A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

Franz Kafka

THE METAMORPHOSIS

A NEW TRANSLATION
TEXTS AND CONTEXTS
CRITICISM

Translated by

SUSAN BERNOFSKY
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Edited by

MARK M. ANDERSON
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

W. W. NORTON & COMPANY • *New York* • *London*

W. W. Norton & Company has been independent since its founding in 1923, when William Warder Norton and Mary D. Herter Norton first published lectures delivered at the People's Institute, the adult education division of New York City's Cooper Union. The firm soon expanded its program beyond the Institute, publishing books by celebrated academics from America and abroad. By midcentury, the two major pillars of Norton's publishing program—trade books and college texts—were firmly established. In the 1950s, the Norton family transferred control of the company to its employees, and today—with a staff of four hundred and a comparable number of trade, college, and professional titles published each year—W. W. Norton & Company stands as the largest and oldest publishing house owned wholly by its employees.

Copyright © 2016 by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.
Translation copyright © 2014 by Susan Bernofsky

All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America
First Edition

Manufacturing by Maple Press
Book design by Antonina Krass
Production manager: Vanessa Nuttry

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kafka, Franz, 1883–1924, author.
[Verwandlung. English]
The Metamorphosis : a new translation ; texts and contexts ; criticism / Translated by Susan Bernofsky, Columbia University ; Edited by Mark M. Anderson, Columbia University. — First edition.
pages cm. — (A Norton Critical Edition)
Summary: Franz Kafka's 1915 novella of unexplained horror and nightmarish transformation became a worldwide classic and remains a century later one of the most widely read works of fiction in the world. The Metamorphosis is the story of traveling salesman Gregor Samsa, who wakes one morning to find himself transformed into a monstrous insect. In her new translation of Kafka's masterpiece, Susan Bernofsky strives to capture both the humor and the humanity in this macabre tale, underscoring the ways in which Gregor Samsa's grotesque metamorphosis is just the physical manifestation of his longstanding spiritual impoverishment. Mark Anderson's critical apparatus brings together a wide variety of analyses of the existential story, ranging from the psychological vantages of Sacher-Masoch and Nietzsche to focuses of Kafka's relationship to animals, Judaism, and photographs. Along with snippets of Kafka's letters and diary entries concerning The Metamorphosis, a chronology and selected bibliography are also included. — Provided by publisher
Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-393-92320-9 (pbk.)

1. Kafka, Franz, 1883–1924 Verwandlung. I. Bernofsky, Susan, translator.
II. Anderson, Mark M., editor. III. Title.
PT2621.A26V413 2015
833'.912—dc23

2015013869

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue,
New York, N.Y. 10110
www.wwnorton.com

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., Castle House,
75/76 Wells Street, London W1T 3QT

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

Contents

List of Illustrations vii
Preface ix
Translator's Note xv

The Text of *The Metamorphosis* 1

Texts and Contexts 49
KAFKA 51
From Wedding Preparations in the Country 51
Kafka, Max Brod and Editors on *The Metamorphosis* 52
KAFKA'S CONTEMPORARIES 69
Leopold von Sacher-Masoch • *From* Venus in Furs 69
Friedrich Nietzsche
• *From* On the Use and Abuse of History 75
• *From* Thus Spoke Zarathustra 78
Hugo von Hofmannsthal • *From* [The Lord Chandos Letter] 83
Rainer Maria Rilke 86
• Der Panther 87
• The Panther 87
• Archaïscher Torso Apollos 88
• Archaic Torso of Apollo 88
Johannes V. Jensen • The Condignog 89
Jakob von Uexküll • *From* The Environment and Inner World of Animals 95

Criticism 101
Günther Anders • *From* Franz Kafka 103
Walter H. Sokel • Kafka's "Metamorphosis": Rebellion and Punishment 117
Nina Pelikan Straus • Transforming Franz Kafka's "Metamorphosis" 129
Mark M. Anderson • Sliding Down the Evolutionary Ladder? Aesthetic Autonomy in *The Metamorphosis* 144

Elizabeth Boa • Creepy-Crawlies: *The Metamorphosis* and Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* 161
Carolin Duttlinger • *From* Photographic Metamorphoses 173
Kári Driscoll • (A) Is for Animal: Speech and Voice in Ovid and Kafka 184
Dan Miron • [A Few Raisins and Almonds] 196

