

Introduction

Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*, or *The Metamorphosis*, has sparked much critical interest during the past century because it is indefinable, complex and undeniably unique. Casual Kafka readers and scholars alike find themselves in a state of suspended disbelief, even after a tenth read. "Can this really be happening?" they ask with more surprise than the transformed protagonist Gregor Samsa, who seems to accept his fate more readily than real-life critics or the world that surrounds him. This intentionally created discord emerges from Kafka's distinctive pairing of the familiar with the bizarre. Supernatural events are described in a dry, matter-of-fact tone; the characters that experience these oddities have common, insignificant jobs, and the magical occurrences are recognizably set in an early 20th century European city. Kafka's pairing of predictable characters and mundane setting with extraordinary events evokes ambivalent reactions of disbelief and familiarity.

Yet, the supernatural occurrences of the story are not uncommon in fiction. Tales of magical forces and unexplainable phenomena permeate the literary tradition of every culture, and Kafka continues and contributes to that practice. His unique combination of magic and mundanity seems to be responsible for the awe-filled reactions that the story inspires, for we are familiar with magical tales themselves. In many cases, stories filled with paranormal events are told or read to us as children, but fascination with magic is not limited to the young. Examples of supernatural themes can be found from the first written works of ancient writers, to Shakespeare, to modern horror novelists and magical realists. These themes infuse many tales never, or only recently, recorded, which were passed on in the oral tradition.

This may explain why something about the unbelievable events of *The Metamorphosis* also elicits a nostalgic reaction. This sense of familiarity is partly due to the influence of folk and fairytale tradition upon Kafka's work, a tradition almost everyone is familiar with from their early youth. While authoring a unique tale, Kafka draws on the literary tradition of fairytales and alludes to common motifs used by storytellers and authors for centuries. Yet, Kafka's tale is no fairytale, for though traditional motifs are apparent in the story, they are always inverted, transformed, twisted and reconfigured, conveying a philosophy vastly distinct from his classic fairytale predecessors. By coupling these paranormal occurrences with the everyday working life of ordinary city-dwelling characters, Kafka creates an urban fairytale, or perhaps "anti-fairytale" as some suggest, which simultaneously elicits familiarity and surprise.

A few scholars have published work exploring fairytale facets of Kafka's work. Some, Patrick Bridgwater, Ernst Pawel, and Horst Daemrich, for example, argue that Kafka inverts, reverses or manipulates classic fairytale motifs in his stories. Others, Kurt Fickert and James Whitlark, simply recognize common fairytale motifs in Kafka's tales and describe his writing as an extension and continuation of the works of classic fairytale authors. This study argues that Kafka indeed uses motifs established in folklore and classic fairytales, but that he generally inverts these motifs, rejecting the world and messages of the traditional tales.

This study will focus on the development of the primary fairytale motif embodied in Kafka's tale: metamorphosis, or the transformation of a human or object into an altered form. It will trace the development of this motif through different authors including the Grimm brothers and Russian author Nikolai Gogol as well as Kafka. Transformation, or

metamorphosis, is a frequently used supernatural motif originating in ageless tales passed on from era to era. In his definitive *Motif Index of Folk-Literature*, Stith Thompson documents a wide variety of transformation motifs, including transformation of man to animal, transformation of man into an insect, and even more specifically applicable, transformation of man into a beetle. Evidence for the universality and age of metamorphosis as a motif can also be found in the only Latin novel surviving in whole, *The Golden Ass* written by Corinthian Greek Lucius Apuleius, which dates back to the second century CE. Also known as *The Metamorphosis of Lucius Apuleius of Madaura*, this ancient novel is a collection of stories deliberately written in the style of storytellers and drawn from several traditional oral tales (wikipedia.org). Though Lucius, the narrator, breaks into several peripheral narratives, many of which also involve metamorphosis, the main plot is driven by his own accidental transformation into an animal he considers detestable: an ass. Apuleius' tale, which predates *Die Verwandlung* by more than 1700 years, might strike Kafka readers as a familiar story, or vice-versa. Apuleius' work was probably at least partially inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, predating *The Golden Ass* by about 100 years. Ovid, a Roman poet, composed his collection of creation stories drawing on Greek and Roman mythology and focusing on the transformation of humans and gods as a primary theme. Both of these ancient works concentrate on the motif of metamorphosis and draw on a rich oral tradition providing evidence for the timeless roots of this theme. The following chapters will explore the evolution of fairytale motifs within transformation tales that explicitly influenced Kafka's writings. Though the study began with and primarily concerns Kafka's adaptation of these fairytale motifs, the research led to a study of two of his major literary inspirations

and sources. These provide a background of understanding for Kafka's perception and treatment of the motifs. Transformation tales from the fairytales of the Grimm brothers and the short stories of Gogol, who serves as an intermediary between the classic fairytales of the Grimms and Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, will be discussed as a means to a deeper understanding of the literary developments which inspired Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. Many editions of fairytale collections were found in Kafka's personal library upon his death, including the Grimms' *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* (Bridgwater 73), and he indeed read Gogol. Some say Gogol's death by self-imposed starvation inspired Kafka's tale "Ein Hungerkünstler" ("A Hunger Artist"), and many Gogol scholars claim that Kafka, among other authors, continued his writing legacy (Bridgwater 8).

Kafka's familiarity with the fairytale tradition was a mark of the time and place in which he grew up. Franz Kafka was born in Prague to middleclass Jewish parents in 1883. Kafka's father Hermann Kafka owned a successful dry goods store and provided his family with financially stable living conditions. Born under less fortunate circumstances, Hermann Kafka was a self made man with social aspirations, and he chose to send his son to German-language schools. During most of Franz Kafka's lifetime, Bohemia was part of the Czech crown lands ruled by the Hapsburg Monarchy. The majority of Bohemians spoke Czech, but German was the language spoken by royalty and the elite ruling class. Many urban Jewish families spoke German in the household, and this was true for the Kafkas, though their servants and country relatives often opted for the more commonly spoken Czech. Franz Kafka's German education evidences his father's desire for upward mobility, though his family's knowledge and use of Czech saved them from being completely aligned with Austrian occupiers. Comprised

of a combination of languages, peoples and identities, Prague was a city in cultural and political conflict during most of Kafka's lifetime. Kafka was a Jew living in a Catholic country who spoke three different languages: German, Czech and French. As a result, his cultural heritage is varied. It is also important to note that during the period when Kafka was writing his most famous works, (*The Metamorphosis* was published in 1914), Europe was on the brink of its First World War. Kafka lived during a time of industrialization, witnessing the popularization of automobiles, airplanes, and mechanized weapons as well as the de-personalization of production. It was an era when many of the hopes and ideals of past generations were overshadowed by the harsh realities of everyday life in an exploited society threatened by large-scale war.

Kafka was a quiet, introverted child with a passion for reading. He performed well in gymnasium, especially in the arts. However, in the *Letter to His Father* he expressed feelings of apathy, discontent and anxiety during his school years in language that echoes descriptions of alienated 'little man' characters of his stories: "I was about as interested in school- and not only in school but in my surroundings all together, at this decisive age- as a larcenous bank clerk would be in the petty routine of his job while trembling with fear of being found out" (Pawel 51). Despite Kafka's sour memories of school, he received a solid education in the German language and culture, which, no doubt, included exposure to the Grimms' tales. Indeed, his first German teacher, Ferdinand Deml, was a specialist in fairy and folk tales, and in an 1896 report he provides insight into the German view of their role in education. He remarks: "whosoever absorbs the language and spirit of the fairy tale is forever armed against any perversion in thought and writing" (Pawel 74).

Kafka expressed a lifelong love of fairytales in diary entries and letters (Bridgwater 73-75). His enjoyment of fairytales was probably inspired much earlier by governesses of his early childhood, and later in his own writing, he would test his teacher's beliefs, adapting, inverting and twisting motifs which the Grimms employed to demonstrate moral justice. Kafka's love of fairytale, apparent from adaptations of motifs in his own writings, was also noticed by his close friend, Max Brod, who stated in his biography of his lifelong friend that Kafka was accustomed to thinking in fairytale terms (Bridgwater 74). Kafka expressed his desire to explore the genre in a diary entry: "I would love to write fairytales (why do I hate that word so much?)" (Bridgwater 74-75). This telling quote provides a glimpse of Kafka's simultaneous identification with themes explored by his classic predecessors and a rejection of their interpretations which would lead him to create fairytale-like stories that skirt classic genres.

A lonely and alienated child, Kafka conceived of himself in a lifelong battle with his father (Pawel 15). Biographer Ernst Pawel remarks, "The father, with his crude selfishness, parvenu mentality, and mindless vulgarity, bore a large if unwitting share of responsibility for his son's troubled childhood" (Pawel 58). Kafka's childhood love for fairytales may have stemmed from a self-identification with classic characters. In his book *Kafka: Gothic and Fairytale*, Patrick Bridgwater describes Franz's bond with the world of *Märchen* (tales):

It was because the atmosphere in the Kafka family household was implicitly so baneful ("kinderaussehend": Briefe 1902-1924 347) that fairytales appealed so much to the young Kafka: the typical ogre household was all too familiar to

him... He retained a vivid memory of the fairytales that were such a light in the lonely darkness of his childhood (Bridgwater 74).

Kafka may have identified personally with victimized children of the Grimm's fairytales like the lost boy in the forest who ultimately defeats the evil ogre father figure. In the stories he writes, however, he refuses the hope that his Romantic predecessors afforded their characters. After all, in the Grimms' tales, the evil ogre is always conquered.

Bridgwater goes on to suggest that Kafka's use of fairytale motifs represents a simultaneous rejection of the just worlds they employ and recognition of the desirability of such a world: "Kafka's fairytale-like works involve many echoes of the folk-fairytale, their purpose being, typically, to deny the hope that was a fundamental feature of this, while at the same time, indirectly expressing a nostalgia for it" (Bridgwater 93). Like Gogol, Kafka fuses supernatural occurrences with the mundane, expressing a sense of realism despite the unexplainable events that transpire. Both use a realistic, unsympathetic setting which highlights questions about justice, order, and absurdity. The pages that follow begin with an introduction to scholarly work concerning the Grimms, then discuss Gogol's adaptations of fairytale and transformation motifs and his establishment of an urban setting, and finally explore Kafka's treatment of classic themes and his continued use of the urban setting and philosophy of absurdity. Thus, the study will investigate the transformation of fairytales, specifically metamorphosis tales, from the Grimms to Gogol and Kafka.

Renaissance and Revision: from Volksmärchen to Kunstmärchen

In folk and fairytales readers find something basic, something binding, something that comments on the core of human nature. These tales are passed on through time, bearing changes from each bard or author who delivers them to a willing audience, which will likely convey and contribute to them in turn. Historically, the popularity of folk and fairytales fluctuates, but they have always remained an influential part of the literary tradition. Authors have emulated and adapted motifs from spoken tales from the time of the first epic, novel, or tragedy, maintaining a dialogue, as folklorist Jack Zipes describes, with previous tellers or writers (*Brothers* 57). Beginning in the late 18th century and on into the 19th, interest in folktales boomed. About one hundred years before Kafka adapted fairytale motifs in Bohemia, creating his own brand of grotesque or uncanny tales, these motifs were energetically collected and transcribed by scholars. The Brothers Grimm, largely responsible for the renaissance of folk interest and popularization of the fairytale in German-speaking lands, created the body of work that delivered these motifs to Kafka.

This chapter will examine scholarly research on the Grimm brothers to establish a basic understanding of the fairytales with which Kafka and the German-speaking world were familiar. It will discuss the influence of the Grimms' popular tales, their political motivations and the effect of those motivations on their writing philosophy. Some symbols the Grimms used to support those motivations will also be discussed, including their identification of the "Landvolk" or German peasantry as keepers of cultural tradition, and their use of the wilderness setting so common to classic fairytales, a symbol which Kafka and Gogol will invert. It will conclude with a brief description of the classic

manifestations of metamorphosis in a few of the Grimm tales, for many of the themes and motifs established in these stories are alluded to, but not accepted by, Gogol and Kafka. This section will serve primarily as the research basis for the following chapters and the starting point from which the authors will depart. The examinations in this chapter will set up the close readings of supernatural transformation in tales written by Gogol and Kafka.

