to describe the events textually is crucial. This has to do with the nature of these works, being graphic, and because the static nature of each individual panel limits what an author can do. Even with this in mind we are still able to understand when and where the Father fits in the comic. This largely has to do with the fact that he is mentioned, however he does not have a speaking role like we assume the Mother does. Yet, logically it would make more sense for a speaking role to indicate the identity of character, but in this case it does not. This is because we have to rely on our previous knowledge of the Kafka's text to indicate who is speaking, rather than let Sikoryak's original appropriation be able to exist independently.

While Sikoryak may stray from Schulz's structure surrounding adult voices in the comic strips, he makes the distinctive choice to highlight Gregor's behavior of thinking out loud with speech bubbles instead of thought bubbles, specifically in the first strip. This is a tool that Schulz used throughout the *Peanuts* comics. One notable example of this, seen in *Masters of American Comics*, is a four panel strip that was published March 11, 1980, where Charlie Brown is hanging upside down, stuck in a tree because he got tangled up in a kite string.<sup>138</sup>



Fig. 16. Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, March 11, 1980.

<sup>138</sup> Charles Schulz, "Peanuts," comic strip, in *Masters of American Comics*, ed. Stephanie Emerson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 93.

This strip illustrates Schulz's use of having Charlie Brown think out loud when he is stuck in precarious situations. In these four panels Charlie Brown reflects back on the situation he has found himself in which a strong sense of melancholia. This combination of emotions and reflection is what Sikoryak uses in order to explain Gregor Brown's *Metamorphosis* situation.

While Gregor Brown is the amalgamation of Gregor Samsa and Charlie Brown, the individual characters, Kafka's Samsa and Schulz's Brown, also share character traits. The shared characteristics between the individual characters provides a basis for thinking that the amalgamation of Kafka's Samsa and Schulz's Brown acts as a less clumsy popular culture crossover of two vastly different universes than the aforementioned synthesis of Gregor Samsa and Homer Simpson. "Good Ol' Gregor Brown" was a topic of discussion in an interview that Robert Sikoryak gave to "The Rumpus" during a New York Comics & Picture-Story Symposium on the various original comics and literary adaptations he has created. During the interview, the portion of the conversation that focused specifically on "Good Ol' Gregor Brown" began with Andrea Tsurumi from "The Rumpus" commenting on how Sikoryak is, "...so faithful to the text of both things too—you're not drawing Peanuts and putting a lot of "good grief" gags in it; it's actually Peanuts and it's actually Kafka."<sup>139</sup> Sikoryak responded with:

That strip, Good Ol' Gregor Brown, was the first one I did where I thought, "wow this is really the same character." I felt there was a lot of overlap between the characters of Gregor Samsa and Charlie Brown. That's the strip everyone remembers of mine and I think it's because I hit upon the perfect combination. These ideas are in the air. I feel I can execute them really well, but those things exist beyond me . . . you were saying something about the comedy, or the way I write the jokes?<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Robert Sikoryak and Kriota Willberg, "The New York Comics Symposium: Interview with R. Sikoryak and Kriota Willberg," by Andrea Tsurumi, *The Rumpus*, last modified August 2, 2013, accessed March 25, 2016, <http://therumpus.net/2013/08/the-new-york-comics-symposium-interview-with-r-sikoryak-kriota-willberg/>.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

The sentiments that Tsurumi raises about “Good Ol’ Gregor Brown” being “faithful to the text of both things”<sup>141</sup> further provides evidence that Sikoryak’s work is a combination of the two universes into a third separate universe that still holds true to important aspects from the original texts. The commitment to *The Metamorphosis* and *Peanuts* that Tsurumi highlights is Sikoryak detailed replication of Schulz style of comic illustration and having his new universe stay confined within the pre-established unofficial rules that Schulz had created for himself and the *Peanuts* universe. Sikoryak’s commitment to *The Metamorphosis* is evident in the way Kafka’s plot and characters are closely mimicked and followed and how even with the details and textual elements that are left out, the original story is still recognizable. According to Sikoryak, the amalgamation of the two separate worlds into a unique third that still stays true to elements of each original works well because of how alike Gregor Samsa and Charlie Brown are as individual characters. He explains how to him Gregor Samsa and Charlie Brown are “really the same character”<sup>142</sup> which made it possible for the comic to work well. The two characters share important characteristics that both Kafka and Schulz attributed to Samsa and Brown independent of one another.