Kafka: A Chronology 205
Selected Bibliography 209

KÁRI DRISCOLL

(A) Is for Animal: Speech and Voice in Ovid and Kafka†

L'animal que je suis, parle-t-il?
—Jacques Derrida

I. Logos *and* Phonē

As a literary form, the "metamorphosis" is dedicated primarily to the impermanence of form. It is a genre in which the stability of the boundaries between different genera is consistently called into question, prime among them being the boundary between human and animal. At least since Aristotle, man has been defined as the *zoon logon echon,* the only animal possessing language [*logos*]. Language thus constitutes a unique supplement to the mere voice [*phonē*], which man shares with all living creatures.[1] It is therefore not surprising that the human *voice,* rather than language or speech per se, should frequently play a pivotal role not only in establishing the strict distinction between humans and animals, but also in undermining it, as in the metamorphosis. For while speech, as the unique property of the *zoon logon echon,* serves as a guarantee of the humanity of the speaker, the human voice is in constant danger of being mistaken for an animal voice (and vice versa), and thus invalidating the strict separation of human and animal.

Thus, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* the transformation of the subject is often marked by a change in his or her voice. The hunter Actaeon, for example, who, as punishment for having accidentally glimpsed the naked goddess Diana while bathing, is transformed into a stag, does not at first understand what is happening to him: as he flees the scene, he is struck by his newfound speed, but does not otherwise perceive the corporeal transformation he has undergone. The metamorphosis is recognized as such only when he attempts to speak, which, significantly, he does at the sight of his reflection:

Actaeon fled,
Royal Actaeon, and marvelled in his flight
At his new leaping speed, but, when he saw

---

† From Kári Driscoll, "'*Das war eine Tierstimme*': *Metamorphosen der Stimme bei Ovid und Kafka*," *Tierstudien* 4 (2013): 25–35. Revised and translated by the author. Reprinted by permission of the author.

[1] See Aristotle, *Politics,* with an English translation by H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959) 10–11 (1253a10).

His head and antlers mirrored in a stream,
He tried to say "Alas!"—but no words [*vox nulla*] came;
He groaned—that was his voice [*vox illa fuit*]; the tears
 rolled down
On cheeks not his—all changed except his mind.[2]

When he tries to voice his distress, his voice fails him: "vox nulla secuta est" (lit. no voice followed). His voice is no longer equipped to utter even a simple exclamation ("Alas!"); instead, it produces only an inarticulate groan. Yet this too is a voice: "vox illa fuit." The essence of Actaeon's metamorphosis lies in the tension between these two voices, which we might describe using the classical distinction between *vox articulata* and *vox confusa*. The difference between the two hinges not on an a priori distinction between rational and irrational speech, or even between human and animal, but rather on whether or not an utterance is scriptable: while the former may be divided into syllables and thus transformed into written language, the latter is immediate and hence cannot be written down.[3] It is important to note that while man is typically the only creature whose voice may be considered to be *articulata*, the human voice can equally be labeled *confusa*: as the great Enlightenment philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder noted at the beginning of his *Treatise on the Origin of Language*: "All violent sensations of [man's] body [. . .] and all strong passions of his soul immediately express themselves directly in cries, in sounds, in wild, inarticulate noises. A suffering animal, as much as the hero Philoctetes, when overcome with pain, will whine!, will groan!"[4] In the wake of his metamorphosis, the hero Actaeon is stranded between these two poles: when his hounds at last overpower him, "He gave a wailing scream, | Not human, yet a sound no stag could voice" (Ovid III: 237–39). Just what is this sound that is neither human nor animal?

---

2. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, translated by A. D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 57. Book III, lines 198–203 (henceforth cited parenthetically in the text).
3. "All voices are either distinct [*articulata*] or indistinct [*confusa*]: the human voice is distinct, and animal indistinct. A distinct voice is one that can be written, such as A or E; an indistinct voice is one that cannot be written, such as the moaning of the sick or the voices of the birds and beasts." Thomas of Cantimpré, *Liber de natura rerum* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973) 26, quoted in Karl Steel, "Centaurs, Satyrs, and Cynocephali: Medieval Scholarly Teratology and the Question of the Human," *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, edited by Asa Simon Mittman and Peter Dendle (Burlington: Ashgate 2011) 271n59.
4. Johann Gottfried Herder, "Treatise on the Origin of Language (1772)," *Philosophical Writings*, translated and edited by Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 65. Herder is echoing Aristotle here, who in ascribing the specific faculty of *logos* to the human, notes that "[t]he mere voice [. . .] can indicate pain and pleasure, and therefore is possessed by the other animals as well (for their nature has been developed so far as to have sensations of what is painful and pleasant and then signify those sensations to one another)" (*Politics* 1253a10 [p. 11]). An obvious corollary to this is that we *humans* too may express pain or pleasure by means of our inarticulate "mere voice" rather than by articulate speech.