Political circumstances taking place at the time of the 1814 publication of the Grimm's major work, *Kinder-und Hausmärchen*, inspired a flowering of interest in collecting and transcribing several forms of folklore, especially folksong, poetry and tales, as a means of producing, or rather describing, a German cultural identity (Bottigheimer 198). The Grimm brothers, Jacob and Wilhelm, born in the state of Hessen, now part of Central Germany, were not inhabitants of a unified German nation during the time that they collected and published their first edition of tales. At the beginning of the 19th century, Europe was facing a cultural crisis, sparked by the French Revolution and continued by the Napoleonic invasions. Formerly part of the Holy Roman Empire, German-speaking states, including Hessen, were invaded and occupied by the French under Napoleon from 1806 until 1815, while states west of the Rhine were ceded to France as early as 1795 (Connelly). The occupation, specifically during the time of Napoleon's French Empire, elicited a cultural backlash from German speakers. Perhaps Napoleon's encouragement of nationalism among his countrymen inspired them, or perhaps the bitter taste of subjugation to the French had finally grown stale. During this time many Germans, though speaking several regional dialects, were bonded by a common literary language known as High German. Many inhabitants believed they also

shared common traditions and began increasingly to seek and form the boundaries of a cultural identity as a means of cultural unification. The Grimms shared this desire, longing to define a people culturally through the study of language, the oral tradition, and literature. In addition to their publication of *Kinder-und Hausmärchen*, the Grimms also collected and published a collection of German legends and, in another great work of their lives, they began to compile the *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, or German Dictionary. The Grimms' use of their work to inspire a German cultural identity will be discussed in more detail later. Though Kafka's writings seem markedly and intentionally withdrawn from the national politics that interested his predecessors, his interest in fairytale was at least partly a result of its general renaissance in the 19th century. During this time, culturally inspired Romantic authors collected and transcribed folklore. Kafka knew and drew inspiration from many of them, evidenced by his personal library, diary entries and letters referenced earlier.

Like any child educated in German culture and language at the time, Kafka was familiar with the Grimm's Teutonic fairytales. But the appeal of fairytales charmed Kafka throughout his adolescence and adult life. Kafka actually continued to read fairytales until he died at the age of 40 (Pawel 158-159). Kafka's familiarity with the Grimms' tales is not surprising, considering the circumstances of his life. The Grimms' tales began to be regularly included in Germanic school curriculums by the 1870s and in the early 20th century, Kafka's lifetime, *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* ranked second in sales only to the Bible, a position it has maintained since then (*Brothers* 48).

This famous collection of fairytales by the Grimm brothers is still seen today as a great landmark in the history of folktale. Their first published edition was inspired by the

work of fellow folklorists Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim's collection of folk poetry and songs, entitled *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Boy's Magic Horn) in 1808, which many cite as the beginning of the 19th century Germanic renaissance in folklore (Ashliman). Inspired by the work of Brentano and Arnim, and with similar motivations, to discover and inspire common aspects of a cultural identity, the Grimm brothers focused on folktales. They actually submitted much of their work to Brentano and Arnim in the form of notes, including many early versions of several tales that they later published in *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* (Tatar). They collected, transcribed, published and deliberately popularized the tales, though their work began in a scholarly vein. By the publication of the final polished and entertaining volume of 1857, their versions of these traditionally oral tales had become part of the common literary itinerary for inhabitants of Germanic nations and beyond.

The Brothers Grimm did make folktales accessible to a wide public audience, but scholars have found that they also adapted many of these tales to serve their own political and didactic purposes during their editing process. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the terms used to describe the different categories of tales stemming from those passed on in the oral tradition. Contemporary scholars make the distinction in German between *Volksmärchen* (folktales) and *Kunstmärchen* (art-tales or fairytales), the former being orally transmitted and the latter including tales that were collected, edited and transcribed and also original tales which use folk motifs. Therefore, the terms *Kunstmärchen* or fairytale apply to the tales written by the Grimm brothers, among others, who collected folktales and then published their own versions of them (Bridgwater 84-85). For my purposes, I will use the English and German terms interchangeably, although the

commonly used English term ‘fairytale’ stems from French supernatural tales, specifically from the *Contes de Fees* written by Countess D’Aulnoy (*Breaking* 23). Nevertheless, ‘fairytale’ is the current term used by English-speaking folklorists to refer to literary art tales, including those written by the Grimms. The Grimms themselves generally refer to their tales simply as *Märchen*, (“short old stories”), which is also the term used by Kafka to describe these fairytales. However, the Grimms’ concept and symbolization of the term “Volk” is an important point to study.

Plenty of evidence from the Grimms’ letters and publications exists to describe their fascination with and use of the term ‘Volk’ and how it related to their search for a German cultural identity. In a letter composed by Jacob Grimm in 1811 entitled “Aufforderung an die gesammten Freunde altdeutscher Poesie und Geschichte erlassen” (“Appeal to All Friends of Old German Poetry and History”), the brothers laid out their intended methods and reasoning concerning the collection of folklore. They specifically convey their ideas about the origins of these tales, emanating, they believe, from those who are closely tied to the land. The Grimms’ symbolization of the German wilderness as a place of purity and justice is certainly only one of many examples that they use to enforce their conception of moral order, the details of which will be later explored in depth. This symbol of the land, also serving as the Grimms’ setting for their tales, will be confronted and inverted by Gogol and Kafka, and so it is important to this study. The letter’s tone is meant to inspire a sense of cultural connection. Images of the German landscape paired with references to a common culture attempt to marry the land to the cultural soul of the German people. This coupling supported the Grimms’ political

interests, as they tried to foster a common identity amongst German speakers living on the lands of their ancestors but currently occupied by foreigners. Grimm writes:

Most Honored Sir!

A society has been founded that is intended to spread throughout all of Germany and has as its goal to save and collect all the existing songs and tales that can be found among the common German peasantry (Landvolk). Our fatherland is still filled with this wealth of material all over the country that our honest ancestors planted for us, and that, despite the mockery and derision heaped upon it, continues to live, unaware of its own hidden beauty and carries within it its own unquenchable source. Our literature, history, and language cannot seriously be understood in their old and true origins without doing more exact research on this material (*Brothers* 26).

Jacob Grimm uses the land as a unifying symbol and the people who are closely in contact with it, those who rely on it and know it intimately, represent the true cultural identity of all of its residents. His tone implies his sadness and dissatisfaction with subjugation and his belief that the study of folklore is intrinsic to an understanding of a culture. He refers to “old and true origins”, citing folklore as a pure source of this cultural identity “planted” by “honest ancestors,” as opposed to the culture fostered by the foreign French. The term Jacob uses is “Landvolk” translating directly to “land people” referring to peasants, or those who make their living from the land. Though he seems graciously to view these people as the keepers of the folklore he deems so important, his reference to them as “common” marks a hint of condescension and illustrates the class stratification that he cannot transcend. He goes on to cite the

“fatherland,” a term which unfortunately carries negative connotations in a post-Hitler era. Grimm’s usage, however, illustrates his view of the land as a unifying symbol, the “father” of a common culture. His words inspire reverence for that land as the birthplace of a cultural identity while also signaling a patriarchal worldview which would infiltrate the Grimms’ versions of *Kunstmärchen*. Grimm continues later in the letter:

... although actually every area should be completely searched and explored, there are preferential places more deserving than the large cities, and the towns, than the villages, and these are the places in the quiet and untouched woods and mountains that are fruitful and blessed. The same is the case with certain classes of people such as the shepherds, fishermen, miners- they have a stronger attachment to these tales, and these people are to be preferred and asked...

(*Brothers* 27-28).

Considered the founders of what we today know as folklore studies, the Grimms specifically instruct collectors to focus on those who live in the purity of the land, away from the political turmoil and ever-evolving decadence of the cities. Jacob Grimm emphasizes the divide between nature and civilization, referring to the woods as “untouched,” or perhaps uncorrupted by foreign invaders, and to the mountains as “fruitful and blessed,” conveying a sense of holiness and productivity not found in “large cities.” The Grimms thought that the peasants, those closely tied to the land, in addition to being isolated from the changing aspects of urban society, also preserve traditions in purer forms because it is a primary occupation of their time. Instead of visiting foreign operas or plays, these peasants entertained themselves by telling stories.

The Grimms continued their claim of the importance of those tied to the land in the 1812 preface to *Kinder-und Hausmärchen*. They describe the stock characters common to their tales, mentioning the royal ruling class, but emphasizing the role of the peasantry: “The entire range of this world is clearly defined: kings, princes, faithful servants and honest tradesmen, above all fishermen, millers, colliers, and herdsmen (those who have stayed closest to nature) make an appearance” (Tartar 206). This passage describes the predictable scope of the Grimms’ stories where characters are generally stereotypical types, frequently repeated in many tales. The Grimms emphasize the importance of characters who are tied to the land “above all.” Kings and princes are mentioned, but the passage glorifies the positive virtues of the lower classes; servants are “faithful” and tradesmen are “honest.” The peasants are described as “those who have stayed closest to nature” echoing the Grimms’ stated belief that these people are the preservers of the true German cultural identity. The phrase seems to strike a relationship between “culture” and “nature.” Thus the Grimms extend their symbolization of the “Volk” to their characters as well as their sources.

The land itself is a meaningful setting in the tales adapted by the Grimms. This concept is important to my study as Gogol and Kafka set their tales of absurdity in the city, inverting the Grimms’ use of the setting as a scene of justice. The vast majority of the stories take place in the wilderness. As Zipes tells of many of the Grimms’ characters: “Inevitably they find their way into the forest. It is there that they lose and find themselves. It is there that they gain a sense of what is to be done” (*Brothers* 65). For the Grimms, the forest or wilderness symbolized a world apart from the urban hustle and bustle that the majority of the population inhabited. In the forest, the unjust laws of

urbanity no longer apply, but the pure laws of justice always reign supreme. Good and evil are clearly distinguished and justice is clear cut. The preface relates:

Everything beautiful is golden and strewn with pearls; there are even golden people living there; misfortune, by contrast, is a dark power, a horrid cannibalistic giant who is, however, vanquished, since a good woman who knows just how to avert misfortune stands ready to help. These narratives always end by opening the prospect of boundless happiness. Evil is also neither inconsequential nor something close to home, and not something very bad, to which one could become accustomed, but something terrible, black and wholly alien that you cannot even approach; the punishment of evil is equally terrifying (Tartar 207).

In the Grimms' world set in the wilderness, good is good and evil is evil. Those who are good, though they may suffer misfortune, will always be left with "the prospect of boundless happiness," while those who follow an easily distinguishable evil path will face "terrifying" punishment. Justice is concrete in this fairytale world of the Grimms. What is right and what is wrong does not depend on circumstances or vary from character to character, but is an over-arching establishment based on the Grimms' notion of patriarchal Christian values. This concept of concrete justice will be a major point of departure for Gogol and Kafka, both of whom adopt a system based on randomness and absurdity rather than predictable punishment and rewards.

Mundane conventions need not hinder the imagination in the forest where animals talk, magical forces preside, and trees take on a life of their own. But despite its tangible flexibility, justice is always served in the wilderness, where bad guys are punished and heroes rewarded. In the Grimms' world of divided provinces, occupied by foreigners,

made chaotic by conflict and silenced by censorship, the forest provided a symbol of fairness and purity. For the brothers, it was a means through which to connect to a past full of cultural richness and clues to piecing together a fragmented identity. Jacob wrote to Wilhelm in an 1805 letter:

The only time in which it might be possible to allow an idea of the past, an idea of the world of knights, if you will, to blossom anew within us is when it is transformed into a forest in which wild animals roam about (for example, wolves with which one must howl if only to be able to live with them). This is the only way to break away from the norms (Sitten) that have restricted us until now and shall continue to do so (*Brothers* 68).