In “Chips Off the Ol’ Blockhead: Evidence of Influence in Peanuts Parodies” Gene Kannenberg, Jr., explores how Sikoryak’s appropriation is successful because of the similarities between the Gregor Samsa and Charlie Brown and the way Sikoryak follows Schulz comic structure and borrows elements from *Peanuts* to create “Good Ol’ Gregor Brown.” Kannenberg views Sikoryak’s work not specifically as a separate appropriative work where important aspects

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

from the original sources are co-mingled, but similar to Tsurumi's idea that, "Good Ol' Gregor Brown" uses *The Metamorphosis* and the world of *Peanuts* to tell a story. Kannenberg explains how the role of each original text within "Good Ol' Gregor Brown" through the idea that the, "... primary base-text is in fact 'The Metamorphosis,' with *Peanuts* being a second interpretive system used to adapt the story."<sup>143</sup> Kannenberg's theory that *Peanuts* acts as a formative and graphic vessel for exploring and explaining the plot of *The Metamorphosis*, proves "Good Ol' Gregor Brown's" existence as a third universe, separate from the pre-formed textual and graphic worlds that Kafka and Schulz created. Kannenberg explains this through Sikoryak use of *Peanuts* as the primarily physical and visual foundation for this appropriation and *The Metamorphosis* as the predominately plot based foundation.

Kannenberg however, does not view "Good Ol' Gregor Brown" as an appropriation, but as a combination of multiple forms that fall within the categories of adaptation, appropriation, translation, and interpretation. Kannenberg views Sikoryak's work as, "...not just adaptation, not just retelling, but of translation in terms of both form and idiom,"<sup>144</sup> along with this being a parody of both texts.<sup>145</sup> The idea of "Good Ol' Gregor Brown" being a parody is problematic because it does not fully encompass the complexities that Sikoryak's exhibits as a synthesis of two separate works. The use of parody as a classifier for Sikoryak's work diminishes the intrinsic value that it has, especially when acknowledging the other terms that Kannenberg uses as

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<sup>143</sup> Gene Kannenberg, Jr, "Chips Off the Old Blockhead: Evidence of Influence in Peanuts Parodies," *Studies in American Humor*, n.s., 3, no. 14 (2006): 93.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. 92.

descriptors; adaptation, retelling, and translation. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines parody as:

A literary composition modelled on and imitating another work, *esp.* a composition in which the characteristic style and themes of a particular author or genre are satirized by being applied to inappropriate or unlikely subjects, or are otherwise exaggerated for comic effect. In later use extended to similar imitations in other artistic fields, as music, painting, film, etc.<sup>146</sup>

This definition of parody, while comprehensive, does little to differentiate itself as a more apt term for describing “Good Ol’ Gregor Brown.” Instead it acts as an explicative platitude that fails to describe the work as efficiently as the more specific term already used. Kannenberg’s idea that “Good Ol’ Gregor Brown” is an adaptation, like the use of parody as a descriptor, does not fully exemplify the complexities that are created through the amalgamation of both works.

Referring back to Hutcheon’s definition of adaptation, Sikoryak’s “Good Ol’ Gregor Brown” is more than just a “a shift of medium”<sup>147</sup> and a work that is “telling the same story from a different point of view”<sup>148</sup> because this specific graphic work does not absorb the content of one appropriated work into the other, like the “Metamorphsimpsons,” but uses *The Metamorphosis* and *Peanuts* equally to tell the story of “Good Ol’ Gregor Brown.” Kannenberg is applying a broad definition of translation to their classification of Sikoryak’s work where the term is being interpreted as, “... inter-semiotic transpositions from one sign system (for example, words) to another (for example, images)...”<sup>149</sup> This definition, again from Hutcheon, provides a

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<sup>146</sup> "parody, n.2". OED Online. March 2016. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/138059?rskey=MgQwZ7&result=2> (accessed March 27, 2016).

