

Metamorphosis Translation Problems

Originally written in German

1. **Metamorphosis** -- The first problem involves the title of the story. The German title, *Die Verwandlung*, can be translated as either *The Transformation* or *The Metamorphosis*. The most frequent choice is *metamorphosis*, but this word has the disadvantage of beinga biological term referring to a caterpillar's transformation into a butterfly, not at all the type of transformation that the story describes. Gregor has a physical change, but inside he remains Gregor. His family members have no physical change, but they change internally.

2. **Bug/ Insect/ Vermin/ Pest** -- Kafka never said Gregor was a bug (in our English sense of the word).

ORIGINAL	LITERAL
Als Gregor Samsa eines Morgens aus unruhigen Träumen erwachte, fand er sich in seinem Bett zu einem ungeheuren Ungeziefer verwandelt.	As Gregor Samsa one morning from restless dreams awoke, found he himself in his bed into an enormous vermin transformed.

ungeheuren= *gigantic, giant, enormous, monstrous* (dilemma for the translators is that the original German word can mean both large and frightening at the same time)

Ungeziefer= *vermin, bug, insect, pest* (The disadvantage of words like *bug* or *insect*, however, is that they don't convey the sense of disgust that's implicit in the word *vermin*) (In the region where Kafka lived, Jewish people were often referred to, in times of persecution by anti-Semites, as *Ungeziefer*, or *vermin*.) Kafka was born into a Jewish family, but by the time of his death, he had abandoned all form of religion.

We have no way of knowing what Kafka intended. He left us no explanations, and he wanted his works burned when he died.

Works Consulted

<http://www.nvcc.edu/home/vpoulakis/Translation/kafkatr1.htm>

http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Franz_Kafka