For the Grimms, the forest is a place where conventions do not bind and justice, which perhaps had been neglected as reflected by the occupying foreign forces, can be restored. The German land served as a symbol of German culture and imagination purified and untainted by the outside political world, ironic considering the Grimms' own political motivations for composing the tales.

Conflict between the Grimms' stated ideals and the actual methods they employed to collect the tales is paradoxical. Even in the preface to their 1812 volume of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, they stressed the importance of purity, but many of the stories actually have foreign origins, or at least foreign connections as a result of their collection methods. Though the brothers advised their colleagues to focus on stories told by German peasantry, an ideal that they no doubt believed would be the purest and most fruitful method, in reality they relied heavily on educated story-tellers, mostly women of the middle-class or aristocracy, some of whom were of French origin and spoke French in

their households. Contrary to popular belief which they promoted, the Grimms did not in fact go out to the countryside and collect stories told by peasants. Instead they invited storytellers to dinner parties at their home in Kassel. Some of the stories told by the educated tellers were adapted from tales they had heard from their servants, governesses, nursemaids, or other members of the lower classes. However, since the Grimms heard tales told by a primarily literate crowd, many of storytellers were familiar not only with the oral tradition of these tales but also the written tales, and so many motifs and plotlines were combined from oral and written sources (*Brothers* 28-29). The origin of the tales and their relative purity, in the sense of connection to a definitive idea of German culture, is a debated topic among folklorists. After all, the Grimms did indeed directly collect some of their tales from members of the peasantry. However, it is hard to deny the influence of the middle and upper classes on their work, and evidence supports much less involvement with the “Landvolk” than earlier scholars believed and as the Grimms argued. It seems that notions of the land and those closely connected to it served the Grimms as more of a fictional symbol of the cultural unity they desired to create, a means rather than the end where they found that identity.

The Grimms, members of the middle class themselves, eventually realized the commercial potential of their fairytale volumes, and with each new edition gradually catered more and more to their largest audience: bourgeois families. Their initial motivation for collecting and transcribing folktales was primarily scholarly; they desired to uncover cultural characteristics by studying folklore. They expressed their belief in the importance of tale purity and transcribed detailed notes and versions of the stories as they listened. In the same 1815 letter cited earlier, Jacob Grimm writes:

It is extremely important that these items are to be recorded faithfully and truly, without embellishment and additions, whenever possible from the mouth of the tellers in and with their very own words in the most exact and detailed way (*Brothers 27*).

Though the Grimms emphasized the importance of “faithfully and truly” recording the tales, scholars have proven that their publications underwent heavy editing. They collected the tales with the intention of conveying the “pure” German tradition and culture, but when they found that the German cultural identity, as defined by folktales, included sexual innuendo, and even hints of gender equality, they decided to step in and cleanse the tales of what they deemed morally inappropriate. Violence was rarely edited out by the Grimms but practically any reference to sex, especially premarital sex, was quickly axed (Tartar 3-10). The brothers published seven editions of *Kinder-und Hausmärchen*, the last one in 1857, only two years before Wilhelm Grimm’s death, and though some of the editions included new tales, many of the original tales were heavily revised. Unfortunately, the last edition, the most revised version, is the basis for most current publications and translations of *Hausmärchen*, and probably the least related to the original oral tales (Ashliman).

Though the Grimms state in the *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* preface that the tales were not constructed to relate moral lessons, the editorial changes made to the stories suggest otherwise. The preface implies the Grimms’ denial of infusing the tales with moral instructions but, regardless, they claim, lessons can be deemed:

... we can see the basis for the moral precept or for the relevant object lesson that can be derived so readily from these tales; it was never their purpose to instruct,

nor were they made up for that reason, but a moral grows out of them, just as good fruit develops from healthy blossoms without help from man (Tartar 207-208).

The Grimms seem to shed responsibility for forwarding their morality through the tales by claiming that a moral simply “grows out of them” like fruit “without help from man.” This passage evidences their feeling that the tales provide an easy opportunity to teach, the lesson being “readily” available to readers. But the Grimms imply that the moral lessons imparted by the stories is no work of their own and simply exists within the tales because of their natural goodness. Scholars have found that this is not really the case, however, observing many editorial changes from edition to edition for the purpose of forwarding a system of morality that the Grimms deemed appropriate. Changes involving plot details that the brothers considered inappropriate for publication are apparent even in the first published edition of 1814 when compared to early versions recorded in handwritten notes sent to Brentano. Some scholars cite an editorial dispute between the brothers, Wilhelm being more interested in censoring details he deemed inappropriate for an audience of children and Jacob more interested in preserving authenticity. Despite disagreements, Wilhelm was clearly responsible for the majority of editing after 1815, and with each new edition the tales became increasingly didactic. As they grew older, enforcing a conservative, Christian-based moral system onto the tales became a higher and higher priority (*Brothers* 30). Their word choice of “fatherland” in the letter cited earlier was no accident. It reflects the patriarchal system under which they lived and extends also to their own views of morality. This reflected the brothers’ own increasing moral conservatism and their growing concern for the mass appeal of the volumes, rather

than their scholarly value. Thus, in being transcribed, the tales underwent changes and revisions, which reflect the concerns of the bourgeois authors and their bourgeois audience (Bottigheimer 193).

Notions of literacy and the purpose of books went through a change in Germany during the 18th and 19th centuries, and these ideas affected the brothers' editing of their tales. With the rise of the middle class, more and more people became literate, and books reflected their changing audience. In 1795 Goethe published his *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, a prime example of an emerging novel genre referred to as Bildungsroman, which translates to "novel of education" or "novel of formation" in English. These stories trace the development of a character from childhood to adulthood. They grew to be a major part of a regular curriculum for German-speaking students. Though *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* do not fit into this category, its bourgeois audience was primed by the genre. Thus the brothers' view of their role as authors of what would become tales popularly read to children was one of responsibility. If the tales were to be read by families, then they should uphold morals and lessons proper for raising good, German children who are inspired by Christian piety, obedience to their parents, especially their fathers, and refusal of selfish interests.

The morals reflected in the brothers' *Kunstmärchen* were those of their bourgeois class. They considered themselves rational thinkers. Toward the end of the 18th century, the term bourgeois began to represent a class of people who believed in the ideas of the Enlightenment and believed that as rational entities, they should be able to participate in civil government (*Brothers* 53). The Grimms' tales reflect their belief in the potential of the individual to affect and change, if not create, the world around them. At the same

time, the Grimms' bourgeois class supported the notion of a rational world based on order. Though they believed that they should have a part in government, they also valued a structured society, and instead of initiating a revolution as in France, they sought ways to compromise and work within the governmental system for improvement. Zipes describes the bourgeois' values and methods for dealing with the ruling classes:

Unlike the French and British, the German middle classes sought ways of compromise with the nobility which would enable them to share in the government and safeguard their vested interests. Ultimately, these compromises led to the bourgeoisie's dependence on the state, no matter what form it took, and to the perversion of the bourgeois public sphere. Characteristic of the German bourgeoisie was its effort through industriousness (*Tüchtigkeit*), duty and morality to establish a public sphere consisting of institutionalized structures... (*Breaking* 61).

The tales of the Grimms reflect these ambivalent Enlightenment values, emphasizing the potential of the individual on one hand and respect for ordered laws on the other. Though the Grimms use character *types*, or in other words, they do not delve into the psychology of individuals, they grant them the possibility to control the circumstances of their lives. If characters choose evil actions, they are punished, but if they follow a path of good, they might bring themselves back into human form, out of poverty, or into better living conditions than they might have had before. Thus a character from the Grimm tales might have the ability to completely change his surroundings and circumstances as long as he abides by good laws of justice and rationality. Characters that comply with the values emphasized by the brothers are rewarded, while those who do not are punished.

For the brothers, Christian rationality dictates that the ideals of good and evil are concretely defined and objective, and that a world based on order predictably supports those who are good. This is one of the areas of major departure for Kafka and Gogol who, inspired by the Grimms' tales, would create supernatural tales of their own. As the following chapters will discuss, Kafka and Gogol call the Grimms' absolute system of justice into question in their stories exploring the possibility of chaos, unpredictability and absurdity.

Unlike the metamorphosis tales of Gogol and Kafka, the Grimms' stories follow predictable patterns to their conclusions. Innocent characters and those that redeem themselves are retransformed into human shape by the end of the tales. Generally these characters or members of their family must undergo certain trials but they always achieve disenchantment and return to their original human form. In "The Seven Ravens," a tale that shares many motifs with Kafka's *Metamorphosis* which will be discussed later, seven brothers are turned into ravens when their father carelessly curses them for failing to bring baptismal water for their newborn sister. The brothers are ultimately transformed back into humans, however, after their sister searches for them and finally finds them. The "Brothers Who Were Turned into Birds" tale type, classified by Aarne and Thompson as number 451, is a popular in *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* and includes other tales such as "The Twelve Brothers," and "The Six Swans." In a similar tale type, number 450, "Little Brother Little Sister" and story of the same name, a brother is turned into a deer, but receives his human form at the end of the story when the witch who enchanted him is killed. The Grimms' popular tale "The Frogking, or Iron Henry," is also a metamorphosis tale in which a prince is enchanted by a witch and turned into a frog. He

becomes disenchanted and regains his human body after a princess hurls him against a wall, and he again becomes human. All of the Grimms' transformation tales, where an innocent human is transformed into an animal, share disenchantment, or retransformation. As this study will demonstrate, while Kafka and Gogol adapt themes common to these tales, they refuse the predictable and justice-inspired ending so intrinsic to the tales of the Grimms.

Gogol's Influence and the Development of the Urban Fairytale

After the boom of interest in folklore and fairytales during the late 18th and early 19th century, many authors continued to use folklore elements in their writing. They began to experiment with the form of the fairytale, inverting, expanding and manipulating traditional motifs. This chapter will explore the writings of another of Kafka's inspirations, Nikolai Gogol, specifically focusing on his metamorphosis tale, "The Nose." Gogol, a Russian writer who published most of his work in the 1830s and early 1840s, experimented with the art-tale genre, using and inverting folklore motifs to create eerie, almost grotesque tales, mixing the supernatural and mundane. In Gogol, readers might find a stepping stone between the world of absolute justice, or justice defined by a single moral system, created by the Grimm brothers, to the existential questioning of an absurd world characterizing Kafka's stories.

Gogol's piece recounts how a high-chinned government worker mysteriously loses his Nose, which transforms into a walking and talking independent entity posing as a high-ranking civil servant. The author uses fairytale-like supernatural elements, especially surrounding the magical transformation of the Nose, but he creates a world much different from the one established by the Grimms. Motifs that appear in the story are recognized by Thompson in his *Motif Index of Folk-Literature*, including "noseless person" (F514.1), "remarkable nose" (F543), and "cut off nose" (K1512). Gogol also constructs one-dimensional symbolic characters like those of the Grimm brothers and other classic fairytale authors. However, as with Kafka, Gogol inverts the fairytale world, fusing bizarre fantasy with ordinary details. He deals with similar questions concerning justice, identity and the role of setting, breaking from the Grimms' wilderness

and placing his supernatural tale in the urban center of Saint Petersburg. Setting his story in the city, Gogol creates a sort of urban fairytale, which resembles the *Märchen* of the Grimms, but is warped and manipulated to different ends. For the purposes of this study, Gogol's twisted transformation tale will serve as a bridge between the Grimm Brothers' *Kunstmärchen* and Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, broaching fairytale inversions that Kafka continues.