<sup>147</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 7-8.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid. 8

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. 16.

basis for Kannenberg's broad claim. This claim, while not wrong, is just too unspecific to truly assert it as a classification for Sikoryak's that, again, encompasses everything. This classification is merely explaining that "Good Ol' Gregor Brown" is a, "...translation in terms of both form and idiom,"<sup>150</sup> because the foundation of the work, *The Metamorphosis*, switches from a solely textual to graphic medium.

While Kannenberg and I disagree on the classification of Sikoryak's work, Kannenberg associate the success that "Good Ol' Gregor Brown" holds as a combination of *The Metamorphosis* and *Peanuts* with Sikoryak's commitment to staying true to Schulz's world and the similarities between Gregor Samsa and Charlie Brown. Kannenberg highlights how:

...the individual strips which comprise "Gregor Brown" themselves function in the same ways as idol "real" *Peanuts* strips: the situations and even character types are the same, the rhythm of the presentation is the same, and the joke or payoff at the end of each strip is the same. Sikoryak not only uses the *Peanuts* characters to retell Kafka's story, he utilizes the day-to-day strip continuity to break down the narrative into smaller, punch-line-punctuated units.<sup>151</sup>

This analysis of Sikoryak's structure of "Good Ol' Gregor Brown" further illustrates how closely the structure of the original *Peanuts* comics was followed in order to create an appropriation that stays true to both original works. Kannenberg explains how Sikoryak not only uses the basic structure that is equated to *Peanuts*, individual strips that make up a greater comic, but uses the specific characters to tell Kafka's story—and how, "using the *Peanuts* cast to adapt Kafka's story ultimately seems perfectly fitting...."<sup>152</sup> This same sentiment is shared by both Sikoryak and

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<sup>150</sup> Kannenberg, "Chips Off the Old Blockhead," 93.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid. 93-94.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. 95.

Tsurumi because of the immense similarities between Gregor Samsa and Charlie Brown's character traits and general demeanor.

In his essay on "The World of Charlie Brown" Umberto Eco analyzes Schulz's character in a manner that we can attribute to Kafka's Gregor Samsa. Eco's interpretation of the way Brown functions, both an individual character and in his greater role within the *Peanuts* universe, is focused on multiple aspects of the character's psyche. The main points of the analysis are Charlie Brown's inferiority complex, his repetitive failures, his normality, and his rejection by society. Specifically Eco details how in the center of the *Peanuts* universe:

...is Charlie Brown: ingenuous, stubborn, always awkward and doomed to failure. Requiring, to a critical degree, communication and popularity, and repaid by the matriarchal, know-it-all girls of his group with scorn, references to his round head, accusations of his stupidity, all the little digs that strike home, Charlie Brown, undaunted, seeks tenderness on every side...He always fails. His solitude becomes an abyss, his inferiority complex is pervasive—tinged by the constant suspicion...that Charlie Brown does not have an inferiority complex, but really is inferior. The tragedy is that Charlie Brown is not inferior. Worse; he is absolutely normal.<sup>153</sup>

These are all qualifiers (the inferiority complex, his repetitive failures, his normality, and his rejection by society) that have been or able to be attributed to Gregor Samsa by theorists or by the character himself within specific moments in the novella. In *Franz Kafka: Parable and Paradox*, Heinz Politzer outlines many of the same characteristics that Charlie Brown displays, but in relation to Gregor Samsa and more specifically the transformative process he goes through and how the changes affect him and his relationships. Politzer focuses on three main aspects of Gregor's psychological changes that line up with the qualifiers Eco assigns to Schulz's Brown.

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<sup>153</sup> Umberto Eco, "The World of Charlie Brown," trans. William Weaver, in *The Graphic Art of Charles Schulz*, comp. The Oakland Museum (Oakland, CA: Oakland Museum, 1985), 84.