Having pronounced her curse upon Actaeon, Diana spitefully adds: "'Now tell | You saw me here naked without my clothes, | If you can tell at all!'" (III: 192–93). Thus, his metamorphosis is explicitly marked as an effacement of speech, a prohibition against storytelling. And indeed, when his hounds have closed in on him, he longs to shout, "'I am Actaeon, look, I am your master!'" But: "Words failed his will; their baying filled the sky" (III: 230–31). Stripped of his *vox articulata,* Actaeon is unable to assert his mastery over his hounds—and hence his human sovereignty—and his identity is lost amid the general confusion of animal voices. Actaeon's complete loss of self is underlined in the poem by the fact that immediately before this moment Ovid provides a lengthy catalogue of the hounds in the pack: between Blackfoot, the first, and Barker ("noisy bitch" [*acutae vocis,* lit. "of piercing voice"]), the last, we learn the names of a further *thirty* individual dogs, often including their provenance and distinguishing features, over the space of twenty lines—almost a fifth of the entire narrative. To add insult to injury, the poet cuts short his enumeration on the grounds that it would take too long to name them all. The list of names is thus potentially infinite; Actaeon alone now has no name, and is torn mercilessly limb from limb.

> He gave a wailing scream,
> Not human, yet a sound no stag could voice,
> And filled with anguished cries the mountainside
> He knew so well; then, suppliant on his knees,
> Turned his head silently from side to side,
> Like arms that turned and pleaded. (III: 237–41)

His gestures cannot be "heard" above the din of the noisy hounds and the shouts of his former fellow huntsmen, and he submits, silently, to his death. Arguably, it is at this moment that the metamorphosis is complete. He turns *his* head (when before his tears had rolled down "cheeks not his") from side to side, in imitation, almost, of a human gesture.

II. The "Rustle" of Language

In Kafka's *Metamorphosis* it is also the voice that marks the transformation as complete. Gregor Samsa attempts to speak—to assert his presence as a human subject—but because of his voice he is perceived not as a human being but rather as an animal. When he awakes in his "proper human room"[5] to find himself transformed into a "monstrous insect" (3), Gregor is astonishingly calm in the face of his new physical state. Similarly to Actaeon, his mind is unchanged even as his body is completely altered. But unlike Actaeon, Gregor does not at any point encounter his reflection, and it is not until he hears himself speak that he feels alienated from himself. Without a mirror stage to generate a sense of self (and of the self as other), it is Gregor's voice that alerts him to the discrepancy between his felt identity and his actual physical form.

---

[5] Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis: A Norton Critical Edition*: translated by Susan Bernofsky (New York: Norton, 2015). 3. Subsequent parenthetical citations for quotations from *The Metamorphosis* refer to this Norton Critical Edition.

The experience of hearing oneself speak has traditionally been regarded as entirely immediate, as so-called "pure auto-affection,"[6] yet, as Jacques Derrida has shown, it is nevertheless predicated on a minimal distinction between speaker and hearer, a barely perceptible hiatus that transforms the experience of the self into the experience of an other. The *phonē* bridges the gap between *logos* and *physis,* between language and body. Thus, the intrinsic and yet constantly disavowed alterity of the self is inscribed already in the nature of the voice as at once coincident with and yet not reducible to language. Language is merely the semantic part of an utterance, the *articulate* part, which may be taken down in writing and thus translated from presence into absence, from sound into silence. But the voice also contains a purely vocal, noniterative component, which continually eludes *logos,* and which can therefore never truly be circumscribed by thought or language. This is the *physical* part of the voice, or, if you prefer: the *animal part.* And this animal voice—which is also *our* voice—exists perennially on the edge of *logos.*

In an early essay, Giorgio Agamben notes that "[w]e can only think, in language, because language is and yet is not our voice."[7] It is this irreducible disparity, he writes, that gives rise to thought: "We think [. . .] because, finally, we hope to find our voice in language. Long ago—we are told—our voice was inscribed in language. The search for this voice in language is thought" (107). Agamben describes going for a walk through the woods at night and being surprised at the infinite variety of animal voices. With every step he hears "the rustle of invisible animals" in the undergrowth on either side of the path he is following. This evening walk becomes a metaphor for the relationship of language to thought. The path consists of words, but they are not important: what really matters "is the indistinct patter that we sometimes hear moving to the side [. . .]. The animal in flight that we seem to hear rustling away in our words is—we are told—our own voice" (107).

---

[6] Jacques Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl's Phenomenology,* translated by Leonard Lawlor (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011) 68.

[7] Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity,* translated by Karen E. Pinkus with Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) 107.

