



Victoria University  
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# ASSIGNMENT

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**1. What is postmodernism? What are the features of postmodern literature? Do you think Franz Kafka's Metamorphosis is a postmodern novel? Elaborate your answer with proper reasoning.**

**Answer:** Postmodernism is related to modern beliefs and philosophy. Postmodernism can be described as the denial of the viewpoints and philosophy which was taken for granted up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Postmodernism can also mean the enlightenment of the western civilization and their new viewpoints and philosophy of life. The shift in perspective that has manifested in last two centuries regarding architecture, fashion, communication, technology etc. also broadly refers to as post modernism.

There are some distinct features of postmodern literature. Some of the most noticeable features of postmodern literature is mentioned below.

- a. Make new style of writing by taking ideas from previous writing styles. Postmodern literature involves metafictionality. Metafiction is a form of work which put emphasis in its own narrative structure in a way that constantly reminds the reader that they are reading or viewing a work of fiction. The most obvious example can be a novel which is about a novelist writing a novel. Where at one point the protagonist eventually declares that he does not obey the author anymore and he developed a life of his own. In another work by Pinter, the author declares that the characters do not obey or listen to him and he has no power to control the narrative of the characters.
- b. Acknowledging previous literary works withing new literary works. The literary works of Postmodernism is marked by self-referentiality. Many literary works of Postmodernism is filled with references from the previous work of literature.
- c. Making readers aware of the nature of the fictional writing within the writing itself. These types of writing are referred to as metafiction.
- d. Using non-linear narrative technique in the story. Postmodern literatures are usually inconclusive and doesn't follow the formula of chronological plot.
- e. Using non-exceptional characters with whom the readers can relate. The characters used in postmodern literature has difficulties in life which most of the readers would face. That would make the reader relate to the characters more and care for them, which would make the readers more immersed and invested in the story.
- f. Using Highly detailed and lengthy writing. And postmodern literature may create a different reality within the literature which might start projecting into the readers life.
- g. Producing fictional events in the story in actual historical setting. Postmodern literature can be rewriting of existing narrative which can be a parody or politically subversive from previous narratives.
- h. Directly addressing the reader to increase the involvement of the reader. Readers becomes crucial in order to produce meaning in post modernism. And the readers remain a constant point of reference in postmodern literature.

Franz Kafka's life experiences game him the uniqueness he had. He was born in the house of a prosperous self-made Jewish businessman. His parents did everything to make sure that Kafka got good education. His parents wanted him to speak and write like the German-speaking minority while also appreciating the Jewish side of his family bloodline. Franz Kafka was born in 1883. He was very meritorious and got is doctorate in Law by 1906 at the age of twenty-

three. Franz Kafka met novelist Max Bred in 1902 who first introduced him to Prague literary circles. From there his journey of postmodern literature began. But he did not have enough time to write because he started to work at an Italian insurance company. Due to his sickness he went to retirement early but his writing career continued. One of his most popular novels is *Metamorphosis*. This novel is about a salesman who did everything that was expected of him by his family and his workplace. He never had any high ambition or any extravagant desires. All he knew was working in order to provide for his family. One day he realized that he has turned into a huge insect. At first his family sympathized with him and tried to take care of him. But as day went by, he became inconvenience to everyone in his family. His family became very cruel towards him, especially his father. Many believe this novel is embodiment of his relationship with his family in the end.

*Metamorphosis* is very popular novel from postmodern era. This novel stands out not only because it has a great story but it also has deep psychological and philosophical aspect to it where it gives a perspective on human behaviors. From the very beginning of the story, we witness the isolation Gregor experienced. Upon waking up he finds out that his body has turned into a giant insect and there is nobody around him to help him out. And his isolation becomes more apparent as the story progresses, when he is locked in a room and nobody around him tries to help. Even before he was in this situation he lived in isolation. He never socialized with other people and he did not even have a lover or a close friend. He kept himself isolated from the society. Even though Gregor was alienated from the society, he seemed to be unaware of that fact. He used to be the only person who was earning and fulfilling everyone's needs. He was also saving money so that his sister can take lessons and play violin. But he never discusses that with his sister, so naturally she was unaware of that. He thought the fact that he takes care of everyone in the family, his family members would be proud of him and happy with him for all his accomplishments. But his family members were quite unhappy with him.

The fact that the main character Gregor turns into a bug makes the theme of alienation and isolation more intense. Kafka shows us how helpless Gregor feels by turning him into an insect. After turning into an insect, we realize that his human life wasn't that different from this life. It is nothing more than inconvenience for him. After turning into an insect, he cannot communicate with his family. Whenever he tries to talk, they don't understand him. They are scared away by the insect noise instead. After his appearance changes, his family doesn't want to be around him and they don't want to take care of him. He has become more of a liability to his family than asset. What little connection Gregor had with his family got wiped out after his transformation.

Besides being isolated, Gregor starts to develop existential crisis. He starts to view life as futile and not worth living. He doesn't understand why is this happening to him. He always wanted to make his family happy and proud. He worked at a job he hated just to earn enough to provide for his family. If not for his family he would have left this job a long time ago. Despite all he has done for his family and all the good intentions he had, why so much bad thing is happening to him. Despite all he did, why his family abandoned him. All the abuse, neglect and sickness made Gregor fall into despair. He spent all his day wondering and fantasizing of living a normal life and what he would do if he could return to have a normal life. In this novel we can assume Kafka is influenced by Existentialist philosophy. Kafka doesn't want its reader to feel bad for Gregor. Here, we can feel that Gregor needs to take control of his life and get out from his depression. If he remains like a feather in the wind, the

wind of life will only take him to more despair. We can assume that his mental health and depression was more responsible for his death than his physical condition.

So, we can conclude that *Metamorphosis* is a good example of postmodern literature which brought many new ideas into this world. As the world was evolving around Kafka, he was also looking for new inspiration and ways to explain his world views through postmodern literature. And because of his revolutionary work of literature in postmodernism, he is now a household name.