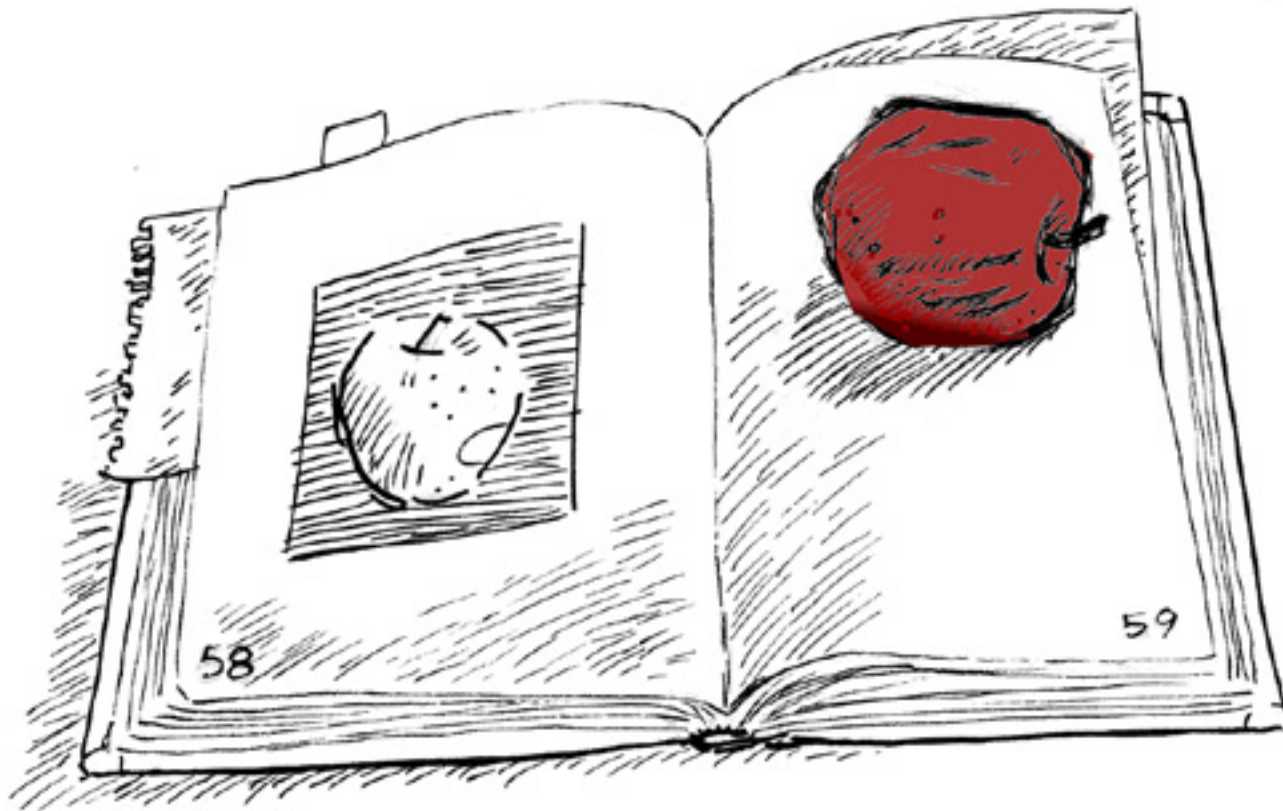


Modernism and the Journey



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The Metamorphosis || Franz Kafka (1915)

As Gregor Samsa awoke from unsettling dreams one morning, he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous vermin. He lay on his hard armorlike back and when he raised his head a little he saw his vaulted brown belly divided into sections by stiff arches from whose height the coverlet had already slipped and was about to slide off completely. His many legs, which were pathetically thin compared to the rest of his bulk, flickered helplessly before his eyes.

“What has happened to me?” he thought. It was no dream. His room, a regular human bedroom, if a little small, lay quiet between the four familiar walls. Above the desk, on which a collection of fabric samples was unpacked and spread out—Samsa was a travelling salesman—hung the picture that he had

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recently cut out of an illustrated magazine and put in a pretty gilt frame.

It showed a lady, sitting upright, dressed in a fur hat and fur boa; her entire forearm had vanished into a thick fur muff which she held out to the viewer.

Gregor's gaze then shifted to the window, and the dreary weather—raindrops could be heard beating against the metal ledge of the window—made him quite melancholy. “What if I went back to sleep for a while and forget all this foolishness,” he thought. However, this was totally impracticable, as he habitually slept on his right side, a position he could not get into in his present state; no matter how forcefully he heaved himself to the right, he rocked onto his back again. He must have tried it a hundred times, closing his eyes so as not to see his twitching legs, and stopped only when he felt a faint, dull ache in his side, a pain which he had never experienced before.

“Oh God,” he thought, “what a grueling profession I picked! Traveling day in,

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day out. It is much more aggravating work than the actual business done at the home office, and then with the strain of constant travel as well: the worry over train connections, the bad and irregular meals, the steady stream of faces who never become anything closer than acquaintances. The Devil take it all!” He felt a slight itching up on his belly and inched on his back closer to the bedpost to better lift this head. He located the itching spot, which was surrounded by many tiny white dots that were incomprehensible to him, and tried to probe the area with one of his legs but immediately drew it back, for the touch sent an icy shiver through him.

He slid back into his former position. “This getting up so early,” he thought, “makes you totally stupid. A man needs sleep” (3-4).

Kafka, Franz. *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories*. Donna Freed, trans. New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc. 1996. Print.