
**Strange Creatures: Familial Disaffection and Disintegration
in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and René Marqués' *La carreta***

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Abstract

*This study examines familial alienation and the disintegration of family relationships in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and René Marqués's *La carreta*. Through comparative literary analysis and close textual reading, the study explores family dynamics, characterization, symbolism, and thematic parallels, with particular attention to the protagonists' experiences of alienation and the changing relationships between Gregor and Grete and Luis and Juanita. The analysis demonstrates that Gregor and Luis occupy parallel roles as self-sacrificing providers whose attempts to find meaning through labor ultimately contribute to the collapse of their family relationships. As their brothers decline, both Grete and Juanita assume new responsibilities, but their responses reveal contrasting ethical perspectives. Juanita's transformation culminates in compassion and self-sacrifice, whereas Grete's transformation reflects her acceptance of the exploitative social and economic values that contribute to Gregor's dehumanization. By bringing Kafka and Marqués into dialogue, the study demonstrates how both authors critique the dehumanizing effects of modern social and economic systems while presenting fundamentally different visions of familial obligation, compassion, and redemption.*

Keywords: familial alienation; family relationships; self-sacrifice; dehumanization; comparative literary analysis.

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Introduction

When Jane Austen put quill to paper in 1813 to exclaim, “What strange creatures brothers are!” she could scarcely have imagined that strangest of all brothers in Western literature, Kafka’s Gregor Samsa. But Gregor’s strangeness in *The Metamorphosis* and the repulsion he elicits from his family do not originate with his physical transformation, nor are they solely the result of it. Rather, the roots of the Samsas’ familial dissension predate Gregor’s metamorphosis and had already begun to cause a rift even before the narrative begins. Recent Kafka scholarship has increasingly moved away from treating Gregor’s transformation as an isolated supernatural event and toward understanding it as the culmination of preexisting economic and relational pressures. El Hajj (2026), for example, reads *The Metamorphosis* as an exploration of psychic collapse produced by the entanglement of bodily experience, social obligation, and institutional demands, reinforcing the argument that Gregor’s transformation reveals rather than creates his family’s underlying dysfunction. Nevertheless, the strain on the Samsas after Gregor awakens one morning to find himself “changed into a monstrous verminous bug” (Kafka, 1999, p. 3) eventually leads to a total breakdown in family relationships. The disaster particularly affects his seventeen-year-old sister Grete, who undergoes her own transformation as a result. Likewise, the initial uneasiness between Luis and his family in *La carreta* by René Marqués is not wholly the result of Luis’s flawed, and ultimately tragic, series of decisions after their father’s death. But Luis’s transformation—which, though less literal than Gregor’s, is no less dramatic—does precipitate a disintegration of family relationships along similar lines, with his nineteen-year-old sister, Juanita, particularly affected. While Juanita initially rejects the role of “brother’s keeper,” ultimately, she, like Grete, takes pride in her new position as breadwinner for the family. Nevertheless, the nature of the young women’s reconciliation with their new roles is completely different; Juanita finds redemption in sacrificing herself for her family, whereas Grete’s metamorphosis is merely a capitulation to her parents and, by extension, the larger capitalist society that victimized her brother.

Although *The Metamorphosis* and *La carreta* have each generated substantial bodies of scholarship, critics have generally examined them within their respective national, linguistic, and cultural traditions. Studies of Kafka have tended to emphasize existential alienation, capitalism, bureaucracy, and modernity, while scholarship on Marqués has focused primarily on Puerto Rican identity, migration, colonialism, and nationalism. Comparisons between these works, particularly with respect to the relationship between familial disintegration, labor, and sibling transformation, remain relatively underexplored. By placing Kafka and Marqués in dialogue, this study offers a comparative perspective that reveals striking thematic and structural parallels while also highlighting significant ideological differences. Specifically, it demonstrates that although both authors depict protagonists whose identities are consumed by their roles as family providers, they diverge sharply in their treatment of the sisters’ transformations and in their ethical responses to modern social and economic forces. In doing so, the article contributes to comparative literary studies by showing how two authors writing in distinct historical and cultural contexts employ the family as a vehicle for exploring the dehumanizing consequences of modernity.