The first focus is on Gregor Samsa's change, "...from a recluse into a parasitic insect."<sup>154</sup> The second focus is on, "...Gregor's submissiveness..."<sup>155</sup> and the third revolves around Gregor's understanding of, "...his human failure..."<sup>156</sup> when he is at the end of his life. While Politzer does not specifically use the same terms as Eco, the general meaning that is taken from Eco's attributes remains. Eco labels Charlie Brown as a character who is rejected by society just like Politzer calls Gregor a "recluse" who transforms into a "parasite"—a label that has the greatest negative societal connotations because he is calling him both a literal bug and someone who is negatively dependent on those around him. Like Charlie Brown, Gregor Samsa is outright labeled as a failure; again a term that connects to the societal disadvantages and failings that each character faces independent of one another. For Gregor these relationships are with his family, specifically the control that his father has over him financially and Gregor's lack of motivation and foresight to escape his grasp until it is forced upon him by the transformation that takes place. The relationships that Charlie Brown has trouble with are centered on his friendships with the other characters in the strips and how, like Eco explains, Brown is regularly bullied by others because of his "failures." While the actual terms may be different, the behavior by Gregor Samsa that is regarded as submissive and the behavior by Charlie Brown that highlights his inferiority are similar.<sup>157</sup> Submissive behavior is defined as:

A form of display (1) in which an animal that loses a fight, whether an escalated fight or a conventional fight, adopts a submissive posture to acknowledge defeat and to deter

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<sup>154</sup> Heinz Politzer, *Franz Kafka: Parable and Paradox* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962), 45.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.* 71.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.* 75.

<sup>157</sup> In order to understand how these two terms are interconnected in regard to both characters individual characteristics the Oxford Dictionary of Psychology will be used as a reference point.



further attack. Human equivalents include gestures (1) of non-verbal communication such as holding up one's empty palms to communicate 'I give up'.<sup>158</sup>

Similarly an inferiority complex is, "...a complex of emotionally toned ideas arising from repressed fear and resentment associated with real or imagined inferiority, resulting either in compensation, in the form of pugnacity, or withdrawal into oneself."<sup>159</sup> These two psychological definitions interconnect through the idea of cause and effect—that one of the characteristics, an inferiority complex, can cause the other, the submissive behavior, to occur. In the case of Gregor Samsa and Charlie Brown, while both characters do not directly display both submissive behavior and inferiority complexes, Samsa's submissiveness resembles the way Schulz displays Brown's inferiority. In Gregor Samsa's case he is submissive to his family, Gregor is the sole provider for them even though his father is still able to work, which directly results in him feeling like a failure and inferior to his father when he can no longer provide for his family and his father takes on the role.<sup>160</sup> Charlie Brown's inferiority complex is highlighted in the character's constant affirmations that he could have done better, usually in the comics that focus on sports, or that other characters have done better than him. In the example below Brown states one of these affirmations that highlights his feelings of inferiority.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> "Submissive Behaviour," Oxford Reference, accessed March 29, 2016, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100539870>.

<sup>159</sup> "Inferiority Complex," Oxford Reference, accessed March 29, 2016, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199657681.001.0001/acref-9780199657681-e-4147?rskey=wXZhHN&result=3>.

<sup>160</sup> Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," in *The Complete Stories*, 126.

<sup>161</sup> Charles Schulz, "Peanuts," comic strip, in *Masters of American Comics*, ed. Stephanie Emerson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 90.



Fig. 17. Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, June 15 1958.

