

## CELLULOID ADAPTATIONS OF FRANZ KAFKA'S WORKS

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*As Gregor Samsa woke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself in his bed, transformed into a monstrous insect.* Who, or which between the two, is the cold-blooded, brutal and cruel being? Is it the horrible insect Gregor Samsa has turned into? Or, is it the human being, manifested in his family revealed to be a cold-blooded killer of its own kin? Human relationships change dramatically when situations change, and this comes across brilliantly in renowned Russian theater director Valery Fokin's transformation of Kafka's quintessential tale (1914) into an eerie and stunningly beautiful film, *Metamorphosis*. Evgeny Mironov turns in an unforgettable performance as Gregor Samsa, the middle-level clerk who awakes one morning to find he has changed into a monstrous insect. Fokin, who adapted the story for the stage in 1995, shows the alienation and profound sadness that pervades the original story, and the class tensions that gripped Prague in the early 1900s.

Fokin takes precisely 20 minutes to arrive at the first sentence of Kafka's original story. The celluloid presentation passes through a masterful orchestration of sound design, cinematography and acting, at times taking the audience into a fascinating journey that designedly vacillates between the real and the surreal, the dreamy and the nightmarish, creating perhaps, one of the best expositions of Kafka's literary work on celluloid. The pattering of the rain has never seemed so filled with mystique, nor has the rhythmic sound of a single drop of water built up an ambience of so much intrigue, working towards that first shocking sentence that not only changes the life of Gregor Samsa, but the lives of all those who watch, and slowly get sucked into his metamorphosis. It is a point-of-view film unfolded through the eyes of the insect-turned-Gregor who watches his once-loving family turn into a collaborating and conspiring team trying to erase him completely from their lives. The film is a classic example of ensemble work, reflecting Fokin's theatre experience. The film spells out in no uncertain terms, that the metamorphosis is not Gregor's alone. It embraces his father, mother and loving sister no less.

The novel and the film are not antithetical forms but are graduating points along the same continuum if the narrative is to be taken as its base. The film in fact, is a larger piece of work than a novel because a film uses the technological tools to bring the story alive on screen to create a living ambience through sound, light, actors, music, editing, dialogue, production design, costume, etc. On the other hand, it limits the scope of the viewer/spectator to exercise his imaginative and creative powers that literature offers its reader.

*The Trial*, a novel by Kafka, is about a character named Josef K, who awakens one morning and, for reasons never told, is arrested and subjected to the rigours of the judicial process for an unspecified crime. Like Kafka's other novels, *The Trial* was left unfinished at his death, and was rescued in its manuscript form by Kafka's friend Max Brod. It was first published in German in 1925. Orson Welles made a celluloid adaptation of the novel in 1962. With Kafka's story, Welles does everything for effect, creating and maintaining an atmosphere that he honed after years of film-noirs. The *mis-en-scene* is always with a purpose to get the viewer into the tension and on-going confusion. The end result of Welles' directorial stamp on the work is that of something like a psychological horror film. With the long takes, the usage of darkness and lights, the indoor and outdoor locations, and deep focus, the look of the film, it could be argued, tops the story in some parts.

The acting separates *The Trial* from being a weird, experimental landscape. Anthony Perkins, who plays the main role of Josef K, gives a convincing performance. His little flubs and

little moments of nervousness add to the credibility of the character and the performance. The issue is universal. It is something we can identify with, often being charged with some unnamed guilt, where, we do not know what the charge is or in what way we are guilty, but feel guilty all the same. Perkins captures all emotions extremely well. His plight becomes more tragic as we get sucked into this nightmare society. By the end of the film, which ends on a note that does not follow the book, is cathartic that explains the effect. Welles and Perkins have created a pure, unique crossbreed of Kafka's tale of maddening persecution.

*In the Penal Colony* is a film written and directed by Sibel Guvenc, based on the short story by Kafka in 1914. At its first public screening in February 2006, the film won the award for Best Cinematography at the *Through Her Eyes: Women of Color Film Festival* held in New York City. Sibel's movie had its Canadian premier in March this year at the Canadian Filmmakers Festival held in Toronto. *In the Penal Colony* has also been selected for participation by film festivals in France, Florida, and California. The story goes like this. A woman explorer accepts an invitation to a penal colony to investigate its justice system, where the condemned is executed without any defense. In this world of judgment and condemnation in a desolate place, she confronts an officer who is getting ready to execute a soldier. The officer demonstrates the apparatus, an instrument used to inflict capital punishment. The explorer's silent disapproval of the system brings a surprising and climactic outcome for the future of the officer, prisoner and the colony. Guvenc treats the film with the fine blend of surrealism and existentialism that marks the literary works of Kafka. The cinematography is brilliant though the unfolding of the narrative might seem a bit confusing for those who have never known Kafka.

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