For Roland Barthes, too, rustling is a "limit-noise," always ungraspable by rational discourse and yet not entirely beyond "a horizon of meaning."[8] Barthes associates the sound of "rustling" with a machine that is working so perfectly that it is all but imperceptible (it is only when the machine breaks down and begins to stutter that we become aware of it). Hence rustling, as Barthes conceives of it, is "an impossible noise," because it is "the noise of what, functioning to perfection, has no noise" (76–78). With regard to language, rustling is, crucially, tied to the body and above all the voice, as a form of speech that is "exempt" from meaning, and hence liberated from the violence of signification (79). Meaning and signification, then, would constitute a kind of stuttering or disturbance in the smooth functioning of the machine of language. Conversely, this a-signifying rustle, grounded as it is in the physicality of the speaker and the specific "grain" of the voice, represents a threat to the supremacy of *logos* over *phonē*. The fact that such "rustling" is essentially unintelligible *as* meaning, and yet does not lie *beyond* a horizon of (possible) meaning, ties it to the designation of *vox confusa,* which does not deny any and all potential meaning to an utterance outright, but rather specifies simply that it remains unscriptible and hence unintelligible to our existing modes of linguistic recording.[9] Such an attitude is the antithesis of strict logocentrism, which views all components of an utterance besides *logos* as fundamentally insignificant. The "rustle" of language necessarily suspends all narrative, because it is radically synchronous and thus disrupts the diachronic, sequential nature of the sentence. This is why Barthes begins his essay with a remark concerning the impossibility of erasing a spoken utterance, except by adding to it—by saying, "I take that back," for instance. "Rustling," by contrast, would be a form of erasure that escapes the necessary sequentiality or contiguity of speech and introduces a synchronous "white noise" that subtracts rather than adding its erasure.

This indefinable, rustling threat to sense is omnipresent in Kafka.[1] Most prominently, of course, in his late story "The Burrow,"

[8] Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language,* translated by Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989) 76–79.

[9] Cf. Karl Steel's discussion of the distinction between *vox articulata* and *vox confusa*: "Such definitions focus not on the vocal content but on the tools for recording voices. They imply not that snakes lack language, but that human understanding has failed them; that any animal, any creature [. . .] might be understood by humans as well, if only humans could develop the capacity to construe or to transcribe its voice properly" (272).

[1] We find it in Odradek's uncanny lungless laugh, which sounds "like the rustling of falling leaves"; in Josefine's singing, which is more akin to "piping" or "whistling"; in the cry of the jackdaws in "An Old Manuscript"; and in the howling of the "wolf's cough" in "Memoirs of the Kalda Railway." Gerhard Kurz lists several others, including the hive-like drone of the court in the fragment "Advocates" and the rustling of the voices from the grave in "The Warden of the Tomb." See Gerhard Kurz, "The Rustling of Stillness. Approaches to Kafka's *The Burrow,*" in *Kafka's Selected Stories*, edited by Stanley Corngold, translated by Eric Patton (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007) 333–55 (346).

in which the animal protagonist becomes aware of a faint, insistent hissing sound, "audible only after long pauses,"[2] the origin of which is impossible to establish, for it is, as the creature asserts, in truth "nothing" [*ein Nichts*]; it is, in other words, "the noise of an absence of noise" (Barthes 78), the sound of silence, as it were. Most importantly, while the burrowing narrator initially conceives of this hissing or rustling as a threat coming from outside its burrow—which, insofar as it can be read as a linguistic construct, a "burrow of writing,"[3] would mean that it must originate *outside* language—it gradually becomes clear that its origin in fact lies *inside* language, that it subtends the narrative, and ultimately consumes it.[4]

In *The Metamorphosis,* this rustling threat to sense is explicitly tied to the voice. Early in the text, when Gregor Samsa is still in bed pondering his strange predicament, there comes "a timid knock at the door":

> "Gregor," the voice called—it was his mother—"it's a quarter to seven. Didn't you want to catch your train?" That gentle voice! Gregor flinched when he heard his own in response: it was unmistakably his old voice, but now it had been infiltrated as if from below by a tortured peeping sound that was impossible to suppress—leaving each word intact, comprehensible, but only for an instant before so completely annihilating it as it continued to reverberate that a person could not tell for sure whether his ears were deceiving him.

