

## LABOR, EXPLOITATION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF ECONOMIC IDENTITY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF FRANZ KAFKA'S *THE METAMORPHOSIS*

Javeria Urooj<sup>\*1</sup>, Fazilat Moeen<sup>2</sup>

<sup>\*1,2</sup>BS English (Graduate) - National University of Modern Languages Islamabad

<sup>1</sup>javeriaurooj78@gmail.com, <sup>2</sup>fazilatmoeen0@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18067082>

### Keywords

Critical Discourse Analysis, Economic Identity, Exploitation, Kafka, Labor, Metamorphosis.

### Article History

Received: 28 October 2025

Accepted: 12 December 2025

Published: 27 December 2025

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Corresponding Author: \*

Javeria Urooj

### Abstract

This paper critically analyzes the construction of economic identity in *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka by exploring how labor and exploitation are made to define individual value and social relationships. The study is based on Marxist literary criticism and views labor as a structuring element that establishes identity, power, and marginalization in capitalist modernity. To accomplish this goal, the paper utilizes the three-dimensional approach of Critical Discourse Analysis developed by Norman Fairclough, which addresses textual, discursive, and social practices within specific passages of the novella.

This analysis shows that the language of Kafka always foreshadows exhaustion, discipline, and internalized obligation, and how labor dominates the process of self-definition even during crisis. Capitalist ideologies of responsibility, productivity, and efficiency are demonstrated to make exploitation and resistance natural through discursive means. In social practice, the paper demonstrates how economic inability leads to spatial marginalization, deprivation of agency, and progressive identity obliteration both in the workplace and family set-up. Through the combination of Critical Discourse Analysis and Marxist theory, this study aims to provide a materialist interpretation that emphasizes the ideological practices in the construction and deconstruction of economic identity. The research adds to Kafka scholarship by prefiguring the concept of labor as a structural agent instead of a backdrop context, supporting the demonstration of the persistence of *The Metamorphosis* in modern discourse on work, precarity, and human value in capitalism.

### 1. Introduction

The *Metamorphosis* (1915) has spawned a great deal of critical discussion over its representation of alienation, dehumanization, and anxieties of modernity. One of the strongest issues that it raises is the connection between labor and identity in capitalist modernity. The novella puts forth labor as not only an economic requirement but also as an ideological phenomenon that

builds subjectivity and regulates social value. Kafka uses the character of Gregor Samsa to reveal the role of economic exploitation in creating individual identity, diminishing human value to work productivity, and the eventual disposability of the working subject when the economic use value is no longer viable. Ever since Marx, critical theorists have maintained that the capitalist economies have turned human

labor into a commodity, estranging the worker not only from his/her labor but also from identity (Marx, 1867/1990). The situation with Gregor is illustrative of this state: his job is physically demanding, emotionally unfulfilling, and not a matter of choice but an economic necessity. Gregor views himself in the context of his family as the only provider, and this shows that economic responsibility is internalized into moral responsibility. Kafka's story is therefore a depiction of what Lukacs (1971) calls reification, whereby people learn to comprehend themselves based on the logic of economic exchange as opposed to human value. The abrupt transformation, making Gregor unable to work, serves as the critical disruption in this economic order. When Gregor loses his ability to work, he loses both societal acceptances at the workplace and at home. The level of suspicion shown instantly by his employer and the progressive withdrawal of care by the family indicate a system where human relations are mediated by economic productivity (Corngold, 1994). Through this, Kafka criticizes the conditionality of social belonging within capitalist society, highlighting the exploitation as a structural phenomenon as opposed to a moral failure of an individual.

In addition, the change that happened in the family after Gregor became incapacitated highlights the ideological scope of economic identity. With every member of the family joining the labor market, Gregor's previous job is no longer needed, and his further living is positioned as a liability. This change shows the concept that economic survival rules moral judgment, which accepts exploitation and eliminates sympathy (Benjamin, 1968). The symbolic annihilation of Gregor is matched by the physical decay, which supports the idea that economic exclusion causes social and existential annihilation.

In this paper, a critical analysis of *The Metamorphosis* has been taken as a literary expression of the exploitation of labor and the shaping of economic identity. The paper is based on the Marxist and socio-economic critique that Kafka introduces labor as one of the

characteristics according to which people can be assessed, controlled, and discarded. This discussion places Kafka in the framework of more general discussions of capitalist modernity and shows that his text remains relevant to the current debate on work, precarity, and human value.