In both works, the firstborn son is initially the family’s sole provider, a situation that in each case results from an old debt. For Gregor Samsa, the debt is literal; at the time of his transformation, Gregor has been working for five years, and expects to work for at least five or six more—to repay his parents’ debt to his employer. In contrast, Luis’s debt in *La carreta* is of a figurative nature. He tells his grandfather, Don Chago, that he has a debt to pay, clarifying, “No me refiero a la jipoteca. Me refiero a la vieja”/“I’m not talking about the mortgage. I’m talking about the old lady” (Marqués, 2016, p. 45). Because Doña Gabriela has raised him as her own child in spite of his illegitimacy, Luis feels that he must repay her, a sense that is compounded when her husband dies and the family is left without a provider. It is this motivation—the desire to provide the family with a better life in order to recompense Doña Gabriela’s affection—that drives Luis’s actions in the play.

To pay their debts, literal and figurative, and support their families, both young men are prepared to do anything necessary. Almost the entire first third of *The Metamorphosis* recounts Gregor’s efforts to get up and go to the office despite the monstrous change in his physical condition.

He tries to verbally communicate to his family that he will go to work, makes every effort to bend his new body to his will, and finally manages to escape his room in an attempt to convince the manager that he's well enough to work: "You see, Mr. Manager, I am not pig-headed, and I am happy to work. . . . I am concerned about my parents and sister. I'm in a fix, but I'll work myself out of it again" (Kafka, 1999, p. 20).

This attempt to maintain his routine continues the pattern of Gregor's pre-transformation life, which was dominated by work. As his mother tells the manager, "He is not well, believe me, Mr. Manager. Otherwise how would Gregor miss a train! The young man has nothing in his head except business" (Kafka, p. 20). Gregor's inability to imagine an existence outside his economic function reflects what Castro Mattos (2024) identifies as the political dimension of Kafka's critique: a social order that reduces human value to usefulness and productivity. Similarly, Sahi (2025) argues that Kafka's depiction of family and society reveals a system in which personal worth becomes inseparable from one's capacity to provide. This dynamic also reflects broader patterns examined in family studies, where scholars have emphasized that families are not isolated emotional units but social institutions shaped by economic pressures (Sangari, 2024) and obligations among kin (Frimmel et al. 2025). Gregor's transformation therefore exposes, rather than creates, the logic that had already governed the Samsa household: his value within the family has always depended upon his economic usefulness. Likewise, Luis seems to think of nothing except how to earn more money. The young man takes no interest in girls, nor does he indulge in vices like smoking or drinking. Before the family leaves for San Juan, Don Chago observes that Luis is too serious for someone his age: "Yo nunca lo e vihto reírse con ganah"/"I've never seen him laugh like he means it" (Marqués, 2016, p. 38). In New York, it's a point of pride with the eldest son that he can finally meet Doña Gabriela's needs, a fact that he repeats like a mantra throughout the third act. But even in the United States, with their debts paid and the family settled and comfortable, Luis cannot relax; seeking to fill the void within himself, he continues to work extra hours, explaining to Juanita that he does it for Doña Gabriela's well-being.

The protagonists' devotion to work therefore represents more than economic necessity; it reveals the deeper alienation produced when familial identity becomes inseparable from the ability to provide. Both Gregor and Luis experience the alienation of living in a world—and a family—in which they are "strange creatures," outsiders who feel isolated even among the people closest to them. Despite Doña Gabriela's attempts to conceal the truth, Luis and his siblings are aware that Luis is not her biological child. The love she lavishes on him, and his position as the father's favorite—as Doña Gabriela tells Juanita near the end of the play, "Murió queriendo a Luis máh que a ninguno de uhtedeh"/"He died loving Luis more than any of you all" (Marqués, 2016, p. 144)—have sown resentment among the siblings. This is first evidenced in the stark contrast between Luis's interactions with his grandfather and his two siblings. He greets Don Chago amiably, asking him for a blessing, but is curt with Chaguito and Juanita. His first words to his brother, without greeting or prologue, are "Y tú, ¿entoavía no te jas cambiado?"/"And you, still haven't changed?" and to his sister, ¿Tú estáh lihta?"/"You ready?" (Marqués, p. 47). When Don Chago suggests that Juanita's ambivalence about moving to San Juan might be due to her budding romance with Miguel, Luis responds dismissively. Indeed, his only apparent interest in his siblings stems from his desire to sell sixteen-year-old Chaguito's rooster for three pesos. Chaguito makes it clear, in anguished tones, that he does not consent to the transaction: "Eh míó. Yo no tengo máh ná. Pero el gallo eh míó. Yo lo crié. Y él me conoce"/"He's mine. I don't have anything else. But the rooster is mine. I raised him. And he knows me" (Marqués, p. 49). The younger boy even takes pains to hide the rooster from Luis; nevertheless, the latter afterward sells it in San Juan. The antagonism between the two comes to the forefront when Luis threatens physical violence and Chaguito responds by saying, "Pégame si te atreveh. Tú no ties derecho. . . . No me jagah jablar. Sé muchah cosah"/"Beat me if you dare. You have no right. . . . Don't make me talk. I know a lot of things" (Marqués, p. 53). His implicit threat to reveal Luis's illegitimacy prompts Doña Gabriela to defend Luis in a pattern that defines the family's interactions.