While the English translation has "the voice called," the German original uses the impersonal pronoun "es" ("it"),[5] which is repeated after the dash ("it was his mother"), creating a striking chiasmus that seems designed to emphatically depersonalize the mother: "'Gregor', rief *es*—*es* war die Mutter." "I," famously, "is another,"[6] but in this scene "it" appears to be his mother. "It" also has a "gentle voice"—or rather: it *is* the voice. The spatial division between Gregor and his mother is rendered typographically by the dash, on either side of which hovers an "es," as if to visualize the division in the voice itself between inside and outside, self and other. This division forcefully asserts itself the moment Gregor attempts to respond and becomes aware of the "tortured peeping" sound subtending his human voice, rendering his words incomprehensible "as it continued to reverberate." At the moment of their utterance—which is to say, as Gregor hears himself speaking them—his words are still understandable, only later (the German here is *Nachklang,* literally: "after-sound" or "re-sonance") do they become garbled beyond recognition. Gregor's voice, in other words, is in the process of being transformed into a *vox confusa*—a purely immediate voice, which therefore cannot signify, nor can it subsequently be taken down in writing. The moment of hearing-oneself-speak expands, and in retrospect, as it were, the alterity of his own voice gains the upper hand—the signal-to-noise ratio worsens until not a single word reaches the recipients on the other side of the door (beyond the dash).

---

[2] Franz Kafka, "The Burrow," in *Kafka's Selected Stories,* 162–89 (181).

[3] Stanley Corngold, *Franz Kafka: The Necessity of Form* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988) 283.

[4] Like so many of Kafka's stories, "The Burrow" is unfinished. In fact, it ends on a dangling article, "das" [*the*]. Burkhard Müller offers what is to my mind a particularly intriguing interpretation of this abrupt ending, when he suggests that this final word—or more precisely the final letter, "s"—*is* in fact the ominous hissing sound that has *been threatening* to consume the text all along and eradicate all meaning, until all that is left is this lingering unvoiced sibilant, fading away to nothing. See Burkhard Müller, "Consolation in Your Neighbor's Fur: On Kafka's Animal Parables," *Kafka's Creatures: Animals, Hybrids, and Other Fantastic Beings,* edited by Marc Lucht and Donna Yarri (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010) 101–117.

[5] The same is true of the "timid knock at the door," which, in the English, Gregor hears, while in the original German it is again this impersonal "es" that knocks (in German "it" can knock, just as "it" rains in English).

[6] The awareness of the alterity of the self, famously encapsulated in the French symbolist poet Arthur Rimbaud's formulation "je est un autre [I is another]," may in some respects

Not until the office manager arrives in order to find out what has become of Gregor does he attempt to speak again. He pours forth a long, desperate stream of words in which he frantically tries to reassure the manager that he has just suffered a "slight indisposition" (10) nothing too severe, and that he is already feeling quite well again, will take the later train, etc. Meanwhile, he succeeds with some difficulty in rolling off the bed and landing on his many little legs. "And having thus attained control over himself, he fell silent" (11). His words now seem "clearer than in the past" to him, "perhaps because his ear had grown accustomed to their sound" (12). In other words, he no longer perceives the "tortured peeping" in his voice, but on the other side of the door that is all that is left: "'Did you understand a single word?' [. . .] 'That was an animal's voice,' the general manager said, speaking in noticeably subdued tones compared to the cries of Gregor's mother" (11). The manager's statement proves to have illocutionary force: on the basis of the sound of his voice, Gregor has been declared an animal, and thus excluded from the human sphere, precisely because not "a single word" of his

---

be regarded as the defining characteristic of European literature around 1900. Not long after Rimbaud, the prominent German physicist Ernst Mach pronounced the I "unsalvageable" [*unrettbar*], a diagnosis that became something of a credo among German-speaking modernists, in particular the Viennese writer and critic Hermann Bahr, who interpreted it in relation to Darwin's theory of evolution and its consequences for humanity's self-conception. Cf. Ursula Renner, "'Jetzt aber war der Mensch auch ein Tier geworden': Verwandlungsgeschichten um 1900," *Hofmannsthal-Jahrbuch* 19 (2011) 357–99.

speech can be understood. Gregor's voice is thus an animal's voice, a *phonē* devoid of *logos*.[7] The Aristotelian definition of the human as the *zoon logon echon* is based first and foremost on the human capacity to draw distinctions, between good and bad, just and unjust, and so on. The faculty of *logos* carries with it the prerogative to distinguish between oneself and the other and thus to establish a clearly defined self. Indeed, as Juliane Prade observes, "it is this very ability to draw distinctions—and not some a priori distinction—that, for Aristotle, constitutes the difference between humans and other beings."[8] Hence the manager's designation of Gregor's voice as "an animal's voice" is not only performative but also autotelic: *logos* defends its own authority by marking the other as not-*logos* (*a-logon*), thus reaffirming the strict boundary between human and animal.