Gogol was born in Sorochintsi, Ukraine in 1809 to educated and wealthy parents. He grew up on his family's country estate until he was ten, where storytelling was a regular past time. Gogol's father was also an author who wrote poetry, sketches and play scripts in Ukrainian. While Gogol lived in the Ukrainian countryside, he was frequently exposed to the native folklore. Family servants entertained him with Ukrainian folktales filled with demons, magic and other supernatural elements, and his father's plays, specifically the comedies, abound in folktale motifs (Gippius 17). As with Kafka, this childhood pastime would later influence his writing as an adult. In fact Gogol collected over 1000 Ukrainian folksongs, which were published in 1908, after his death (Chyzhevsky). In 1819, he left his family's home for boarding school, where he received high marks. He was an intelligent youth, and began writing early- as a teen in high school. At the age of twenty, Gogol settled in Saint Petersburg, the bustling Russian city that would take on a life of its own in many of his tales. He devoted an entire volume of short stories to the urban setting. His *Saint Petersburg Stories*, including his tale "The Nose," was published in 1835-1836, almost twenty years after the Grimms published their first volume of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. Gogol traveled extensively throughout Europe during his lifetime, living in Rome for many years. Later in life he became

influenced by Catholicism, and with a new dedication to “serving God and humanity,” he made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem on his way back to Russia in 1849. The circumstances surrounding his death are mysterious, but apparently on the verge of insanity after returning to Russia and becoming connected with a fanatical priest, Father Konstantinovsky, Gogol burned one of his major manuscripts and then died about ten days later in March of 1852 of self-inflicted starvation (Chyzhevsky). Rumors at the time speculated that he might have even been buried alive.

During his life, Gogol was an innovator. Because of his use of folklore motifs and supernatural elements to create unique tales, Gogol has been compared to Arnim, Brentano, and the brothers Grimm as a Russian author of *Kunstmärchen* (Kopper 45). Though he paints his stories using supernatural aspects, as with Kafka it seems inaccurate to describe his fiction as fairytales. The terms gothic, uncanny or grotesque seem more apt, for his use of and reference to traditional fairytale motifs often results in their inversion and manipulation.

Gogol references and modifies themes inspired by both enlightenment and romantic thinkers, yet he cannot be aligned with either. He presents rational and identifiable aspects of everyday life, illustrated by an array of characters from Akaky Akakyevich, the mild protagonist of “The Overcoat,” one of his “little men,” or seemingly insignificant working members of the lower classes, to the conceited Major Kovalev from “The Nose” who frets about the impact his lost nose will have on his social aspirations. These stories are set in the busy but ordered scene of Saint Petersburg, a place filled with social stratification. Gogol’s detailed descriptions of the city itself, and the fact that one could visit many of the places he describes, adds to the credibility of his

stories. He often provides very specific details about the setting; the first few lines of “The Nose,” for instance, supply the specific name of the street, the Voznesensky Prospekt, where the barber lives. Gogol provides mundane details of the setting and the characters’ actions to impart this taste of identifiable reality in his tales. Aside from the unusual occurrences that take place in the tales, the characters seem to live mundane and believable lives. But his use of reason and realism are highlighted by his contrasting employment of the supernatural. Surprising and seemingly nonsensical events happen to believable characters; a man’s nose turns into an independent entity, walking, talking and achieving heights on the social ladder to which the man might only aspire. The ghost of a formally insignificant worker vengefully wanders the night streets of Saint Petersburg ripping coats off the backs of passing citizens. Gogol’s employment of fantastic and unexplainable occurrences often emphasizes, despite the façade of order and rationality, that unpredictability, injustice and ultimate absurdity are the truth of contemporary life. As Gogol scholar John Kopper writes, “Disorder can invade at any time, not only the reality construct of fiction, but the writing itself.” He goes on to quote Gogol: “There’s no saying what it is that comes up” (60-61). Gogol abandons the notion of a world ruled by justice, departing from the clear-cut systems of right and wrong presented in fairytales by the Grimm brothers in favor of a subjective world where everyone has his or her own opinions, bad things happen to good people, and unlikable characters are seemingly rewarded.

Unlike the brothers Grimm, who authoritatively present their tales in a straightforward, omniscient and confident tone, Gogol generally produces a puzzled narrator who often admits his unsurety and lack of knowledge, especially concerning

causation, about the events he describes. Self-reflexive authors, a mark of romantic irony, are also found in the late romantic writings of E.T.A. Hoffman (1776-1822). Hoffman was another influential composer of German *Kunstmärchen* with whom Gogol was familiar (Kopper 48), but like Gogol, his use of fairytale motifs differ from the Grimms' classic tales. Whereas the Grimms provide authoritative moral answers and guidance by employing supernatural occurrences to consistently reward good characters and punish evil ones, Gogol's narrators question the nature of reality and readers are often left wondering if any definitive answers actually exist. The Grimm brothers wished to convey the true nature of the German people and their cultural identity, while Gogol questions whether a common definitive nature can be pinpointed. His narrators frequently emphasize their own unreliability, as in the concluding paragraphs of "The Nose." After the tale's baffling conclusion, the narrator rambles for a paragraph about his own confusion:

No, I do not understand that, not a bit of it! But stranger still, and hardest of all to understand, is why authors should take such incidents as their subject matter. I am forced to admit I find it quite incomprehensible, I just... no, I simply do not understand. Firstly, there is absolutely no benefit to the nation; secondly... no, and there's no benefit secondly either. I simply do not know what it means... ("Nose" 183).

Using playful layering, Gogol allows his narrator to distinguish himself from the author in these lines. Gogol separates the identity of the author and the narrator like Kovalev's Nose is separated from his body. The narrator acknowledges that he does not understand the motives of authors who write about "such incidents," or occurrences of absurdity.

Yet, by drawing the readers' attention to what the narrator depicts as two separate identities, the author conveys that he is writing these lines self-consciously. We are told that the narrator does not understand the author's intentions, but at the same time are reminded that the author is writing the narrator's lines. By distinguishing himself from the author and expressing his confusion, the narrator implies that the author has knowledge inaccessible to him. However, the layered identity that the author creates, and the undeniable presence of the his voice, emphasized by the narrator's denial, raises the question of whether or not the author understands what he has created through the tale. The narrator does not understand, but does the author himself?

Gogol provides the answer, via his narrator of course, a few lines later:

I mean, strange things happen all the time, do they not? And you must admit, when you think about it, there is something in all this, isn't there? Whatever you might say, such things do happen, rarely perhaps, but they do ("Nose" 183).

Gogol's explanation conveys that there is no explanation. Unexplainable events "happen all the time." The narrator's concluding paragraph suggests that the author himself cannot explain the meaning of the tale or its conclusion because the events that occur are simply absurd and that absurdity, or events that do not coincide with some ideal of rationality or justice are a part of everyday life. By recognizing and emphasizing the absurdity of his tale, Gogol rejects any system of concrete or objective justice like that in the ordered world of the Grimm's fairytales. The unlikable Major Kovalev does not appear to go through any personal growth, yet, from his perspective, he is seemingly rewarded when his nose mysteriously reappears back on his face with no explanation. Though he portrays realistic characters in a setting one could actually visit, Gogol shakes

up notions of justice and order through his use of supernatural events depicted by unreliable narrators to convey an overriding law of absurdity. While the Grimms use supernatural events and an authoritative tone to carry out absolute justice, Gogol's magical occurrences create a system of disorder bolstered by his narrator's questioning tenor.

Gogol's conveyance of absurdity is also forwarded by his emphasis on the unreliability of physical images and the language through which one might try to convey them. He frequently employs an all or nothing approach to description, sometimes rambling on about minute details and sometimes providing a complete lack of description. Renate Lachmann sums up this idea in her article "Gogol's Urban Imagination":

In order to come to terms with the unreliability of the visible sign and the deficiencies of language Gogol takes recourse to two opposite strategies: on the one hand he displays a verbal abundance of images, both grotesque and arabesque (metaphors, similes, puns), and plays with nonsensical arguments. On the other hand he withholds from the reader the flow of verbal expression. Thus he reverses the abundant imagery into a picture of absence (248).

In an example of the other illustrative extreme, Gogol offers very little description, for instance about the spot left behind by Major Kovalev's runaway nose, other than to call it a "ridiculous, empty, smooth space" (161). Gogol frequently provides either an abundance of description, naming specific streets for example, or a noticeable lack of imagery, as in the case of Kovalev's noseless face. The author's swing from detailed depictions to an utter lack of description adds to the unreliability of his narrator. Kovalev

himself expresses his disgust at the lack now occupying his face: “If even there had been something to take the nose's place!” he exclaims. “But, as it is, there's nothing there at all” (161). This difficult-to-picture image of a face with a lack of nose draws attention to the obscurity of conveying such inconceivable occurrences through language. Gogol therefore uses a lack of description to illustrate an eerie image.

Gogol toys with the unreliability of imagery and language further in his physical description of the independent nose. Like Kafka's *Ungeziefer*, the well-dressed Nose leaves readers intentionally puzzled about its physical size. In one moment the autonomous Nose is “stooping” (161) as he climbs down from a carriage; in another he is speaking face to face with his former owner; and finally after the police apprehend the Nose the constable hands it back to Kovalev wrapped in paper. The constable describes his initial impression after seeing the independent Nose: “Another strange thing is that at first I took him for a person. But luckily I had my glasses with me, and saw at once that he was a nose” (174-175). Then as he gives the Nose back he assures Kovalev, “Your nose is exactly as it left you.’ On saying this the constable put his hand in his pocket and took out a nose wrapped in paper” (175). Is the Nose human sized? He must have been big enough to step in and out of a carriage, but in these lines he clearly fits into the constable's pocket. Gogol emphasizes the absurdity of his tale by presenting us with an unreliable image, which is inconsistent from scene to scene. He provides little physical description of the Nose itself, other than relating his sharp apparel, leaving readers with an unclear image of the title character. The symbolic meanings of the Nose will be explored later in the study.

Gogol emphasizes absurdity through inconsistency and questioning, yet in another departure from the traditional fairytale, he anchors absurdity as a part of mundane life by setting his tales in the bustling urban scene of Saint Petersburg, a tangible Russian city, creating what might be called an urban fairytale. While he maintains supernatural elements and traditional fairytale motifs, his setting is no sanctuary of justice, as the German forest is for the Grimms, where evildoers are punished and the good rewarded. Justice is a prevalent issue in Gogol's stories and for Gogol's characters, but unlike the Grimms, Gogol blurs the line between good and evil by conveying the subjectivity of perspective and demonstrating how the world's reward system is chaotic, unpredictable and often unjust. The good-hearted, money-saving, unfortunate worker Akaky Akakyevich is victimized throughout "The Overcoat" until he finally dies a pitiful death, while in the conclusion of "The Nose," self-centered Major Kovalev never improves his character, yet gets just what he wants. Both of these men inhabit the same setting, one that Gogol portrays as full of multiple truths.

Different city-dwelling characters of "The Nose" illustrate Gogol's notions of the subjectivity of justice in his setting. By creating a world where characters view justice selfishly, meaning they act based on what is best for themselves and found their view of right and wrong accordingly, he departs from the Grimm's world of absolute right and wrong. Though many, if not all of them, have very strong opinions, especially when it involves the unbelievable occurrences surrounding the mysterious Nose, hardly anyone agrees on what is to be done. Praskovya Osipovna, wife of the barber Ivan Yakovlevich who finds the Nose in his loaf of bread, immediately and angrily places blame for the event on her husband. Any loyalty she might feign for him is quickly dispelled as she

angrily threatens him, commanding him to do anything with the Nose, as long as he removes it from her house: “‘Where did you cut off that nose, you butcher?’ she shrieked, livid with rage. ‘You villain! Drunkard! I’ll report you to the police myself. Downright criminal!’” After Ivan tries to calm her by offering to wrap the nose up while he decides what to do with it, she continues berating him:

‘Not another word! You think that I’d allow a cut-off nose to sit in my room?.. You numbskull! All you’re good at is stropping your razor, and soon you won’t be able to do your job properly at all, you stupid oaf! You scoundrel! You think I’m going to stand up for you to the police?.. No fear, you good-for-nothing, you blockhead! Take it away! Away! Wherever you like, just don’t let me set eyes on it again!’ (155).