The early interactions between Gregor Samsa and his sister Grete also demonstrate a thinly veiled animosity that erodes the sibling relationship further as the work goes on. After the manager's fright at seeing Gregor in his transformed state, the latter laments that his sister was not there to calm

the manager down. A ladies' man, the manager would certainly, Gregor feels, have listened to Grete, who is holed up in her bedroom avoiding the situation. This abandonment is the first of a series of indignities that Gregor will afterward suffer at his sister's hands and foreshadows her final betrayal.

Both Gregor and Luis demonstrate what Díaz calls "inner exile" (1988, p. 9), a condition of profound spiritual estrangement that leaves them isolated not only from society but also from the families for whom they sacrifice themselves. Extrapolating from Kafka's own position as a German-speaking Jew in Prague, "the citizen of a crumbling state," treated with suspicion by both Jewish Czech-speakers and Gentiles, the reader might apply the epithet "the loneliest of men" to Gregor as readily as to Kafka himself (Corngold, 2004, p. xii). Gregor's life as a traveling salesman is marked by rootlessness and dehumanizing routine, a condition reflected in his first thoughts after his transformation: "O God... what a demanding job I've chosen!... I have to deal with the problems of traveling, the worries about train connections, irregular bad food, temporary and constantly changing human relationships which never come from the heart. To hell with it all!" (Kafka, 1999, p. 4). Significantly, Gregor's immediate response to his metamorphosis is not horror at his new body but anxiety about returning to work, revealing the extent to which his identity has become inseparable from his economic function. Yet his transformation offers no genuine escape from alienation, for he continues to equate his humanity with the very system that has dehumanized him.

Luis suffers a comparable estrangement, though its origins lie in his illegitimacy, migration, and colonial context. As Babin (2016) observes, he is "el hombre sin rumbo, siempre de camino, huyendo del fracaso que lleva en sí mismo"/"a man with no path, always on the move, fleeing the failure he carries within himself" (p. 12). Luis himself recognizes this condition when he confesses to Doña Isa, "Estoy como sin raíces. No encuentro tierra. No encajo en ningún sitio"/"It's like I'm rootless. I have no homeland. I don't fit anywhere" (Marqués, 2016, p. 98). His repeated migrations—from the mountains to San Juan and ultimately to New York—never resolve this sense of displacement but instead intensify it, as each attempt at economic advancement brings new forms of exploitation and suffering for himself and his family. Thus, despite the different historical and cultural circumstances in which Kafka and Marqués write, both portray labor pursued solely as economic necessity as incapable of restoring human dignity. Instead, the protagonists' relentless devotion to work deepens their alienation and hastens the collapse of the very families they seek to preserve.

Marqués, a moralist, provides an antidote to the existential alienation that Luis suffers. Through the character of Don Chago, the author expresses his faith in traditional Puerto Rican values and his rejection of colonialist exploitation. Contemporary Puerto Rican literary criticism continues to examine how displacement, economic transformation, and colonial structures shape relationships between people and place (e.g., Rogers, 2025). Read within this context, Don Chago's defense of the land represents not merely nostalgia for a rural past but resistance to economic systems that redefine belonging according to market value. In the play's first act, Don Chago repeatedly exhorts the family not to leave the mountains. Although they have lost their own property, the patriarch insists that staying close to the land, even if it belongs to someone else, is preferable to life in the city. Working the soil, he feels, will restore Luis's soul, even if it won't spare the family the hardships of poverty. Don Chago harkens back to a time when "se podía ser pobre y tener dignidad"/"you could be poor and still have dignity" (Marqués, 2016, p. 39). For the older man, dignity is worth more than material wealth, and he rejects a modern world in which "tód predican el dólar"/"everything revolves around the dollar" (Marqués, p. 39).

