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World Literature Assignment 1

Comparative Essay: *Metamorphosis* and *Oedipus*

Metamorphosis by Frank Kafka and *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, although written in completely different time periods and by different authors, still deal with similar issues. One issue that they have in common is family relationships, how they are broken, then connected again. Gregor from *Metamorphosis* has a strong love for his sister and counts on her to be there for him, but when the most horrific thing happens to him, surprisingly it is his mother who cares for him more. And Oedipus, in *Oedipus Rex*, his mother rejects him at birth, but ironically takes him in later as her husband. Gregor and Oedipus had very different relationships with their families yet eventually or the inability to perceive reality.

The relationship that Gregor and Oedipus had with their mothers shows how the position or family member's status really does matter in one's reality. "It was....a child of Laius' house." (*Oedipus* pg.58) Oedipus realizes that when he was born his mother instantly rejected him because of a prophecy. "Yes, master- They said 'twas on account of some wicked spell." (*Oedipus* pg.58) Jocasta sends Oedipus to be killed in order to keep her husband safe. "... And husband, to the woman who bore him..." (*Oedipus* pg.38) As the years go by, Jocasta later takes in Oedipus, ironically, unaware that he is her son, and marries him. Yet strangely enough she wants him when he is grown and his true identity is not known, while when he was born, she wanted him dead. Just as Jocasta did to Oedipus, in *Metamorphosis*, Gregor's mother did not pay much attention to him when he was a normal person. Instead she ignored him generally and then later when he turned into a bug gave him great amounts of attention and love. Ironically during the play of *Oedipus Rex*, Jocasta takes on a motherly role towards Oedipus even though she is

now his wife by saying, "What is the means of this loud argument , you quarrelsome men?.....You are making much of some unimportant grievance." (*Oedipus* pg.43) Jocasta realizes that Oedipus is her son and again rejects him by killing herself. Gregor too was used by his family yet in his case it was for the income he brought into the house. Both Jocasta and Gregor's mother only acknowledged them after they went through some kind of transformation. Gregor's mother wanted to see him and seemed to be the only one who wasn't repulsed by him being a bug. Yet she had a very ironic presence in the novel as before hand it was his sister who had really cared for him and now couldn't stand him. Through this, he saw the reality of the relationships he had been exposed to all his life. The Oedipus complex is when the boy understands that he has to become just like his father to impress his mother. This occurs with Oedipus when he marries Jocasta and would of course try to be better than her last husband without knowing that it was actually his father. Both Gregor and Oedipus connect with their mothers to a great extent yet ironically spend most of their lives in a battle with their fathers and unintentionally trying to become them.

Every father and son has some type of struggle at some point in their lives to see who will succeed and who is better. Oedipus and Gregor are two men who die fighting in this struggle against their fathers to find the stability in their new lives. Gregor is used by his father and his family for the income that he supplies yet when he turns into a bug his father despises him and refuses to believe that it is his son. "If only his father did not keep making this intolerable hissing sound! It made Gregor lose his head completely."(*Metamorphosis* pg.19) His father turns into a threatening figure and begins to hiss. "One apple, thrown weakly, grazed Gregor's back and slid off harmlessly. But the very next one that came flying after it literally forced its way into Gregor's back." (*Metamorphosis* pg. 39) His father's hissing is a symbol of him being intimidated and the apple thrown at Gregor was a symbol of something being forced onto him. These serve as metaphors for Gregor's perception of reality towards the challenges of life. Gregor tries to escape his father, but his father chooses to fight and wound Gregor. In contrast, it is Oedipus who

wounds his father and eventually kills him. Between these two characters, it is Oedipus who conquers his father, where as Gregor never accomplished that goal. Gregor's relationship with father before was tolerable, but Gregor was not intimate with his father or anyone else. He seemed to block himself from any emotion that took place in his life. As soon as he turns into a bug his family no longer appreciates him. Oedipus's downfall is brought about when he finally sees the truth that he himself killed his father and then as a result chooses to blind himself from the world. As Tiresias says to Oedipus, "You are pleased to mock my blindness. Have you eyes, and cannot see what company you keep?" (*Oedipus* pg.37) Oedipus goes through his life being blind to the fact that he killed his father.

He then chooses to blind himself because he killed his father and does not want to see the people he has hurt anymore. "They had just gotten used to it, the family as well as Gregor, the money was received with thanks and give with pleasure, but no special feeling of warmth went with it any more." (*Metamorphosis* p.27) Gregor goes through life before he turns into a bug being blind to the fact that his parents are using him and only realizes it when he turns into a bug and sees how his family all of a sudden take part in their own lives and go out and work and worry about income. The reason for Gregor's death is that his father lodged an apple in his back and this ended up killing him. What seems most ironic about *Metamorphosis* is that Gregor's last thoughts were about his parents.

In conclusion *Oedipus Rex* and *Metamorphosis* are comparable on a basic level. Their family relationships were very similar and at the end, led to both of Gregor's and Oedipus' downfall. This shows that the theme of family relationship is a common and possibly, an important theme.