Praskovya clearly views the unattached Nose as a disgusting implication of a horrendous event that she blames on her husband. However, though she first threatens to turn him in to the police as a criminal, her selfish motivations become clear when she tells Ivan that she doesn’t care what happens to the Nose as long as it is out of her sight. Perhaps her anger is caused not by the fact that she believes the severed Nose is evidence of injustice; indeed, she does not seem to care whether it is returned or whether justice is pursued, but rather she fears her own implication of responsibility as long as it remains in her house. Though she treats the severed Nose’s appearance as disdainful, she does not express shock or surprise. In fact, she accuses her husband as if she might have expected such an event. “I have already heard from three men that, while shaving them, you pulled their noses to the point that they could hardly stand it,” she adds to her chastisement (155). Her reaction, without horror or shock, emphasizes the absurdity of Gogol’s world.

Her husband's own sense of responsibility and justice also seem egocentric and skewed. At first he debates his liability for the unexplainable event: "Perhaps I came home drunk last night, or perhaps not, I can't say." This is the closest Ivan comes to recognizing any role he might have played to initiate the mysterious chain of events he is experiencing. He continues: "But on the face of it this is altogether ridiculous; I mean, bread is something you bake and a nose is nothing of the kind. It's a mystery to me!.." (155). This sense of mystery paired with his fear of being arrested in possession of the Nose, Ivan seems to shed any worry for anyone other than himself. His self-doubt concerning his guilt, in spite of the unusual circumstances surrounding the Nose's appearance in a loaf of bread, illustrates how far Gogol's conveyed world is from that of the Grimms. Whether Ivan committed a crime or not is of little importance. He assumes that he will be blamed regardless of his guilt, and so he only wishes to disassociate himself from the severed nose. Conveying characters racked with paranoia and a psychological penchant for feelings of guilt and helplessness could possibly be a product of the oppressive social atmosphere in Czarist Russia for Gogol. It is a theme that Kafka continues in his own writing. Filled with growing concern for the consequences of being caught with the Nose, Ivan consumes himself with the thought of disposing of it somewhere that no one will find it, or at least somewhere far from himself. As Ivan approaches the bridge where he will rid himself of the Nose, Gogol, after describing him as a poor craftsman and a drunkard, depicts him as a "worthy citizen" (156). In the same paragraph, Ivan guiltlessly drops the nose into the river: "He felt as though a ton weight had been lifted from his shoulders: Ivan Yakovlevich even chuckled" (156-159). Ivan's actions are obviously motivated only by worry for himself and fear of arrest. His sense

of right and wrong is completely dictated by his own perspective and concerns, not by some overriding system of absolute good and evil.

Indeed, Ivan's innocence, at least in the realm of conscious understanding concerning the Nose's removal, and the unlikable nature of Major Kovalev, raises the question of who is actually the victim of the story. Gogol's sarcastic presentation of Kovalev as a snooty, selfish, image-concerned man appears to imply that his self-obsessive behavior is the real cause of his Nose's flight. Really, Gogol seems to ask, doesn't Kovalev deserve to lose his nose, his pride? But if Gogol alludes to a system of moral judgment, he undoes it by his story's conclusion, inverting classic reward-punishment mechanisms. Though Ivan is a drunkard, "like every self-respecting Russian craftsman" Gogol describes, his only fault appears to be his lack of concern for the Nose's owner, and this Gogol attributes to the snooty man's treatment of the barber whom he tells: "Ivan Yakovlevich, your hands always stink!" (156). Rather than as a blamable character, Gogol presents Ivan in a sympathetic light for the circumstances in which he unwittingly becomes entangled. After dropping the Nose in the river, he is harassed by a passing policeman and is later described by the constable who returns the Nose to Kovalev as a rogue and a thief (175). Though Gogol presents Kovalev as the less likable of the two, the Major gets his nose back at the end of the tale, while Ivan receives rebukes from the police who have had their "suspicions of him for a long time" (175). Kafka's *Metamorphosis* continues this theme of gratuitous harassment perpetrated by the bureaucracy. When Gregor's employer the chief clerk visits Gregor on the morning of his transformation, he does not display any sympathy for Gregor's condition and, on the contrary, accuses Gregor of stealing.

Gogol's setting of the urban city brings together this wide array of characters and, for Gogol, makes subjective justice possible. Unlike the forest, which, in the view of the Grimms, is governed by the laws of nature, man designs the rules of the city, and Gogol illustrates how each man may have a different design and a unique idea of justice. As the natural setting of the Grimm's tales echoes what they believed to be a natural and concrete moral system of right and wrong, Gogol's urban setting reflects his understanding of the subjective nature of justice drawn and enforced by an amalgamation of humanity. For the Grimms, the use of supernatural and magical motifs serves to convey the universality and transcendence of a cultural morality. In Gogol's world where right and wrong do not exist concretely, absurdity and unpredictability become the rule, and his use of the supernatural serves to convey the disorder of urban life.

Gogol's urban setting not only provides a scene for his characters' actions, it often takes on a life of its own, reflecting themes of his stories, especially his fascination with dualism, or presenting two facets of one entity. The phenomenon of casting the city as a dual-natured character is not limited to Gogol's writings. Semiotician Vladimir Topov introduced the concept of the "Petersburg text" manifested by other authors like Alexander Puskin, Fedor Dostoevskij, and Andrej Belyj as well as Gogol (Lachmann 245). The authors' dualistic characterization of Saint Petersburg might be explained by its physical location. At the time of Gogol's writing, it was Russia's capital. Many branches of the Neva River's delta divide it as it flows into the Gulf of Finland. The city houses several bridges and frequently falls victim to severe flooding. In her article exploring Gogol's relationship to the topology of the city,

“Gogol’s Urban Imagination,” Renate Lachmann describes Saint Petersburg as a scene divided between wild nature and tamed concrete:

The opposition between nature and culture is represented by water, swamps, rain, fog, humidity on the one hand and the “prospekty”, the squares, the Neva banks, the Winter Palace, the fortress of Peter and Paul, on the other. The irregular space of nature, its amorphism, competes with the linearity and geometrical morphology of planned space. The untamable threatening forces of nature, the chaos of the annual flooding, is confronted with the urban cosmos which seems to rely on stone constructions and the granite bed into which the Neva is banned (Lachmann 246).

The idea of the city as a symbolic struggle between the wild forces of nature, especially represented by the Neva, and the controlling, civilizing and organizing forces of stone and granite, is echoed in Gogol’s tales. In “The Nose”, the river takes on a mysterious role as a transforming force beyond the reach of the city’s mundane order. It is the location of the supernatural transformation of the Nose. At one moment, standing on the human-constructed Isakievsky bridge, Ivan drops the severed nose wrapped in plastic into the flowing Neva pretending to “ascertain whether there were a lot of fish that day” (“Nose” 156). Gogol subtly emphasizes the wild realm of nature represented by the river through his mention of the fish inhabiting it in contrast to the people who walk along the bridges and streets above. Gogol does not explain what happens to the Nose after Ivan drops it into the river. After Ivan is harassed by the policeman on the bridge, the narrator cuts off: “But at this point proceedings become enshrouded in fog, and we know absolutely nothing of what ensued” (“Nose” 159). The Nose transforms in the

river, experiencing what could be considered as his own birth into independence and autonomy, and Gogol employs yet another symbolic force of nature to shroud the mysterious supernatural events that occur: fog. During the Nose's next appearance, when Kovalev spots him in the street, he is in the form of a well-dressed, walking and talking, state councilor. Nature is where the supernatural transformation occurs and Gogol uses a force of nature, repeatedly, to mystify those supernatural events. Though the supernatural tale takes place in the urban city, it is interesting that the major magical event, the nose's transformation from an inanimate object to an independent living being, occurs in the waters of the Neva, a symbol of wild nature within the metropolis.

Gogol's characterization of a dual Saint Petersburg reflects his depiction of Kovalev's binary identity. His nose becomes a double, or a caricature of his personality. The details of the Nose's symbolic meaning will be discussed further. In "The Overcoat", another tale set in Saint Petersburg, Akaky Akakyevich's coat seems to take on a life of its own that is inexorably tied to the existence of his owner. Indeed, when the coat is stolen, its owner also ceases to exist. John Herdman, author of *The Double in Nineteenth Century Fiction*, describes Gogol's use of the double in these two tales:

In his most famous story 'The Overcoat' (1842), the prized coat of the wretched clerk Akaky Akakyevich becomes his 'companion', a kind of extension of his self, and hence a rudimentary double. In 'The Nose' (1836), Gogol had created a gruesome and evocative image of dissociation: Collegiate Assessor Kovalev, an aspiring social climber, wakes up one morning to find that his nose has vanished, and when he later sees it in uniform and confronts it, it claims, 'I am a person in my own right!' (Herdman 99).

Major Kovalev's Nose might take on a life of his own, but he clearly symbolizes facets of his owner's personality. On several occasions, Kovalev laments his loss, exposing what his Nose actually represents to him. He cries:

My God, O my God! What have I done to deserve this? If only I had lost an arm or a leg- it would have been far better or even my ears- that would have been hard, but at least bearable, but without his nose a man is nothing: neither man nor beast, but God knows what! Just some rubbish to be thrown out of the window!
 ("Nose" 173)

And later as he begs the refusing surgeon to reattach it:

It can't be any worse than it is now. The devil only knows what this is! Where can I show my face in such a preposterous state? I move in the best circles, and even tonight I'm expected at two houses. I have many acquaintances: state councilor Chekhtarev's wife, Podtochina, the wife of a staff officer ("Nose" 177).

The Nose clearly represents Kovalev's pride, his beauty, and his masculinity. He explicitly expresses his loss of manhood in the above quote, and his concern over missing nightly appointments with women also makes this point clear. Kovalev never once makes any comments about the impacts his loss might have on his senses. He makes no complaints about his lost sense of smell or taste. He is only concerned with how his noseless face will be perceived by the people he wishes to impress: pretty ladies and superior government workers. The Nose represents Kovalev's snootiness, his self-perceived superiority, and his vanity. When the Nose prances around town, he is sharply dressed enough to outdo his image conscious owner. Posing as a government official with higher rank than Kovalev, the Nose becomes what Kovalev can only aspire to be.

Kovalev mourns the loss of his Nose, but he never seems to attribute its flight to his obsession with self-image. Kovalev does not appear to go through any evolution at all. He is selfish from the beginning to the end. Yet in another departure from traditional fairytales, one that seems to be related to his urban setting, Gogol employs a type of ‘anti-resolution,’ which, unlike the conclusions of the Grimms’ *Märchen*, is not based on justice. This reversal is continued in Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* also, but the two conclusions obviously differ. Kovalev experiences retransformation, though seemingly based on nothing, or as the result of absurdity. His retransformation appears to come as an unearned reward. However, as Kovalev’s character does not improve or evolve through the story, it is impossible to consider his retransformation as a reward. Indeed, had he not received his Nose back in its rightful place, he might have become a better human, losing concern for his image and gaining some humility. Thus, in metamorphosing back to the self-serving form that he possessed in the beginning of the tale, he may have forgone his moral reward. Details surrounding Kafka’s use of the ‘anti-resolution’ will be discussed in the coming chapter, along with his use and treatment of themes and motifs inverted by Gogol. By manipulating the retransformation and reward system, and by showing that good characters might die a pathetic death while unfavorable characters lead a happy and selfish life, both conclusions undoubtedly emphasize the notion of absurdity and refuse the absolute justice exercised by the Grimms.