Unlike his grandfather, Luis embraces the modern world with enthusiasm. Despite demeaning jobs in one factory after another, he continues to find beauty in the machines that surround him. This identification with the machines that have been so harmful not only to Luis individually but to an entire class of people like him reflects the psychological effects of economic domination: Luis comes to identify with the very system that exploits him because it appears to offer survival. As he tells Don Chago at the beginning of the play, he's moving the family to the city to survive. When his grandfather answers, "¿Eh que aquí ehtamoh muelto?"/"You trying to say we're dead here?" Luis answers, "Peor que muelto. Aquí no somoh ná"/"Worse than dead. Here we're nothing" (Marqués, 2016, p. 44). Ultimately, however, Luis's fascination with machinery is not merely misguided but malign; the

machines themselves represent death. The author demonstrates, through the locus of Luis's death, a variation on Jesus' precept about violence: "He who lives by the machine dies by the machine."

It's worth noting that nature makes few appearances in *The Metamorphosis*. Though Kafka provides numerous points of reference within the Samsa apartment, its only continuous tie to the outside world is the window in Gregor's room, with its view of the hospital across the street—a view that diminishes as Gregor's eyesight worsens. The author makes a point of stressing that the street where the Samsas live is "quiet but completely urban" (Kafka, 1999, p. 38). When the weather is mentioned, it's raining. Only at the end of the work, after Gregor's death, does the family leave the city for the first time and spend a sunny day in the countryside.

In a world dominated by economic interests, without the time or place for cultivation of the spirit (Babín, 2016, p. 9), both Gregor and Luis seek to alleviate their inherent condition of alienation by throwing themselves into their work. However, these efforts are doomed to fail because the types of work they do are fundamentally dehumanizing. In light of the Marxist assertion that the only type of work that leads to fulfillment is that which is, at least partly, self-determined—work engaged in for its own sake (Sokel, 1983)—Gregor and Luis have within their power the means of personal fulfillment. However, neither character engages in work on this order in any significant way. Gregor's mother does point out to the visiting manager that her son enjoys fretwork, and Kafka's decision to showcase Gregor's handiwork—a gilt frame with a picture of a pretty girl in it—at the very beginning of the novella seems to highlight its importance in his life. The frame is a link to Gregor's humanity; not surprisingly, when Grete tries to remove it along with the rest of her brother's belongings, he defends it bodily, even at the risk of frightening his mother. Nevertheless, Gregor had completed the frame "over the course of two or three evenings" (Kafka, 1999, p. 13)—hardly a substantial investment of his time.

Another connection to the human world, and one that has a greater and greater effect on Gregor as the work progresses, is music. Though Gregor was indifferent to music before his transformation (Corngold, 2004, p. xx), he is moved by it afterward. It is music that forces the climax of the novella, when Gregor emerges from his room in order to get a closer view of Grete playing the violin and is witnessed by the three lodgers:

... his sister was playing so beautifully. Her face was turned to the side, her gaze followed the score intently and sadly. Gregor crept forward still a little further and kept his head close to the floor in order to be able to catch her gaze if possible. Was he an animal that music so seized him? (Kafka, 1999, p. 64)

Quite the contrary; Grete's music represents Gregor's last tenuous connection not only to his sister—for whom he had been saving money, to send her to a conservatory—but also to his own humanity. The fact that it is music, a principal point of connection between the two siblings before the metamorphosis, that leads to his sister's final, inexorable repudiation of Gregor only makes it the more poignant.