Meanwhile, now demoted to the status of a *zoon a-logon*, Gregor gradually loses his own ability to draw distinctions and make decisions. Now that his family is worried about him, he feels "drawn once more into the circle of humankind" (12) and "was expecting both the doctor and the locksmith—without properly differentiating [*scheiden*] between the two—to perform magnificent, astounding feats." "So as to have as intelligible a voice as possible for the crucial [*entscheidenden*] discussions that lay ahead," Gregor clears his throat, taking pains to do so as quietly as possible, "since even this sound might differ from human throat-clearing, which he no longer trusted himself to judge [*entscheiden*]" (12). Even when his mother came to knock on his door, he had not been "managing to make up his mind to leave the bed" (5), and, crucially, the manager rings the doorbell—in the German, it is again an anonymous "es" that does so—at precisely the moment when Gregor must "make up his mind and take the plunge [*sich entscheiden*]" (8). The manager's arrival interrupts this decision, and the sentence breaks off without specifying *what* exactly he has to decide. Given what we know about Gregor's situation, and the reference to the time ("for a quarter after seven was only five minutes away"), it seems clear that he must decide whether or not to get out of bed and go to work, but in fact it is his ability to make a decision *at all* that is at stake here.[9] He must make a decision whether to be a human or an animal. The fact that he never makes a decision is sufficient grounds to abrogate his status as a human being.

---

[7] The Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero describes the history of Western logocentrism as a deliberate process of "devocalization" of *logos*, whereby the *phonē* comes to be regarded as a mere integument for rational meaning, rather than as an integral part of expression. The discourse of *logos* can thus present itself as entirely abstract and rational only by severing the bond to the voice, which is forever tied to the body—is indeed an *expression* of the (animal, feminine) body, while meaning is the precinct of the human (and, implicitly, male) rational mind. See Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, translated and with an introduction by Paul A. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), particularly 33–41.

[8] Juliane Prade, "Am Rand des *logos*. Philosophische und literarische Konzepte von Animalität," *Funktionen von Kunst*, edited by Daniel M. Feige, Tilmann Köppe, and Gesa zur Nieden (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009) 87–102 (90). My translation.

III. Metaphor and Metamorphosis

Gregor's indecisiveness is reflected in the indeterminacy of his species. To be sure, the charwoman calls him "you old dung beetle" (36), although Gregor does not respond to such forms of address, and Kafka himself uses the word "insect" to describe Gregor in his letters and diaries, but the language of the story itself is consistently vague in this regard: he awakes to find himself transformed into an indefinite, "monstrous insect" with "many" (rather than, say, six) little legs, a back "hard, like a carapace," and a "curved brown belly segmented by rigid arches" (3). On the basis of these scant anatomical details, Vladimir Nabokov, who, in addition to being a novelist and professor of literature, was of course also a passionate lepidopterist, claimed to have been able to identify Gregor's species, and lambasted critics and translators for their imprecision in labeling him a "cockroach" or a "dung beetle," when in fact he is "merely a big beetle," about the size of a dog, with a hard rounded back "suggestive of wing cases." "Curiously enough," he adds, "Gregor the beetle never found out that he had wings under the hard covering of his back."[1] If he had, he could simply have flown out the open window, to freedom, and the story would have ended quite differently. Now, it is doubtful that Nabokov was being entirely serious in proposing this strict classification, but in any event the scientific precision of his taxonomy renders the consistent ambiguity and indeterminacy of Kafka's language all the more starkly apparent. Kafka famously wrote a letter to his editor forbidding him in no uncertain terms to place an illustration of the "insect" on the cover of the first edition of the story: "The insect itself cannot be depicted. It cannot even be shown from a distance."[2] Evidently, while it may be true that "neither Gregor nor Kafka saw that beetle any too clearly" (Nabokov 260), it was equally important that the reader be prohibited from seeing it as well. In other words, this indeterminacy is not a bug: it's a feature.

According to one of the classic interpretations of *The Metamorphosis,* put forward by Günther Anders as early as 1947, it is not

---

[9] This is even clearer in the German, where "to decide" is a reflexive verb [*sich entscheiden*], and thus connotes much more strongly the sense of deciding *oneself.*

[1] Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature,* edited by Fredson Bowers (New York: Harcourt, 1980) 259.

[2] Letter dated 25 October 1915 to Georg Heinrich Meyer, acting director of the Kurt Wolff Verlag, in *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors,* translated by Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1977) 115.

Gregor, but rather language itself that undergoes a transformation in the story. Anders argues that Kafka "draws from the resources at hand, the figurative character of language. He takes metaphors at their word."[3] This notion was taken up by Walter Sokel, who sees Gregor's metamorphosis as the result of a "literalization" of a metaphor: "Kafka drops the word 'like'," so instead of simply being *like* a monstrous vermin he instead awakes to find himself *literally* transformed into a vermin.