In this strip, Charlie Brown's feelings of inferiority are highlighted through his feelings of sadness and failure about his "team crying." In first and second panels we learn that it was Brown who dropped the ball and caused his team to lose. In the fourth panel Brown displays a look of defeatism through his comically accentuated frown and his eyes which express a look of sadness through the placement of the two half circles next to the dots that represent his pupils. In the last panel of this strip, Schulz's audience is lead to believe that Brown is inferior compared to his teammates because he not only dropped the ball (which is on the ground in front of him), but because he is excluded his from his team and does not understand that he is the reason why they are crying and excluding him in the first place. While the idea of submissiveness is not nearly as directly identifiable in Schulz's comics as it is in Kafka's text, Brown nonetheless indirectly submissive to Lucy. Lucy constantly taunts him and calls him "Blockhead!"<sup>162</sup> and Brown rarely, if ever, stands up for himself. He is usually observed in the strips going along with the taunting behavior or ignoring it. In "Good Ol' Gregor Brown" when Grete, who is played by Lucy, uses the insult, Gregor Brown believes that he has done something wrong and hopes that he has not "upset her," (Fig 7) displaying the most extreme example submission in Sikoryak's

<sup>162</sup> Emerson, *Masters of American Comics*, 91.

work. This is especially notable because this submission is the result of the combination of Gregor Samsa and Charlie Brown into one unified character.

As a result of the meshing of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and Schulz's *Peanuts*, Sikoryak creates a graphic universe where two similar characters, because of their inferiority complexes, personal failures, and social rejection, are transformed into a singular character. In "Good Ol' Gregor Brown," Sikoryak follows Kafka's plot and characters closely while still adhering to the structural and character based constraints that Schulz's comic world entails; like in the "Metamorphsimpsons" Kafka's characters partially assume the identities of those within the universe that are hosting them. However in the case of Sikoryak's appropriation the characters from the two separate creative worlds interconnect and Gregor Brown, the combination of both titular characters, is created. Gregor Brown's identity separate from original characters, not only because he exists in a different literary and graphic universe, but because the traits that Gregor Brown holds cannot be solely attributed to either Gregor Samsa or Charlie Brown. Sikoryak's "Good Ol' Gregor Brown" is a pop-culture appropriation of *The Metamorphosis* that instead of detracting from Kafka's plot (as we have seen in Kuper's the "Metamorphsimpsons") and using the influence of the other pre-formed universe, this is observed again in the "Metamorphsimpsons," that is being used to sway the story in one way or another, it stays true to both the graphic element and the textual element that it is appropriating.

## Conclusion

*“The first broadening of light in the world outside the window entered his consciousness once more. Then his head sank to the floor of its own accord and from his nostrils came the last faint flicker of his breath.”*

— Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*

As adaptations, appropriations, translations, and interpretations, these graphic works stay relatively true to the general plot trajectory of the original text. Each version, regardless of how different it may be from the original text still includes a Gregor that is a ‘monstrous vermin’ and a story line that begins post transformation and ends with his death. However, how do we classify and analyze a text that includes a version of the first line of the original German and references to Kafka, but changes the plot so drastically that the “metamorphosis” does not occur until halfway through the text and when Gregor is at the bottom of the ocean after being throw off a boat on its way to America? While the work in question, *Henshin* is a manga<sup>163</sup> and is in Japanese instead of English (like the other four versions) which denies me access to the text because I do not know the language, the illustrations alone are enough to suggest such a drastically skewed imagining of the original story.

*Henshin* by Baraeti Ato Wakusu, is part of a series called “Manga de Dokuha,” or “Reading Through with Manga” by East Press where the aim is to “introduce average manga readers to important literary works they would otherwise not be aware of or willing to read.”<sup>164</sup> With this version of *The Metamorphosis* being the only one that is in a form from another

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<sup>163</sup> Manga is the Japanese equivalent of American Comics. “In a nutshell, the modern Japanese manga is a synthesis: a long Japanese tradition of art that entertains has taken on a physical form imported from the West.” Frederik L. Schodt, *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga* (Berkeley, Calif.: Stone Bridge Press, 1996), 21.

<sup>164</sup> “Manga de Dokuha,” in *Wikipedia*, accessed April 30, 2016, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manga\\_de\\_Dokuha](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manga_de_Dokuha).

country there are going to be inherent differences, such as the style of illustration, the structure, and the way the individual characters are stylized. Do these differences, however, justify the drastic changes in the actual content?