Die Verwandlung: Kafka's 'Anti-Märchen'

This final chapter will focus on Kafka's adaptation and inversion of fairytale motifs in his transformation tale *The Metamorphosis*. It will show how, like Gogol, Kafka departs from the Grimms' idealized world of defined justice to one founded on absurdity where day to day life may be mundane but outcomes are unpredictable. Kafka's allusion to and manipulation of motifs like common fairytale character roles and transformation as the result of a wish will be discussed. The chapter will also address Kafka's psychological character development of Gregor, including identity issues and how they relate to the symbolic meaning of the insect into which he metamorphoses. It will conclude with a discussion of Kafka's urban setting and the related anti-resolution which disallows Gregor's retransformation and bolsters a philosophy of irrationality where outcomes occur regardless of right and wrong.

Kafka's unique fusion and adaptation of fairytale motifs creates stories that bend genre categorizations. Despite the shared motifs, his tales are certainly not fairytales, and some critics describe them as 'anti-fairytales' for their frequent inversion of common themes, including the traditional happy ending. Ernst Pawel refers to *The Metamorphosis* as a "poisoned fairytale" and "a surreal *Bildungsroman*" (novel of education), emphasizing Kafka's debt to and denial of his German forerunners. The term 'surreal' is often used to describe his tales, as its definition generally implies the subversion of rationality through the "juxtaposition of realistic and fantastic images" (Clute 910-911). It is also related to dream imagery, or perhaps in the case of Kafka, nightmare imagery.

The opening sentence of *The Metamorphosis* draws the reader's attention to Gregor's state of consciousness and blurs the line between waking and dreaming: "As

Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect” (*Metamorphosis* 89). After the introduction, readers are left wondering if Gregor really did awake, or if he is indeed sleeping, still caught in some horrific hallucination. As a character that induces both disgust and empathy, Gregor might be considered a grotesque, and some scholars describe Kafka’s relationship to Gothic writers like Poe, Hoffmann and Faulkner because of his employment of horrific happenings, dark settings, and supernatural elements. Kafka’s tales are also described by the term ‘uncanny,’ which, strictly defined, applies to literature that deals with themes beyond knowledge, thus beyond rational explanation, as many events in his stories surely are. As it refers to occurrences beyond our understanding, ‘uncanny’ also connotes an element of fear and is often related to the term ‘horror.’ The term ‘uncanny’ does not necessarily denote supernatural or magical occurrences, though they are frequently present in uncanny tales. Kafka’s stories might also be labeled ‘fractured fairytales,’ or tales with fairytale motifs which have been re-ordered and altered and that contain original plots, meanings, and conclusions (Oxford, 172f). In truth, Kafka’s writing can only be partially described by any single genre. Kafka bends categories, creating a unique style eluding genre descriptions. Indeed, his writing spurred an original adjective now used to describe other stories: Kafkaesque.

Kafka’s manipulation of fairytale motifs spans several aspects of *The Metamorphosis*, and his reversal of traditional fairytale character roles serves as an example of motif inversion. Kafka alludes to the traditional character roles established by classic *Kunstmärchen*, but he inverts them, completely reversing characteristics used by the Grimms. Gregor’s sister Grete serves as a prime example of this reversal, acting in

the classic sister role by supporting her brother at the beginning of the story, and then transforming into a competitor by the end. In the transformation tales of the Grimms, sisters are frequently responsible for achieving their brothers' retransformation. The traditional sister figure acting as a servant or liberator is a theme established in many folk and fairytales. Stith Thompson categorizes this sub-motif frequently associated with transformation tales under "sister faithful to transformed brother" (Thompson P253.2). The Grimms' story "The Seven Ravens" demonstrates a loyal sister's traditional role. "The Seven Ravens" is a tale about seven brothers turned into ravens when their father curses them for failing to bring baptismal water from the well upon the birth of a sister. In anger he cries, "I wish that those boys would all turn into ravens" and, of course, they do (Grimm 100). The sister, who eventually grows up and feels responsible for finding out what became of her brothers, takes it upon herself to venture out after them. She is willing to sacrifice anything: "finally she secretly set out into the wide world to find some trace of her brothers and free them, no matter what it might cost" (Grimm 100). The sister travels to the ends of the earth and beyond. She finally finds her brothers still in the form of ravens, and by her mere attendance, the spell is released. Suspecting her presence before she enters, one of the brothers exclaims, "God grant us that our little sister may be here. Then we'd be saved!" (Grimm 101). And so the sister fills her common role in this transformation tale, freeing her brothers from their metamorphosis, which ends with their retransformation back into humans and the whole family's happy reunion.

Though Kafka's *Metamorphosis* broaches this motif, it rejects the traditional conventions of the Grimms. Gregor's sister Grete, for a time, fills the role of a savior and

helper to her brother. She is, after all, the lone family member consistently willing to enter his room, indeed, she would hardly allow anyone else control over his keeping, but she never liberates him from his metamorphosis. By the story's conclusion, her sense of justice is dictated by little more than selfishness. She ultimately abandons and betrays her brother for her own self-interests after he becomes an inconvenience. In his financially unproductive state he does, after all, make it difficult for the Samsas to afford their large apartment "which Gregor had selected" (*Metamorphosis* 139), and he scares off the lodgers they take to help sustain it. At first Gregor laments about the effect of his transformation on Grete "whose life hitherto had been so pleasant, consisting as it did in dressing herself nicely, sleeping long, helping in the housekeeping, going out to a few modest entertainments and above all playing the violin" (*Metamorphosis* 112). But alongside Gregor, Grete, like all members of the family, also goes through a metamorphosis of her own, and as her brother declines, she emerges, shifting from his helper to his competitor.

As Gregor imagines it, Grete's "pleasant" life appears stagnant and childish in comparison to the progress she makes after her brother's metamorphosis. The absence of his financial support leads her not only to emerge from her home and become a working citizen, but also to expose herself to learning and motivation for improvement: "his sister, who had taken a job as a salesgirl, was learning shorthand and French in the evenings on the chance of bettering herself" (*Metamorphosis* 123). Grete strikes a healthy balance, which Gregor failed to achieve, between familial involvement, dedication to her work, and also concern for her own well-being. She contributes to the family while spending her evenings in pursuit of self-benefiting knowledge, a stark contrast to Gregor's former

nightly occupations of “reading a newspaper or looking through railway timetables” (*Metamorphosis* 96). As Grete becomes empowered and individualized, her former obligations to her brother dissipate. He is no longer a necessity to her lifestyle; in fact, in his arthropodal form, he becomes a burden that she is no longer willing to accept. She pronounces the condemning words that spur Gregor to his final decision. After the lodgers leave in disgust, she implores her parents to take action, finally explicitly commanding Gregor’s expulsion:

“He must go,” cried Gregor's sister, "that's the only solution, Father. You must just try to get rid of the idea that this is Gregor. The fact that we've believed it for so long is the root of all our trouble. But how can it be Gregor? If this were Gregor, he would have realized long ago that human beings can't live with such a creature, and he'd have gone away on his own accord. Then we wouldn't have any brother, but we'd be able to go on living and keep his memory in honor (*Metamorphosis* 134).

As Grete realizes an independent life from her brother, his current form becomes so baneful and intrusive to her perception of normalcy that she would rather deny his existence, or have him sacrifice himself, than preserve his life. She is flustered by his unwelcome appearance but adamant as she cries out her resolve. Her reasoning, that the creature could not be her considerate brother due to his continued inhabitation of the family apartment, ironically blames Gregor for selfishness during his meager and neglected subsistence. She clearly disregards his unfortunate circumstance in favor of her own convenience. Her words inspire Gregor’s decision to “disappear” and unburden his family of his reliance (*Metamorphosis* 135).

The story's concluding lines signal Grete's triumph. The Samsa parents exchange approving and eager glances as they contemplate her bright future and the benefits it will bring them: "And it was like a confirmation of their new dreams and excellent intentions that at the end of their journey their daughter sprang to her feet first and stretched her young body" (*Metamorphosis* 139). Grete "blooms" in this final scene, as if her brother's dead insect body has brought about the rebirth and coming of age of her own "young body." Her parents are the first to notice and anticipate finding "a good husband for her." With one exploited son barely dead, they can only imagine the "new dreams" that Grete might manifest for them. Gregor's death inspires the family members' reclamation of themselves, yet clearly the parents are hopeful that their daughter might be more successful in bringing them the security, hope, and rewards that Gregor failed to do.

Gregor's parents similarly enact roles that acknowledge fairytale tradition, but ultimately invert classic motifs. The role reversal between father and son is apparent from the tale's beginning when readers learn of Herr Samsa's debt, which has led Gregor to work at a job that he hates. During his years of inoccupation, Herr Samsa "had grown rather fat and become sluggish" while his son worked away day in and day out (*Metamorphosis* 112). While Herr Samsa once lived off the work of his son, the roles of parasite and provider are switched after Gregor's metamorphosis. Like Grete, after Gregor's transformation Herr Samsa emerges as a powerful figure, re-claiming the masculine role of the family provider that his son formerly filled. His forced re-entry into the working world awakes a sense of power that he ultimately exercises over Gregor. Herr Samsa becomes infuriated after Gregor's mother is upset at the unhidden sight of

her insect son. As Gregor pokes his head out of his room with the intention of calming his father, Herr Samsa's restored power and authority is apparent:

Gregor drew his head back from the door and lifted it to look at his father. Truly, this was not the father he had imagined to himself; admittedly he had been too absorbed of late in his new recreation of crawling over the ceiling to take the same interest as before in what was happening elsewhere in the apartment, and he really should have been prepared for some changes. And yet, and yet, could that be his father? The man who used to lie wearily sunk in bed whenever Gregor set out on a business trip; who on the evenings of his return welcomed him back lying in an easy chair in his bathrobe; who could not really rise to his feet but only lifted his arms in greeting... Now he was standing there straight as a stick, dressed in a smart blue uniform with gold buttons, such as bank attendants wear; his strong double chin bulged over the stiff high collar of his jacket; from under his bushy eyebrows his black eyes darted fresh and penetrating glances; his formerly tangled white hair had been combed flat on either side of a shining and carefully exact parting. He pitched his cap, which bore a gold monogram, probably the badge of some bank, in a wide arc across the whole room onto a sofa and with the tail ends of his jacket thrown back, his hands in his trouser pockets, advanced with a grim visage toward Gregor. Likely enough he did not himself know what he meant to do; at any rate, he lifted his feet unusually high off the floor, and Gregor was dumbfounded at the enormous size of his shoe soles. But Gregor could not risk standing up to him, aware as he had been from the very first

day of his new life that his father believed only the severest measures suitable for dealing with him (*Metamorphosis* 120-121).

The perspective of this scene indicates the definitive shift of power from son back to father. Gregor looks up from his lowly and vulnerable position on the floor at the surprisingly intimidating and hardy image of his threatening father. Gregor is stunned by his father's regained manliness and especially notices the "enormous size of his shoe soles" lifted "unusually high off the floor," an image which contrasts with his memory of his seated father's inability to stand. In Gregor's memory, his father is only able to raise his arms in greeting, but now, amidst his rebirth, he brandishes his once feeble feet which could barely support his standing. Gregor recognizes the threat his father poses, and does not "risk standing up to him," an interesting phrase considering Gregor's own inability to stand off the floor. The description of Herr Samsa's banking uniform emphasizes his reclamation of the family provider role, the monogram of his hat casting a golden shadow across the room as if to affirm Samsa's monetary worth and control of the family finances.

The motif of a cruel, powerful and controlling father figure is not uncommon in folk and fairytale; the 'cruel father' motif appears in Thompson's index (S11). However, in traditional fairytales, the Grimms' "Twelve Brothers" and "The Seven Ravens," for example, the evil father figure is silenced or disappears upon the rise of his sons. Kafka reverses the motif in his tale, which concludes with a son's death and a father's rebirth. As the son grows weaker, the father grows stronger, and Herr Samsa is at least partially responsible for the death of his son. In the scene cited above, Gregor's father launches the apple that festers in the insect's back. The grievous apple remains lodged there as Gregor

weakens until his death. Kafka recognizes and references traditional roles of fairytale characters, but his inversion of these motifs signals his philosophical break with Romantic authors like the Grimm brothers. The world Kafka's characters inhabit is certainly not concrete or predictable. Characters, even those who might lend support at first, are not reliable, and notions of loyalty, order and justice are turned upside down.