Music also takes on a symbolic significance in *La carreta*. The second act of the play opens with Doña Gabriela, suffering from a headache, shouting for someone to turn down the jukebox in the café next door, a scene that is repeated later in the act. The blaring jukebox is not merely indicative of the indignities of living in the slums—close living quarters, a lack of privacy, and inconsiderate neighbors—but also demonstrates the family's lack of control as they find themselves impotent to mitigate the series of misfortunes that befall them: Don Chago's death, Chaguito's arrest, Juanita's sexual assault, and Luis's entanglement with Doña Isa. In the third act of *La carreta*, music takes on a new significance. Like Gregor, Luis finds himself moved by the sound of unfamiliar music—in this case, blues from the radio. The sound awakens something in him; as he tells Juanita, "Da ganah e llorar"/"It makes you want to cry" (Marqués, 2016, p. 113). However, unlike Gregor, Luis does not turn himself over to its spell; despite his sister's insistence that she enjoys the music, Luis orders her, almost violently, to change the station. It is one of the many tense interactions between the two demonstrating the deterioration of their relationship.

Although Gregor and Luis experience alienation in the broader social worlds they inhabit, that alienation is most painfully realized within their own homes. The family relationships that should provide refuge instead become spaces where their usefulness—and eventual uselessness—is

measured most clearly. The fathers in both *The Metamorphosis* and *La carreta* are notable less for their similarities than for their stark contrasts to their sons. Although ostensibly absent, Doña Gabriela's late husband—"The Deceased," as she invariably refers to him—remains central to the play's conflicts. Like the father who abandons the family in Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* (2009), his absence defines the lives of those left behind. His death initiates the chain of events that follow, as Luis's increasingly disastrous decisions irrevocably alter the family. Yet The Deceased is not a figure whose motivations must be inferred: Doña Gabriela's dialogue presents him as a vain, proud womanizer who would have rejected Luis. Perhaps Luis intuitively recognizes this, which helps explain why his mother describes him as "enfermo por dentro"/"sick inside" (Marqués, 2016, p. 142).

Gregor's relationship with Mr. Samsa in *The Metamorphosis* offers a similar but more immediate contrast. Mr. Samsa has spent years refusing to work while Gregor sacrifices his own life to support the family. The reader's first view of him shows him knocking "weakly but with his fist" (Kafka, 1999, p. 7) on Gregor's door, a description that captures his contradictory nature: apparently diminished yet increasingly aggressive. When circumstances force him back into the workforce, he reveals the vigor he had withheld from his son:

But now he was standing up really straight, dressed in a tight-fitting blue uniform with gold buttons, like the ones servants wear in a banking company. Above the high stiff collar of the jacket his firm double chin stuck out prominently, beneath his bushy eyebrows the glance of his black eyes was freshly penetrating and alert, his otherwise disheveled white hair was combed down into a carefully exact shining part. He threw his cap onto the sofa and moved, throwing back the edge of the long coat of his uniform, with his hands in his trouser pockets and a grim face, right up to Gregor. (Kafka, p. 50)

This image deliberately echoes the earlier photograph of Gregor in his military uniform, "with his hand on his sword, (demanding) respect for his bearing and uniform" (Kafka, p. 20). Mr. Samsa's authoritative posture precedes an attack on his son, embodying the aggression that defines their relationship.

However, it is clear that Mr. Samsa's hostility toward Gregor predates the metamorphosis. Before Gregor's transformation, his father secretly withholds part of Gregor's earnings, delaying the repayment of the family debt and prolonging Gregor's sacrifice. Yet Gregor, characterized by his selflessness and generosity, refuses to blame his father for this misdeed. The limited third-person narration follows Gregor's perspective and describes the discovery passively, without naming the father as an agent: "...a fortune, although a very small one, was available from the old times [...] Gregor, behind his door, nodded eagerly, rejoicing over this unanticipated foresight and frugality" (Kafka 1999, pp. 36-37). Even upon recognizing his father's role in creating this financial reserve, Gregor concludes that "things were doubtless better the way his father had arranged" (Kafka, p. 37). His forgiveness makes Mr. Samsa's violence the more striking. Kafka depicts the father through a series of attacks: first with a clenched fist, then with a cane and newspaper, and finally by throwing apples at Gregor. Like the fruit that brings exile and suffering in *Genesis* (Mao, 2020), one apple lodges in Gregor's back and ultimately contributes to his death. After the metamorphosis, it becomes clear that the father's affection has depended largely on the son's usefulness; once Gregor can no longer provide financially, he lacks value.