Approaching this work in the context of adaptation theory is difficult, because of the language it is written in, and because of how far it strays from the original work. This work, first and foremost is a translation, from German to Japanese, as established on the first page of the manga.<sup>165</sup>

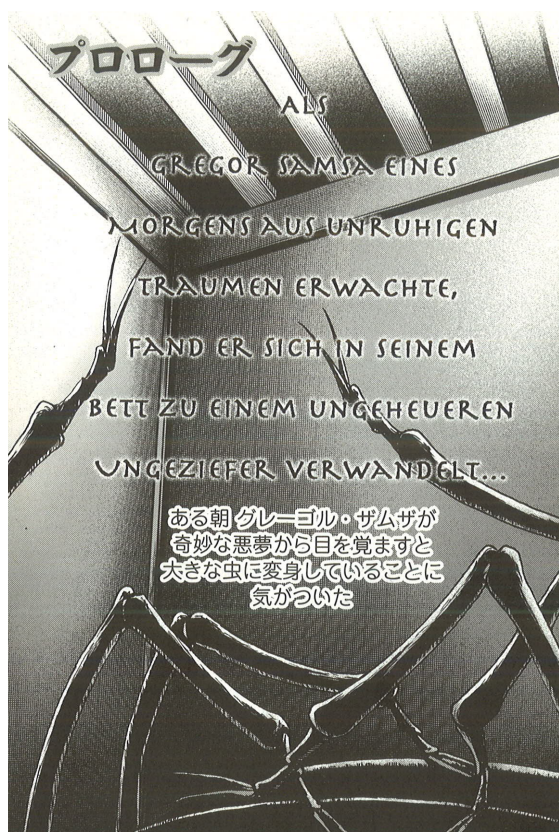


Fig. 18. Baraeti Ato Wakusu, *Henshin*, 2008.

The German text used on this page is the exact same as the original German from *The Metamorphosis*. However, the use of the original text in the original language is misleading

<sup>165</sup> Franz Kafka and Baraeti Ato Wakusu, *Henshin* (Tokyo: Isuto Puresu, 2008).

because this is the only really connection between the two works. Unlike the works by Crumb, Kuper, and Sikoryak, Wakusu's version of *The Metamorphosis* has little to do with the novella. It is at times an appropriation of the original work—Gregor's character is still present, but looks more like a centaur than a “monstrous vermin” and Grete still plays the violin. However, even though these elements still exist within *Henshin*, they do not make this work more like the graphic versions that can be thought of more traditionally as an adaptation, appropriation, translation, or interpretation. Instead, *Henshin* differentiates itself further from the other works and the original text because of immense textual and visual differences. While elements of this manga are appropriations of the original text and it is a translation, the direct relationship between the Wakusu's work and *The Metamorphosis* stop.

The way *Henshin* has the ability to affect a reader's interpretation of *The Metamorphosis* is unique to the fact that this work is in Japanese and is directed at a non-English speaking audience. The liberties taken with the original matter immensely given that readers are likely to be in contact with Kafka only through this manga, with no prior knowledge, while several of the other graphic versions assume that the reader has a some level of previous knowledge of the original text.

While I was not able to include the Japanese to English translation in my analysis of *Henshin*, this thesis is primarily looking at how the images act as interpretations of the original text, not the words in each graphic version. Thus, it is appropriate to interpret *Henshin* by only using the images. Yet it is the images, which inform the majority of the content in this version of *The Metamorphosis*, that prevent new readers (who this work is aimed at), from being able to understand the original text without being draw back to this incorrect version.

Compared to the other graphic works, the use of *The Metamorphosis* in *Henshin* is an exception, not the norm. Crumb, Kuper, and Sikoryak's adaptations, appropriations, translations, and interpretations display versions of Kafka's work that collectively follow the general trajectory of the text and do not include drastic plot changes that make work indistinguishable from the original like *Henshin*.