In another departure from the classic fairytale, Kafka uses and inverts a common motif, 'transformation due to wish fulfillment,' to spur Gregor's metamorphosis. It appears frequently in folk and fairytale (Thompson, D521). In Apuleius' folktale-inspired novel of the second century, *The Golden Ass*, Lucius, the protagonist, wishes to be transformed into a bird so he can fly through the windows of various beautiful women, but instead he is changed into an odious ass. The father in the Grimms' "The Seven Ravens" carelessly wishes his sons to be turned into ravens. In most cases, transformation wishes in folk and fairytales do not manifest as the wisher expects. Kafka also employs this motif in *The Metamorphosis*, but, as usual, he includes a few twists.

Though the wish for transformation is only implied or takes place before the story's beginning in Kafka's tale, textual evidence from a story also written by Kafka entitled *Wedding Preparations in the Country* (*Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande*) foreshadows the existence of Gregor Samsa's desire to escape reality via transformation. *Wedding Preparations in the Country*, a fragmented and incomplete story predating *The Metamorphosis* by four years, describes Eduard Raban's anxieties, apprehension, and avoidance revolving around a train ride to the countryside where he is scheduled to meet with his fiancé to plan their wedding. After making excuses to himself about being tired from the week's work and fearing uncomfortable circumstances in the country, he

fantasizes a solution to his fear: “And besides, can’t I do it the way I always used to as a child in matters that were dangerous?” he muses. “I don’t even need to go to the country myself. I’ll send my clothed body. If it staggers out of the door of my room, the staggering will indicate not fear but its nothingness... For I myself am meanwhile lying in my bed, smoothly covered over with the yellow-brown blanket” (*Wedding* 55-56).

Raban wishes for the avoidance he was allowed as a child to deal with his fears. He would prefer not to resolve those fears, but to evade them altogether by locking himself away. In this quote, Raban envisions his own self-division, sending an empty, unfeeling double to deal with his affairs while his conscious self rests securely in bed. He will avoid his fears, and his body will show no fear nor make any culpable mistakes, due to its “nothingness.” Thus Raban will avoid discomfort, yet will not be responsible for what occurs in the country. His fantasy continues: “As I lie in bed I assume the shape of a big beetle, a stag beetle or a cockchafer, I think.” He goes on, “The form of a large beetle, yes. Then I would pretend it was a matter of hibernating, and I would press my little legs to my bulging belly” (*Wedding* 55-56). Raban pleasantly dreams of turning into a beetle to hibernate in his room, secluded from the worries and toils of his job and his responsibilities. This wish expressed by Raban seems to apply to Gregor also, who uses his job as an excuse to avoid having a social life and also delays getting out of bed to avoid going to that displeasing job. His metamorphosis could be viewed as a hibernation from a life with which he is dissatisfied.

Raban’s image of his desired physical beetle body is reflected in the first lines describing Gregor’s new form in *The Metamorphosis*:

He was lying on his hard, as it were armor-plated, back and when he lifted his head a little he could see his domelike brown belly divided into stiff arched segments on top of which the bed quilt could hardly keep in position and was about to slide off completely. His numerous legs, which were pitifully thin compared to the rest of his bulk, waved helplessly before his eyes
(*Metamorphosis* 89).

Eduard Raban's nice dream turns into Gregor Samsa's nightmare. Kafka carries out Raban's wish in *The Metamorphosis*, making Gregor Samsa the manifestation of that wish gone awry. His description is gruesome, foreign and disturbing. Gregor's transformation does not seem pleasant; rather than relaxing under his blanket, Gregor's stiff insect body makes the sanctuary that Eduard wished for impossible as the blanket slides off of him and he cannot even control the movements of his "numerous legs", much less press them to his "bulging belly." Contrary to Eduard's desire to hide in security under the "yellow-brown blanket," Gregor is totally psychologically exposed by his transformation, an idea that will be discussed further. While Raban dreams of changing into a beautiful "stag beetle," Kafka describes Gregor's new body as an "Ungeziefer," usually translated as insect or beetle in English, though it also includes the connotations of vermin. The original German word implies dirtiness and undesirability (Bridgwater 166). It is unclear what kind of insect Gregor actually turns into, but Kafka's word choice distinguishes it as apparently disagreeable.

The "wish gone awry transformation motif" appears in plenty of folk inspired literature; Kafka's departure from the classic design consists of Gregor's desire to transform in order to avoid his life, responsibilities, and the prospect of marriage. In the

famous first tale of the Grimms' collection, entitled "The Frog King, or Iron Heinrich", the rejected frog transforms into a prince, allowing him to marry the princess. Raban wishes for and Gregor manifests transformation to avoid that possibility. Kafka reverses this classic motif, undoing the Grimms' utopian humanistic ends. In *The Metamorphosis*, while it is not stated explicitly, Gregor's fear of marriage is suggested by his complete lack of a social life. Though a young, eligible man, he seems to have no relationship with any women besides his mother and sister. The only other woman he seems to care about is an inanimate cutout from a magazine. Though Gregor admires the pretty picture and even causes a scene to prevent its removal, it obviously poses no real threat of human contact or interaction. He displaces any form of sexual or social desire onto a lifeless and safe picture that requires nothing from him, unlike the hefty demands he feels from his family. Like the hibernation that Eduard Raban fantasized about, Gregor's transformation into a beetle secures him from confronting the outside world.

Generally in classic fairytales, a character is transformed simply due to magical circumstances beyond his or her control, frequently perpetrated by evil witches or ogres; sometimes transformation serves as punishment for misbehavior, but beyond that, it does not usually indicate anything about the character's psychology. Kafka, on the other hand, uses metamorphosis to illustrate the inner working of his character. Why does Gregor turn into an insect, and, as far as his identity is concerned, what does the Ungeziefer symbolize? In myths of ancient Egypt and early Christianity, the beetle was a symbol of resurrection and rebirth (Bridgwater 169). In a sense, Gregor's transformation represents the birth of his conscious self. Once emotionally deadened, Gregor's metamorphosis allows him to truly understand his insignificant place in his family and the world and to

finally acknowledge his feelings of worthlessness. Gregor does not consciously cement these notions until the moments before his death, but his transformation sets his realization in motion and could be viewed as an unconscious rebellion against his conscious behavior. Before he turns into an Ungeziefer, Gregor allows himself no emotional life. He simply works day in, day out at a reprehensible and boring job where he is not appreciated. “The devil take it all!” he concludes as he ponders why he chose such an occupation (*Metamorphosis* 90). Neglecting his own needs, desires, likes and dislikes, Gregor labors for his family’s well-being, ironically idealizing himself as the only member able to work and provide. Though he feels this familial responsibility, possibly a necessary feeling of importance that he gains from no other facet of his life, Gregor’s metamorphosis into a parasitic, useless bug illustrates his true inner psyche. His transformation from man to insect represents a physical manifestation of his inner emotional reality consisting of feelings of worthlessness, reliance on his family, and social unfitness which remain unconscious and unacknowledged in Gregor until he finally dies, a scene which will be discussed further. While Gogol’s *Nose* represents Kovalev’s haughtiness and social aspirations, Kafka’s beetle conveys Gregor’s lack of self-worth, estrangement and insignificance. Gregor feels like an alien in the world that he inhabits, and his physical change into a non-human represents his emotional isolation.

Like the *Nose* of Gogol’s tale, Kafka’s *Ungeziefer* serves as a double for Gregor, or a physically manifested aspect of his divided character. Set up of a dual nature and existence is apparent, first, in *Wedding Preparations* when Eduard speaks of sending out his “clothed body” to deal with responsibilities as he himself rests in the bed. Similarly, Gregor’s interests are divided between familial duties, or his job responsibilities and his

own emotional well-being. Consciously, Gregor only focuses on providing for his family, neglecting to acknowledge any of his own needs. Though Gregor's human body disappears, he obviously feels disassociated from his new form during his first experiences after the transformation. He has immense difficulties while simply trying to get out of bed:

He thought he might get out of bed with the lower part of his body first, but this lower part, which he had not yet seen and of which he could form no clear conception, proved too difficult to move; it shifted so slowly; and when finally, almost wild with annoyance, he gathered his forces together and thrust out recklessly, he had miscalculated the direction and bumped heavily against the lower end of the bed, and the stinging pain he felt informed him that precisely this lower part of his body was at the moment probably the most sensitive

(Metamorphosis 92-93)

Gregor's intentions and his movements, his mind and body, are clearly divided and disharmonious. Not only does he lack the ability to control his actions, he can neither see nor tell the parts that make up his body; he is unaware of their design and function. This double nature leaving Gregor's will disassociated from his insect body highlights the psychological division between outer world and inner world which manifests in his metamorphosis. Though Gregor's body travels about, riding trains and sleeping in hotels, performing his "exhausting job" (89), he does not like his work and certainly would not choose to do it. His actions are beyond the control of his will and out of touch with his emotions. It is only later, as Gregor grows accustomed to his transformation, that his emotional state, his will, and his actions come into a harmony of mutual existence. He

soon learns that he is able to crawl on the walls and when eventually “he had his body much better under control than formerly...” he discovers a pastime that brings him gratification: “he especially enjoyed hanging suspended from the ceiling” (*Metamorphosis* 115). As Gregor learns to control his movements, free from the obligations of the outside world, his actions and desires, for once, coincide, fostering a sense of freedom and enjoyment, a rare occurrence for Gregor. His identity slowly becomes fully realized and takes its ultimately enlightened form moments before his death, a scene which will be further discussed. Kafka uses the common fairytale motif of metamorphosis to explore and fulfill his character’s identity crisis, a far cry from the simplified characterizations portrayed by the Grimms.

Like Gogol, Kafka shakes up the stable justice system found in the Grimms’ forest and sets his ‘poisoned fairytale’ in an urban setting, a scene that he paints as bleak and depressing. Before he emerges from his bed after the transformation, Gregor soon looks to the window for motivation that he does not receive: “Gregor’s eyes turned next to the window, and the overcast sky- one could hear raindrops beating on the window gutter- made him quite melancholy” (*Metamorphosis* 89). The view from Gregor’s window is always described in tones of bland gray, and at this moment when he looks out, perhaps hoping to catch a glimpse of sun, he is instead greeted with rain dropping on the concrete building and a colorless sky that entraps him in misery even further than his walls. This first reference to the world outside Gregor’s window emphasizes that even the rain cannot escape the apartment building’s reach and only has cement stone and metal to land on as it falls from the sky. The theme of imprisonment, within his room and also within a bleak cityscape that provides no hope of anything better, is reminiscent

of the Grimms' "Rapunzel." Thompson documents many similar tales under the tale type of "the Maiden in the Tower" (310). Yet Gregor has no hope of a rescuing prince, and even if one happened to pass by, bugs do not have any hair to climb. Indeed, in an interesting role reversal, the prince is locked away and left to fend for himself.

So Gregor's only access to the world outside his bedroom remains through a window that looks out onto a city street. Unlike Gogol's characters, Gregor has no hope of interacting with nature. His only view of the outside world is gray and industrialized:

...the hospital across the street, which he used to execrate for being all too often before his eyes, was now quite beyond his range of vision, and if he had not known that he lived in Charlotte Street, a quiet street but still a city street, he might have believed that his window gave on a desert waste where gray sky and gray land blended indistinguishably into each other (*Metamorphosis* 112-113).