> With this metamorphosis, Kafka reverses the original act of metamorphosis carried out by thought when it forms metaphor; for metaphor is always "metamorphosis." Kafka transforms metaphor back into his fictional reality, and this counter-metamorphosis becomes the starting point for his tale.[4]

In his equally famous essay on the "metamorphosis of the metaphor," Stanley Corngold wonders what it would mean to "literalize" a metaphor, which after all exists precisely in the tension between two meanings. If you take a metaphor out of context, or "at its word," it will cease to be a metaphor and instead become a name. Corngold draws on I. A. Richards's terminology, whereby a metaphor consists of a *tenor* (A)—i.e., the basic element, the thing designated—and a *vehicle* (B): i.e., "that thing *as* which the tenor is designated." The irreducible tension between these two elements constitutes the metaphoricity of the metaphor. It is important to note that the metaphor works by appealing only to those specific characteristics of the *vehicle* that suit the *tenor* or the situation in question. To take the standard example: Achilles is a lion only insofar as he is strong and fearless in battle—not because he has a sandy coat and an impressive dark brown mane. But if one were to take the metaphor "literally," that would mean transferring *all* of the vehicle's attributes onto the *tenor*, in other words to transform (A) so completely into (B) that Achilles would be entirely replaced by an *actual lion*. If that were to happen, the constitutive tension between the tenor and the vehicle would have been resolved, and the metaphoric—as well as the metamorphic—nature of the image would disappear. At the beginning of Kafka's story, however, we do not find an *actual*, clearly defined insect lying in Gregor Samsa's bed, but rather a "monstrous insect," or, more precisely, we find Gregor Samsa who has been "transformed into some sort of monstrous insect." A monster, in other words, neither fish nor fowl. It is impossible to establish his exact

---

3. Günther Anders, *Kafka, pro und contra. Die Prozeß-Unterlagen* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1951) 40. Qtd. in Stanley Corngold, "Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*: Metamorphosis of the Metaphor," *Mosaic* 3.4 (1970) 91–106 (93).
4. Walter H. Sokel, *Franz Kafka* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966) 5.

species (a term that, importantly, derives from the verb *specere,* to look). It may be that Kafka draws on the "figurative character of language," but the figures he draws are ambiguous and elusive, and we cannot see them clearly, not even "from a distance."

"We must stop before the metamorphosis is complete," Corngold writes, "if the metaphor is to be preserved and (A) is to remain unlike (B)" (98). There has to be an irreducible remainder, some unassimilable trace of alterity, that renders not only the *vehicle* but also the *tenor* unstable. Just as the sound uttered by Actaeon in his extreme moment is "[n]ot human, yet a sound no stag could voice," metaphor and metamorphosis are liminal phenomena, existing in the gray area between two states, always indeterminate and hence a threat to the strict distinctions called for by *logos.* This irreducible trace that is left over and allows the metamorphosis to be recognized as such gestures toward the inherent instability and impermanence of these seemingly solid forms.

IV. Signifying Nothing

In Kafka's *Metamorphosis,* the division between Gregor's room and the rest of the house is rendered typographically, as I suggested earlier, by means of a dash, on either side of which hovers an "es." While this barrier effectively blocks the sight of and physical contact with this space of animality, it remains permeable to the voice, and indeed, when the family and the office manager are assembled on either side of Gregor's room, unable to enter, we read that his mother and sister Grete "were communicating [*verständigten sich*] through Gregor's room" (11). That is to say, their speech passes through this zone of distorted, inarticulate nonspeech, which, by virtue of the peculiar layout of the Samsa house, is not on the "margins" of *logos,* but rather is a central space surrounded and traversed by it. Nor do the voices on either side of Gregor's room remain unaffected by their trajectory through this a-signifying space. The mother's voice in particular undergoes significant modulations over the course of the text, far more than that of any other character, except perhaps Gregor's. After the initial reference to her "gentle voice," most of what she says takes the form of cries of anguish and despair ("Oh God, oh God!") uttered with a "hoarse, shrieking voice" [*mit schreiender, rauher Stimme*] (29).

The floating, depersonalized "it," which haunts the text from the moment Gregor's mother knocks on his door, is hinted at even earlier in a reference to the manager's obsequious errand boy as a "creature [. . .] devoid of backbone or wit" (5). In German, the sentence begins with the neuter pronoun "Es": "Es war eine Kreatur des Chefs." In his gloss on this remark, Corngold notes that the pronoun *es* and the word *Kreatur* "introduce an atmosphere of animality—of displaced animality, for it is Gregor, after all, who is the animal" (5n6). Undoubtedly, but I would argue that animality is not simply being "displaced" here from Gregor onto others, but rather that, from the outset, the language of *The Metamorphosis* reveals the categories of human and animal to be arbitrary and inherently unstable (this, more than anything, is what links Kafka's text to the tradition of the literary metamorphosis). The only difference is that while the errand boy is, presumably, only metaphorically a mindless invertebrate, Gregor finds himself *literally* transformed into some kind of insect.