A similar pattern presents itself in *La carreta*, where the family grants The Deceased extraordinary forgiveness despite his failures. None of them directly blames him for their hardships, even when those hardships result from his own choices. When Doña Gabriela recounts the family's decline, she attributes it to fate, saying, "El difunto nació con mala ehtrella"/"The Deceased was born under a bad star" (Marqués, 2016, p. 34). Only Don Chago recognizes The Deceased's responsibility, observing that it is easier to blame the stars than human mischief. Doña Gabriela's willingness to excuse her husband extends to Luis as well: she repeatedly defers to him as the family's decision-maker despite the consequences of his choices. She worries about provoking Luis's anger—early in the play, she urges Juanita to hurry and pack to avoid his ire—while her interactions with Chaguito consist largely of criticism and reprimand. Yet although her love for Luis remains constant, a crisis ultimately transforms their relationship.

As Krause (2019) outlines in “Aspects of Abjection in Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*,” Gregor’s transformation “catapults him outside of language and culture into a regressive state. His bedroom becomes the birthplace of his amorphous body whose desperate focus is the recuperation of the lost mother” (p. 303). This recuperation of a lost mother may be the impetus driving Luis as well. His only sexual encounter in the play is with a woman twice his age. Doña Isa seems to have no interest in prolonging the affair, telling Luis “yo no sabría nunca en verdad si eras mi hombre... o mi hijo”/“I’d never know whether you were really my man... or my son” (Marqués, 2016, p. 95). Luis knows that Doña Gabriela is not his mother; he also knows that he can never be reunited with the lost mother who bore him. Just as Gregor’s transformation cuts him off effectively from his own past (Rolleston, 2008), Luis’s flight from one place to the next cuts him off from his. The fact that he’s the one doing the cutting doesn’t make him any less wounded by it. This undercurrent of pain and emptiness reaches its crisis point when Doña Gabriela walks in and Luis and Doña Isa spring apart. The exchange between mother and son would have been unthinkable earlier in the play:

DOÑA GABRIELA. – (A DOÑA ISA) ¿No le da vergüenza? ¿Aquí, en mi propia casa? ¿Una mujer casá? ¿Una mujer de susaño?/Aren’t you ashamed? Here, in my own house? A married woman? A woman of her age?

LUIS. – Mamá.../Mom...

DOÑA GABRIELA. – ¡No me llameh mamá!/Don’t call me Mom. (Marqués, 2016, p. 99)

By the end of the act, when she laments the apparent curse on her bloodline, Doña Gabriela no longer even tries to keep up the pretense of being Luis’s mother. “Sólo tú te has salvao”/“Only you have saved yourself,” she tells him. “Porque tú no ereh...”/“Because you aren’t...” (Marqués, 2016, p. 105). Though she trails off without finishing the line, the implication is clear. Luis, already motherless, has lost the only mother he had. What was always true but never acknowledged has come out into the open, confirming Luis’s status as a “strange creature”: an orphan, an outcast, an interloper. The change is manifest in the play’s final act where, despite his relative financial success, Luis is a shell of his former self (Babín, 2016, p. 13). He clings desperately to the one thought that gives him solace—the knowledge that he can finally meet Doña Gabriela’s material needs.

Gregor Samsa loses his mother in a less dramatic fashion. Mrs. Samsa had been a powerless, diminished figure even before the metamorphosis—asthmatic, weak-willed, and completely ineffective against the stronger characters of Grete and Mr. Samsa. She’s portrayed in one scene with her hair in standing on end, “still a mess from the night” (19), in another in her underwear; in a third, she hurtles forward after tripping. In the reader’s first view of Mrs. Samsa, she takes two steps toward Gregor only to collapse in the middle of her skirts, “her face sunk on her breast, completely concealed” (Kafka, 1999, p. 19). This concealment serves to reinforce how totally inaccessible his mother is. The last time Gregor sees her, turning around to take one last glimpse of the family after being utterly, irrevocably denounced by Grete, his mother has fallen asleep in her chair. Even when she wants to be with Gregor—as when she cries out, “Let me go to Gregor. He’s my unlucky son! Don’t you understand that I have to go to him?” (Kafka, p. 41)—she is impeded by Mr. Samsa and Grete. As the novella goes on, Mrs. Samsa provides Gregor little more than a horrified mirror in which to see himself.

