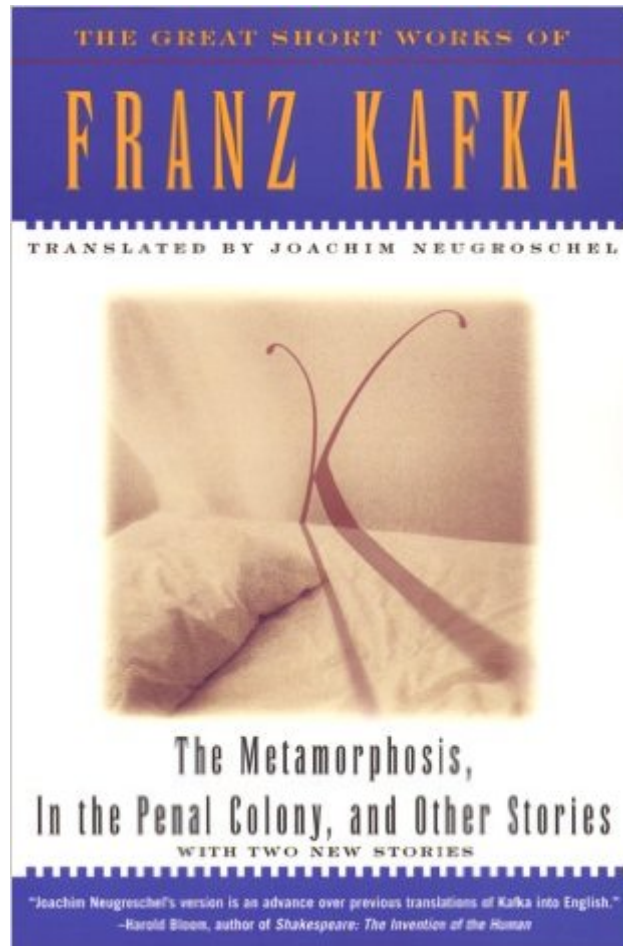


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The Metamorphosis, In The Penal Colony, And Other Stories



Synopsis

Translated by PEN translation award-winner Joachim Neugroschel, *The Metamorphosis, In the Penal Colony, and Other Stories* has garnered critical acclaim and is widely recognized as the preeminent English-language anthology of Kafka's stories. These translations illuminate one of this century's most controversial writers and have made Kafka's work accessible to a whole new generation. This classic collection of forty-one great short works -- including such timeless pieces of modern fiction as "The Judgment" and "The Stoker" -- now includes two new stories, "First Sorrow" and "The Hunger Artist."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The most poignant moment of Franz Kafka's 1915 novella *The Metamorphosis* occurs when the narrator remarks that nobody thought to open Gregor's bedroom door to see him, though the door was now unlocked. In time, Gregor no longer wishes to emerge from his room, to be seen. All connection with his family and his former self is lost. Gregor the travelling salesman had gotten into the habit of keeping his door locked, even at home. He became private to the point of being paranoid. Gregor the absentee member of the Samsa household--albeit the breadwinner--is unknown to his sister Grete and to his parents. The loss doesn't quite register with them. This is the story of the man who wakes up as a bug. He literally embodies his emotional and psychological perception of himself: that he is vermin. He has become his own self-loathing. As this reality settles into his mind, he hopes his family will in some way respond to his need, to feed the unnameable

hunger that gnaws at him throughout this ordeal. Instead, they turn away. He is the dirty secret, the problem child, the social stigma they could do without, thank you very much. The father beats him back into his room every time he emerges. His mother lacks the emotional fortitude to face the situation and faints instead. Grete, his sister, feeds him and cleans his room until he reaches out for her in his buggy way--by creeping toward her while she is playing the violin for lodgers. Gregor's financial control of the family plays a role in the neurosis that afflicts each member. Not until he is free of their control can they realize their potential.

It is difficult to review this collection as a whole, because it includes stories spanning Kafka's literary career which are widely different both stylistically and in terms of content. At the same time, I don't want to review each story separately, particularly since there really isn't that much to say about quite a few of them. So I will try to strike a middle ground and just say a few words about each of the most significant stories. My favorite is probably "The Stoker". It is, perhaps not coincidentally, the most realistic, least "Kafkaesque" of them, almost like something Joseph Conrad might have written. It tells of a young man traveling to America who tries to help a stoker on the ship seek justice from the captain against his boss, who he claims gives preferential treatment to his own countrymen. During the interview with the captain, however, the young man is recognized and carted off by his uncle, an American senator. The story is described as "a fragment", though it is fairly complete in itself (indeed frankly one of the least fragmentary stories here). But though published separately, it was actually the first chapter of Kafka's unfinished novel, *Amerika*. Then there is "In the Penal Colony". It is also quite realistic for Kafka, perhaps excessively so, as it becomes almost surreal in its sheer gruesome brutality.

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