The designation of the messenger as an "it" not only echoes the impersonal "es" used with reference to both the mother and the office manager, but also foreshadows Grete's speech at the end of the story, in which she "demotes" Gregor from the personalized, human "he" to the impersonal, animal "it." This is the second time Gregor is animalized in this way, and on both occasions the mother's reactions provide a striking counterpoint to the unequivocal pronouncements that strip Gregor of his humanity. The first is the manager's designation of Gregor's voice as an animal voice, a verdict spoken in "noticeably subdued tones compared to the cries of Gregor's mother" (11). Following the manager's ignominious retreat, during which his capacity for vocal expression is reduced to a single "cry of horror" (16), which "resounded through the stairwell," Grete eventually assumes the role of the voice of reason, and hence of *logos*. She refuses to refer to that "creature" [*Untier*, literally, the "unanimal"] as her brother, and emphatically insists that they must "get rid of it" (41).

> "She is right a thousand times over," Gregor's father murmured under his breath. His mother, still incapable of breathing freely, began to cough dully into her lifted hand, a lunatic expression in her eyes. [. . .] "We have to try to get rid of it," his sister said, addressing her words exclusively to Gregor's father this time, for his mother was coughing too hard to hear anything. (41)

Gregor's mother suffers from asthma, and spends "every second day gasping for breath on the sofa beside the open window" (23). Her incessant coughing may still, in contrast to Gregor's, be identifiable as *human* coughing, but it is manifestly *inarticulate,* and thus does not fall within the domain of *logos*. Indeed, throughout the text her raw and inarticulate utterances reveal her to be incompatible with rational discourse of the sort Grete now comes to embody. Coughing almost invariably plays a vaguely threatening role in Kafka's texts, perhaps because it also announces a proximity to animality. The coarse laughter of the sailors in the *Report to an Academy*

(1917), for instance, is "always mixed with a dangerous-sounding cough that did not, in fact, mean anything,"[5] and the narrator of the *Memoirs of the Kalda Railway* (1914) develops a debilitating "wolf's cough" which is accompanied by an unbearable animal-like howling.[6] This cough uncannily prefigures Kafka's own tuberculosis, which he would contract three years later, and the indomitable cough associated with it, which, according to Max Brod, he used to refer to as "the animal."

In all of these cases, the cough hovers indeterminately between human and animal, *vox articulata* and *vox confusa*. The same is of course true of Gregor's tentative cough, which, like Actaeon's doleful braying, might not sound human, yet is certainly a sound no insect could voice. The cough belongs to the group of "rustling" sounds that pervade Kafka's narratives and threaten to drown them out, and which moreover serve to undermine the binary oppositions which rational discourse strictly reinforces. The mother's incessant coughing, the father's intolerable hissing, the manager's cry of horror—all of these inarticulate sounds come from the other side of the dash, as it were, which is to say: from the side of *logos*. The hissing in particular "sounds dangerous but means nothing," but the danger lies precisely in its lack of meaning, in the fact that it does not signify, or that it, indeed, signifies "nothing." These too are metamorphoses of the voice; perhaps the story's title does not refer, exclusively at least, to Gregor's metamorphosis. It is not just he, after all, who is an animal.

DAN MIRON

[A Few Raisins and Almonds][†]

Kafka, as is well known, knew Judaism in his childhood and early youth only through the ritual of the synagogue or rather "temple" (for the synagogue he knew was that of the assimilated, Germanized, middle-class Jewish society), from which he recoiled since it struck him as hollow, formalistic, and devoid of any experiential content. This recoiling had much to do with his ambivalent relationship

---

[5] Franz Kafka, "A Report to an Academy," in *Kafka's Selected Stories,* 76–84 (80).

[6] Franz Kafka, "Memoirs of the Kalda Railway," in *Diaries 1900–1924,* translated by Martin Greenberg with the cooperation of Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1988) 303–313. Cf. Kári Driscoll, "The Enemy Within: Zoopoetics in 'Erinnerungen an die Kaldabahn,'" *Journal of the Kafka Society of America* 35/36 (2013) 23–35.

[†] From Dan Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Understanding* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2010), pp. 313–12. Copyright by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Jr. University. All rights reserved. Used with permission of Stanford University Press.