Yet parental relationships alone do not explain the ultimate collapse of familial bonds in these works. The decisive transformations occur within the sibling relationships, where each brother’s former role as protector and provider is reversed. Each brother experiences some degree of role reversal as his position as his sister’s provider and protector devolves, and each is forced to stand impotently by as his sister undergoes a transformation of her own. In the first act of *La carreta*, after Chaguito catches Juanita holding hands with Miguel, Luis assures Doña Gabriela, “Pa ese ehtoy yo aquí. Pa salil por mi hermana.”/“That’s why I’m here. To stand up for my sister” (Marqués, 2016, p. 41). Early in the play, Juanita does indeed seem to need protection; from bickering with Chaguito to escaping into radio programs about Spanish Marquesas lounging in boudoirs, she seems so childlike that it’s hard to believe she’s nineteen years old. This portrayal reaches a humorous pitch when Juanita tells little Lito that the feet of aristocrats never smell bad (Marqués, p. 71). But Luis’s declaration that he will protect his sister takes on a bitter irony in the second and third acts in light of Juanita’s violent rape by an unknown assailant and subsequent descent into prostitution. Nor does Juanita spare him

any of the blame for her misfortunes. The siblings' discourse goes from merely brusque to openly contentious, though Doña Gabriela repeatedly urges peace. Juanita's contempt for Luis is evidenced in her description of her brother to her would-be suitor Paco: "Mi hermano trabaja 'overtaim.' Sólo sirve pa eso"/"My brother works overtime. That's all he's good for" (Marqués, p. 120). Like Gregor's family in *The Metamorphosis*, she equates Luis's worth with his earning power; the difference is that in doing so Juanita applies not her own standard of measurement but Luis's own.

Gregor and Grete's relationship deteriorates along similar lines. Before the metamorphosis, Gregor had coddled and spoiled the girl, treating her like a child and sparing her from work, so that their parents "had often got annoyed at his sister because she had seemed to them a somewhat useless young woman" (Kafka, 1999, p. 40). Grete begins by reciprocating her brother's former solicitude. At first, she enjoys substituting for the absent mother—offering Gregor a variety of foods to see what he likes best and keeping his room tidy—but as time passes, she tires of the arrangement. She begins to serve him carelessly, not noticing whether he eats his meals or (as is more and more frequent) not. His room becomes a filthy dumping ground for any superfluous item around the home, including the ash box, and Gregor spends his last days covered in dirt, hair, and the remnants of food. Grete's role reversal has come to an end, in an echo of their parents' previous disenchantment with Gregor's labors: "They had become quite accustomed to (Gregor's bearing the expenses), both the family and Gregor as well. They took the money with thanks, and he happily surrendered it, but the special warmth was no longer present" (Kafka, p. 35).

Unlike Grete's realized role as her brother's keeper, Juanita's never comes to fruition. After learning the truth about Luis's parentage from Doña Gabriela, Juanita unequivocally forgives her brother. At her mother's urging—"...hay que cuidarlo. Hay que cuidarlo mucho"/"We have to take care of him. We have to take good care of him" (Marqués, 2016, p. 142)—she vows to do so: "Lo cuidaremos, mamá. Seremos doh madre pa él"/"We'll take care of him, Mom. We'll be two mothers to him" (Marqués, p. 144). Juanita is prepared to act as a second parent to her orphaned brother, but she never gets the chance. Luis dies in an accident at the factory, killed by the very machines he so admires, and his sister's only consolation is that "El huérfano encontró lo que buhcaba"/"The orphan found what he was searching for" (Marqués, p. 150). Doña Gabriela amplifies the pathos with her heartbreaking prayer to God, "Sé un buen padre pa mihijo"/"Be a good father to my son" (Marqués, p. 150).

Luis never knows his sister's final feelings toward him, but Gregor can be in no doubt of Grete's. In their final interaction, his sister definitively breaks with him in an impassioned speech to their parents. Though she has always called her brother by name before, both when discussing and addressing him, Grete begins by declaring, "I will not utter my brother's name in front of this monster" (Kafka, 1999, pp. 67-68)—interestingly, however, slipping from "it" to "he," even as she insists that the "monster" must be abandoned. When her father suggests that Gregor may be able to understand them, Grete vehemently denies the possibility and repeats with renewed resolution, "It must be gotten rid of" (Kafka, p. 69). With a series of half-truths and outright lies, Grete describes her brother as bent on the family's destruction, a monster whose goal is to "take over the entire apartment, and leave us to spend the night in the alley" (Kafka, p. 69). A few hours later, perhaps unsurprisingly, Gregor is dead—not, however, without first remembering his family "with deep feeling and love" (Kafka, p. 71).