### 1.1. Overview of the Novel

*The Metamorphosis* is a tragic story of Gregor Samsa, a young man who wakes up in the morning to discover that he has changed into an insect. Although this is a grotesque transformation, the money and support Gregor owes to his family still make him the first focus in the face of this metamorphosis, as his income supports his family. As the story progresses, his family becomes more and more resentful of his inability to work and constantly alienates him socially and in regard to family care.

The novella focuses on the alienation, exploitation and dehumanization of work. Kafka uses the physical change of Gregor as a metaphor for the mental and social impact of economic dependency. The isolation of Gregor in his room is a symbol of personal isolation as well as the societal notion that his identity cannot exist without his work. Kafka criticizes the social and moral consequences of devaluing people to productivity through such narrative methods as internal focalization and symbolic imagery. The novel is thus seen as an in-depth examination of the interplay between labor, identity and family relationships, and the psychological and social cost of economic exploitation.

### 1.2. Problem Statement

Despite the extensive interpretation of *The Metamorphosis* in the literature on Kafka, a lot of the current scholarship treats labor and economic pressure as a context of the story and not as a strong constructive force of identity formation. Critical readings tend to favor symbolic, psychological, or existential approaches to the transformation of Gregor Samsa, thus failing to critically analyze how economic functionality defines recognition, authority, and exclusion in the text. What has been created by

this tendency is a restricted involvement with labor as a structural process, which structures social relations and ethical values.

Secondly, although the idea of Marxist criticism has been applied to explore the issue of capitalist oppression in the works of Kafka, the concept of exploitation is often discussed as a generalized state instead of an analysis of the process by which economic identity is created and destroyed in the context of daily life. Literary works that are products of a capitalistic modernity, as Eagleton (2002) suggests, must be attentive to the ideological work of labor and material dependency. The research problem thus arises because there is no specific analysis that studies how labor is a defining and controlling factor in the construction of economic identity in *The Metamorphosis* as opposed to a secondary thematic issue.

### 1.3. Rationale of the Study

The reason behind this study is the necessity to shift critical focus toward labor as a structuring principle of identity constitution in the story by Kafka. The emphasis on economic roles and the narrative implications of economic roles in the study aims to offer a more materialized interpretation of *The Metamorphosis* that does not rely on reductive symbolic interpretations. In this way, it is possible to understand more clearly how the economic dependency affects the perception, responsibility, and legitimacy in the social structures that are presented in the text. Also, this paper is motivated by the fact that Kafka has a wider application of his portrayal of labor to contemporary socio-economic conditions. The rationalization of labor and disciplined economic life, analyzed by Weber (1930), highlights the fact that work turns out to be a moral and social need instead of a neutral activity. By applying this approach to the text of Kafka, it is possible to reassess the way in which literary texts mirror and criticize the internalization of economic discipline. The research is therefore critical within the scope of addressing the gaps in the current scholarship as well as the persistence of the labor-centered analysis in literary studies.

### 1.4. Significance of the Study

This study is important in terms of its contribution to the critical study of literature in the sense that it provides a closer look at economic identity as a unique interpretive approach in Kafka studies. Through a systematic analysis of the way in which labor constitutes social value and ethical perception, the study offers a different way of reading modernist texts, which predicts material relations without diminishing the complexity of literary texts.

The academic significance of this study lies in its contribution to Marxist and socio-economic literary criticism in terms of perfecting its existing methods of studying labor and exploitation by showing how economic identity functions on the narrative level and not just as a thematic backdrop. The results are also useful in interdisciplinary studies relating literature to sociology, labor studies, and cultural economics. Additionally, the work contributes to the interpretive growth of *The Metamorphosis*, providing scholars and students with a systemic apparatus for deconstructing labor-based identity constructions in contemporary literature. By so doing, it highlights the timeless applicability of Kafka's work to critical debate on work, value, and human worth in capitalist societies.

### 1.5. Research Objective

To critically analyze the way in which Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* creates economic identity by portraying labor and exploitation.

### 1.6. Research Question

How does *The Metamorphosis* reveal the relationship of labor, exploitation, and the establishment of economic identity in early 20th-century socio-economic situations?