However, even with the immense difference between *Henshin* and the other works, they all still change the way we know Kafka had imagined the original text, specifically with no physical illustrations of Gregor. Yet, the inclusion of Gregor does not necessarily change the way a reader may interpret the original text. What creates a change of interpretation in an audience's mind is how the author of the new version of the original work changes the actual content. This is evident in the comparative study of Crumb and Markowitz's "Metamorphosis" and Kuper's *The Metamorphosis*. As established in Chapter One, Crumb and Markowitz version of *The Metamorphosis* is a re-creation and stays relatively true to the original text, albeit for the inclusion of Gregor's image and the exclusion of some moments from the original plot. However, even with the exclusion of moments from the plot, Crumb and Markowitz version still follows the original plot because the moments that are excluded are in fact included elsewhere. On the other hand, Kuper's *The Metamorphosis*, the first of his two versions, does not change the plot or exclude content, but shifts the themes and motifs in the story from a text that focuses on identity and the human condition to anti-capitalism and Marxist ideas. While Adorno attempts to show that these themes are present in the original text, Stanley Corngold shows how Adorno's interpretation does not support the actual content of the original text. Just like Adorno, Kuper changes how Kafka's story is thought of, but instead of the interpretation being solely textual,

Kuper's interpretation is visual which makes the drastic change in the stories theme and content all the more lasting in a reader's mind—especially, due to the fact that knowledge of the original story is needed in order to understand Kuper's interpretation.

Kuper's second version of *The Metamorphosis*, which is an adaptation that includes elements of appropriation and interpretation, is drastically different than his first, both because of the actual content and the nature of the illustrations. Kuper's "Metamorphsimpsons" is a pop-culture adaptation that combines elements from two pre-formed contextual worlds—*The Simpsons* and *The Metamorphosis*. This adaptation, unlike Sikoryak's "Good Ol' Gregor Brown," takes the plot and contextual content of *The Metamorphosis* and places it in the visual world of *The Simpsons*, where Gregor is illustrated as Homer Simpson.

Sikoryak's version is the only true appropriation of the five, where his "Good Ol' Gregor Brown" is the amalgamation of two pre-formed worlds, Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and Charles Schulz's *Peanuts*, into a third. This third world differentiates itself from the two worlds that create it primarily through the creation of a new character, Gregor Brown. Unlike the "Metamorphsimpsons," where Gregor Samsa is Homer Simpson, in Sikoryak's appropriation our titular character is neither Kafka's Samsa nor Schulz's Brown, but a synthesis of different traits from each character. The same synthesis also accounts for the physical structure of Sikoryak's appropriation and the actual content of his version.

The ambiguity that is present in the original text, which primarily surrounds how we as readers are given instructions on how to visualize Gregor (the shape of his back, 'his numerous little legs'), but are given a direct indication of what he has actually transformed into, is what has created the environment for these adaptations, appropriations, translations, and



interpretations to exist. However, this is the same environment that causes these versions of Kafka's work to be problematic because they make something that is purposefully ambiguous clear. This clarity, which has been established after the original text was published, makes a reader unable to see how important the ambiguity is because the concepts that provide this clarity are seemingly unavoidable. This clarity is not only established by the authors of these graphic versions, but by translators (who have made word-choice based changes through translation), and literary theorists like Nabokov, (who have attempted to figure out Gregor's identity by over-analyzing the original text).

Regardless of the drastic amount of changes or lack of changes that these graphic versions make to Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, it's hard to imagine that a reader can separate the illustrations of Gregor and the story of his "metamorphosis" from the original plot. These graphic Gregor's permanently provide a reader with a visualization of character, because the original story lacks one that is not created in a readers mind. Thus, making it hard for an audience to separate the original text from any of the graphic versions because they provide a concrete visual depiction for something that Kafka's work makes a reader imagine on their own—independent of an illustrated guide, or *crutch*.

Yet, if these graphic works and the original text cannot exist independent of one another, after an audience has read both or just a graphic version, is it because we lack the imagination to think of Gregor as something other than an image that has already been pre-constructed for us, or is it that the ambiguity surrounding Kafka's text and titular character leaves us unable to fully understand and imagine Gregor without help?

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