In *The Metamorphosis* and *La carreta*, circumstances require each sister to take on a new role as her brother's keeper. One embraces the role at once—but for superficial reasons, including her raise in status within the household. The other sister reluctantly surrenders to it, both for love of her mother and because of her genuine pity for her brother's state. Here is where the two works part ways in the starkest of terms: Juanita is redeemed, while Grete is not. This redemption is demonstrated in the way the two sisters respond to their brothers' deaths: Juanita vows to have Luis buried in Puerto Rico regardless of the cost, whereas Grete's brother's body is carried out with the rubbish by the cleaning lady, a loud, uncouth woman who ironically had always given Gregor credit "for as complete an understanding as possible" (Kafka, 1999, p. 72)—unlike anyone in the Samsa family.

Each sister undergoes her own transformation over the course of the work, changing from an ingenuous teenager to a working adult. While Grete's path is outwardly more respectable—working

as a salesgirl and studying French and stenography—the end point is the same for both: a good marriage. In fact, the last lines of the two works are uncannily similar. *The Metamorphosis* concludes, “... (the Samsas) thought that the time was now at hand to seek out a good honest man for her. And it was something of a confirmation of their new dreams and good intentions when at the end of their journey the daughter first lifted herself up and stretched her young body” (Kafka, 1999, p. 77). *La carreta* ends with the image of Doña Gabriela, “a los pies de la hija que se yergue firme y decidida”/“at the feet of her daughter, who stands firm and decided” (Marqués, 2016, p. 152). The conclusion of *The Metamorphosis* demonstrates that the Samsas plan to do to Grete exactly what they did to Gregor. This is the “blossoming” that their daughter has undergone—into someone capable of being exploited for their financial gain. In *La carreta*, Juanita also comes of age and becomes capable of taking care of her family. However, the prospect of Juanita’s future marriage implies not exploitation but self-sacrifice. In the play’s second act, Juanita had rejected the idea of marrying Miguel because she felt defiled and unworthy after her sexual assault. At the end of the play, in light of news of Miguel’s interest in emigrating to New York, Juanita changes her mind, telling her mother that they must return to the mountains before Miguel sells his land. “La tierra será nuestra. Y salvaremos a Miguel de venir a buhcar el mihterio que mató a mi hermano”/“The land will be ours. And we’ll save Miguel from coming to look for the mystery that killed my brother” (Marqués, p. 151). Not only does Juanita affirm her love for Luis by calling him her brother, but she makes it clear that she acts not in her own self-interest but out of concern for both her family and Miguel.

Doña Gabriela’s description of Luis in *La carreta* as lost in a world to which he does not belong could apply equally to Gregor Samsa in *The Metamorphosis*. Both young men are “strange creatures” who experience inner exile, alienated not only from society but from the families for whom they sacrifice themselves. Yet the comparison between these works reveals more than a shared depiction of individual suffering. By placing Kafka’s modernist critique of capitalist alienation alongside Marqués’s examination of migration, colonial displacement, and familial obligation, a broader pattern emerges: the family is not separate from the economic and social forces that shape modern life but often becomes a site where those forces are reproduced.

This comparative reading also expands the literary understanding of alienation beyond the traditional image of the isolated individual confronting an indifferent society. In both works, alienation originates within intimate relationships as much as within institutions; the protagonists become estranged because their identities have been reduced to the functions they perform for others. At the same time, the divergent endings of the two texts demonstrate that literature does not offer a single response to the pressures of modernity. Kafka presents a devastating vision of a society in which economic usefulness determines human value and familial bonds collapse when that usefulness disappears. Marqués, while equally critical of exploitative systems, imagines the possibility of restoration through a renewed connection to community and place. This restoration, however, does not occur through economic success or individual escape but through Juanita’s rediscovery of familial and communal responsibility. Ultimately, both protagonists undergo changes that slowly destroy their ties to the members of their families—particularly their sisters, who experience their own transformations. One sister, Juanita, emerges purified by the experience, while the other capitulates to the exploitation inherent in the capitalist society that victimized her brother before her. Indeed, the conclusion of *The Metamorphosis* demonstrates that this sister, Grete Samsa, is more of a monster than her brother Gregor ever was.

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