Gregor's only view, if he could clearly see it, would be a large building, a hospital. For city-dwellers, a huge building housing hundreds of sick and dying people is a common sight, but definitely like nothing found in nature. Such a concept might seem absurd to one used to natural surrounds which are constantly green and full of life. When Gregor looks outside, he sees no life, no river, trees, bushes or even grass; his only view is a constant reminder of civilized human death that does not discriminate between good or evil. As his eyes blur, Gregor considers the view a "desert waste" made up of nothing distinguishable. Kafka's comparison of the blank concrete scene to a "desert" emphasizes its emptiness and lifelessness. Though he mentions a natural scene, it is one composed of blankness, and serves to emphasize the city's distance from green mountains or trees. Gregor's definitely does not inhabit the "fruitful and blessed"

mountains and forests of the Grimms. Life beyond his room, or his city, is unimaginable; he has no hope and the scene does not house reassurance or optimism. It only conveys blankness and the insignificance that Gregor eventually relates to his own life.

The only glimpse of any natural scenery comes after Gregor's death. His father, mother and sister are finally released from the burden of caring for him, and so Kafka symbolically sends them on a trip out of the city into the countryside:

Then they all three left the apartment together, which was more than they had done for months, and went by tram into the open country outside the town. The tram, in which they were the only passengers, was filled with warm sunshine.

Kafka draws a clear distinction between the town and the country that lies "outside" of it. It is a setting to which Gregor could not have access after his transformation, the world beyond his room. Unlike the imprisoning atmosphere of the apartment and the gray cement of the city, Kafka describes the country as "open," conveying a sense of freedom. For the family, the trip is a time of renewed hope and rebirth into a new life where they find themselves satisfied with good jobs, able to move to a smaller and simpler apartment, and optimistic that Grete will marry a "good husband." Even the tram they ride in is "filled with warm sunshine," the first, and only, glimpse of anything but cold, overcast skies that Kafka conveys. Like the forest of the Grimms, the countryside provides the Samsas with a sense of order and hope. They must escape from the entrapment of the city to feel that they might gain a reward of an easier life after their toils. Unlike self-sacrificing Gregor, the Samsa parents and sister, who displayed their selfish nature and actions towards Gregor, are left with a positive outlook for the future.

In another similarity with Gogol, Kafka's departure from the traditional fairytale scenery of forests and other countryside settings seems related to his alteration of retransformation and resolution. In the wild but natural settings of traditional fairytales, justice is served, evil is punished, good is rewarded, and whichever character is transformed resumes his or her human shape by the end, after realizing or correcting any error. This is not the case for Kafka, who employs a type of anti-resolution that draws tension between the fantastic world of romanticized fairytales and the cruel harshness and possible absurdity of the urbanized real world. Kafka alludes to his *Kunstmärchen* predecessors again by weakening Gregor with the rotting 'poisoned apple,' thrown into his back by his father, which is reminiscent of the fruit that does not quite kill Snow White in the Grimms' "Schneewittchen" ("Little Snow White"). Unlike Snow White, Gregor ultimately fades and dies. His death and suffering at the hands of his own family conveys Kafka's message that justice is not always served in life. Once the helpful son, now despised and abused by his own family, Gregor makes his final resolution:

He thought of his family with tenderness and love. The decision that he must disappear was one that he held to even more strongly than his sister, if that were possible. In this state of vacant and peaceful meditation he remained until the tower clock struck three in the morning. The first broadening of light in the world outside the window entered his consciousness once more. Then his head sank to the floor of its own accord and from his nostrils came the last faint flicker of his breath (*Metamorphosis* 135).

The Metamorphosis can be described as a tale of desire to escape from reality, or also as a story of divided personality. This final moment serves as an epiphany of self-realization

or reconciliation with reality, which Gregor had formerly abandoned. Though this moment marks a great shift in his outlook, Gregor is “peaceful” and accepting. Though Gregor’s existential truth is difficult to acknowledge, he finally recognizes his real familial role, merging his unconscious feelings with his cognizant thoughts and expressions for the first and last time. Gregor faces the certainty that his family does not rely on him or need him any longer, but he has become, in fact, an unwanted burden to them. Despite all he has been through at their expense, he selflessly thinks of his parents and sister and recognizes the reality that they would be better off without him. Though Gregor continues in his vein of sacrifice, this is the first time he makes one based on reality, rather than imagined circumstances. He is convinced that his family does not need his support, nor do they even miss it. He faces the harsh truth that to them he exists only as a burden. This realization and the intention to carry out the best solution to this realized truth frees him from his transformed body, which has served as a symbol of his desire to escape and avoid reality. After his meditation and before his death, Gregor sees, or maybe feels, “the first broadening of light in the world.” This is his ultimate moment of realization, but instead of following fairytale tradition and ending his tale with Gregor’s transformation back into his original human form, Kafka assigns Gregor to a fate of death, the physical fulfillment of his character’s epiphany. Thus, Kafka’s leaves his conclusion ambiguous and open to interpretation, providing Gregor with spiritual realization on one hand and physical death on the other.

Obviously, to make his statement, Kafka had no choice but to abandon tradition, for if Gregor had transformed back into his human shape, it is difficult to imagine him leading a different life than the one he lived before. His transformation and ultimate

death are necessary for a spiritual understanding of his true self and familial position to take place. Unlike Gogol, whose character retransforms without any type of character growth, Kafka allows Gregor emotional and spiritual realizations, but still employs an anti-resolution by withholding change back to his human form. Gregor's retransformation would have annulled his recognition of reality and decision to comply with it. It would have made his realization impossible. Instead of receiving his human form as a reward, Gregor is compensated by his spiritual growth, epiphany and ultimate death. Kafka emphasizes with this conclusion that tragic events might occur to good, self-sacrificing people, and that even if a person progresses, he might not gain a physical reward. Like Gogol, Kafka rejects the solid justice system of the Grimm brothers in favor of a more realistic approach deeming disorder, absurdity and inexplicability as the true norms of society.

Conclusion

From Ovid to Kafka, metamorphosis tales span the spectrum of time, location, purpose and genre. Something about taking on a completely foreign shape or identity charms readers and listeners, and so this motif permeates literary and oral tradition as far back as anyone can document or remember. Like the tales we read or listen to, perhaps the transformation motif symbolizes a method, though unattainable, to escape the dull realities of the everyday lives we know. Maybe we identify with stories documenting divided interests or conflicting identities, or perhaps we are simply amused by the bizarre aspects of these fictions. For whatever reason, or, more likely, *reasons*, the metamorphosis motif has spoken to generation after generation of authors, tellers, readers and listeners.

Yet as my study has shown, the literary use of transformation has itself undergone many conversions. With each new author, another version arises. The Grimm brothers recognized the intrinsic power of folklore motifs and employed them to foster a sense of common cultural identity in their German-speaking audience. Nevertheless, in transcribing the metamorphosis tales they collected, the Grimms assigned their own moral belief system to the stories, re-writing them to create an ordered world of concrete justice, piety, patriarchy and hope based on an idealized notion of right and wrong. The evolution of the metamorphosis motif continued, as post-Romantic authors, many of whom were inspired by the Grimms' work, adapted fairytale motifs into original stories of their own. Gogol ventured away from the Grimms' ordered world into the realm of absurdity with his story recounting a nose's transformation into an independent human-like form. He also abandoned the Grimms' natural setting, denying his characters the

forested refuge of justice established by the Grimms. Gogol describes his concrete, tangible setting of Saint Petersburg with mundane detail, providing street names and pinpointing authentic locations. His pairing of supernatural events within ordinary lifestyles is cemented by setting these unusual occurrences in a specific cityscape that could actually be visited by readers. Gogol makes a philosophical shift from the Grimms' notion of ordered and predictable justice, which rewards those who are good and punishes those who are evil, to a more chaotic view based on the absurdity of hoping for absolute justice. The theme concerning the relativity of right and wrong is continued in Kafka's writing along with the departure from a wilderness setting.

Gogol serves as a stepping-stone for Kafka from the *Kunstmärchen* of the Grimms to forming his own brand of what have been called 'anti-Märchen,' a reference to his inversion of classic fairytale motifs. Familiar with these authors, Kafka was no doubt inspired by their writings, but he revises the expected outcomes. He delivers his tales further from classic themes than even Gogol, still referencing fairytale motifs but infusing them with an unmatched uniqueness and denial. Both Gogol and Kafka devised urban fairytales that invert classic motifs and settings. Yet while Gogol's characters are at least afforded walks in the open air and glimpses at the River Neva, Gregor Samsa remains contained in a bedroom of his family's apartment, and his only view is of a cement hospital eventually fading to a gray blur due to his ailing eyesight. Instead of encouraging hope for justice or optimism for a future life, as the Grimms' forest does, Kafka's bleak setting only imparts readers with feelings of imprisonment and hopelessness. The cold setting of *The Metamorphosis* reflects the philosophy that the story conveys. Self-sacrificing characters might receive only death as a reward, while the

selfish foster hope for the future. Good, or evil, characters do not always get what they seem to deserve, and instead of a reigning system of justice, absurdity really governs the circumstances of Kafka's characters. Life is simple in the forest of the Grimms and outcomes are predictable, but though day-to-day activities can be banal and boring for the characters of Gogol and Kafka, life in the city is not ruled by a single system of justice, but by formless absurdity indiscriminately rewarding some and punishing others.

Works Cited:

- Aarne, Antti and Thompson, Stith, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*. FF Communications, no. 184. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1961.
- Apuleius, Lucius. *The Golden Ass*. Trans. Robert Graves. New York: Pocket Books, 1954.
- Ashliman, D. L. "Grimm Brothers' Home Page." 1999-2004. University of Pittsburgh. 15 Oct. 2004-May 2005. <<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm.html>>.
- Bridgwater, Patrick. *Kafka Gothic and Fairytale*. New York: Rodopi, 2003.
- Bottigheimer, Ruth B. "From Gold to Guilt: The Forces which Reshaped *Grimms' Tales*." *The Brothers Grimm and Folktale*. Ed. James M. McGlathery. Chicago: University of Illinois, 1988. 192-204.
- Chyzhevsky, D., Struk, D.H. "Gogol, Nikolai." *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*. Feb-May 2005. <<http://encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?AddButton=pages\G\O\GogolNikolai.htm>>.
- Clute, John. *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1997.
- Connelly, Owen, Ed. *Historical dictionary of Napoleonic France 1799-1815*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985.
- Gippius, G.G. *Gogol*. Trans. Maguire, Robert A. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1981.
- Gogol, Nikolai. "The Nose." *The Government Inspector: A Comedy in Five Acts and Selected Stories*. Trans. Christopher English. Moscow: Raduga, 1989. 153-184.
- Gogol, Nikolai. "The Overcoat." *The Government Inspector: A Comedy in Five Acts and Selected Stories*. Trans. Christopher English. Moscow: Raduga, 1989. 247-283.
- Grimm, Jakob and Wilhelm. *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*. Trans. Jack Zipes. New York: Bantam, 1987.
- Herdman, John. *The Double in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.
- Kafka, Franz. "The Metamorphosis." *The Complete Stories*. Trans. Willa and Edwin Muir. Ed. John Updike. New York: Shocken, 1971. 89-139.
- Kafka, Franz. "Wedding Preparations in the Country". *The Complete Stories*. Trans.

- Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins. Ed. John Updike. New York: Schocken, 1971. 52-76.
- Kopper, John. "The "Thing-in-Itself" in Gogol's Aesthetics." *Essays on Gogol: Logos and the Russian Word*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1992. 29-65.
- Lachman, Renate. "Gogol's Urban Imagination: St. Petersburg and Rome." *Russian Literature* L VI. The Hague: Mouton, 2004. 243-253.
- Pawel, Ernst. *The Nightmare of Reason: a Life of Franz Kafka*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984.
- Tatar, Maria. *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- Thompson, Stith. *Motif Index of Folk Literature*. 6 vols. Bloomington: Indiana University, 1932-36.
- "The Golden Ass." Wikipedia.org. 2004. Oct. 6 2004.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Golden_Ass>.
- Zipes, Jack. *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk & Fairy Tales*. New York: Methuen, Inc., 1979.
- Zipes, Jack. *The Brothers Grimm*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002.