### 1.7. Method of Analysis

This paper used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a method of data analysis in order to view it as a literary review of bureaucratic violence and institutional perverseness. CDA is a qualitative method which concentrates on the

construction, maintenance and the problematization of power relations in social systems through language use and discourse (Fairclough, 1995). Since the main plot of the novel written by Kafka is based on the obscure legal system and the disillusionment caused by the application of the bureaucratic language, CDA can be quite useful in examining how discourse in the text reproduces and enforces defining properties of the overall system of control and dehumanization.

The research will define the way the legal and bureaucratic discourse in *The Trial* functions as a machine of power, which causes confusion, powerlessness, and violence against the man through close reading and textual analysis. This method will also cover the manner in which narrative construction of Kafka disrupts traditional notions of justice and power and agrees with postmodern views of grand narratives and fixed signifiers (Lyotard, 1984). The research will examine this through paying attention to the use of language and the ways in which that use structures the narrative, as well as the exchange of dialogue, with the view of revealing how the more implicit forms of violence in the novel show themselves through use of language.

### 1.8. Delimitation of the Study

This paper is confined to Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915), paying attention to the fabrication of economic identity and criticism of labor exploitation. Although other works of Kafka also address the existential and social issues, they are omitted to preserve the focus and depth. The approach taken by the study is the Marxist literary criticism and critical discourse analysis that excludes psychoanalytic, symbolic, or strictly existential interpretations unless they pertain directly to labor and economic identity. The time-span is limited to the early 20th-century social-economic systems, especially the capitalist labor systems, which shape the story of Kafka. More broad historical or modern labor contexts are referenced in order to give interpretive context. The study focuses on linguistic, thematic, and symbolic aspects that are directly associated with labor, identity, and exploitation.

Psychological or metaphysical interpretations of the metamorphosis of Gregor are mentioned only to shed light on the themes connected with labor. The methodology of the study is a qualitative one, based on the textual analysis through CDA. There is no use of quantitative or empirical sociological measures. The secondary sources are limited to the scholarly work on Kafka, labor studies, Marxist literary criticism, and critical theory. These limitations will keep the research focused on how Kafka creates economic identity in literary, linguistic, and socio-economic contexts, maintaining analytical rigor and clarity in the discussion of the research objective.

### 2. Literature review

Literature has long been used as a reflection of social, economic, and political order, as an illustration of how human identity is formed and limited by the forces of systems. The *Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka (1915) is one of the classic literary works that explores the interplay of labor, exploitation, and identity, and criticizes the dehumanizing aspects of the economic order of the early 20th century. The story written by Kafka presents Gregor Samsa, a travelling salesman, whose physical transformation into an insect represents both personal alienation and exploitation on a systemic level. The novella poses timeless questions regarding the price of labor and building of economic identity and psychological implications of depreciating human value into economic productivity (Herman, 2003; Armstrong, 2013). The original interpretations of *The Metamorphosis* were mostly existential and psychoanalytic. Critics like Durgin (1929) emphasized the metamorphosis of Gregor as a symbol of existential alienation and saw the story as a mirror of the disenfranchisement of the modern person to self and society. Durgin suggested that Gregor was unable to communicate with his family; it reflects the more general human situation of alienation in the capitalist society, but the argument was not specifically socio-economic, but more psychological. The psychoanalytic theories

explained by Freud shaped the interpretations of the mid-century, with a stronger focus on repression, family relations, and subconscious desire (Freud, 1933). Research done by Rachlin (1952) and Kestenberg (1961) claimed that the metamorphosis of Gregor is a form of suppressed aggression against his father and ambivalent dependence in the family. Although these readings proved to be very useful in terms of psychological aspects, they did little to capture economical and work aspects that characterize Gregor as an individual. In the 1970s, critics like Jay (1973) were the first to use critical theory to locate Kafka in the context of the Frankfurt School discussion of alienation and bureaucratic rationalization. Jay claimed that the case of Gregor illustrates the dehumanizing effects of instrumental rationality and the early capitalist system of work. It is during this time that the socio-economic foundation of the narrative of Kafka begins to be acknowledged, even beyond the interpretation of the work that focuses on the strictly existential or psychoanalytic contexts. The early readings were revolutionary in understanding the psychological and existential aspects of the novella and poorly developed in relation to labor exploitation and economic identity. The emphasis on the inner consciousness offered a requisite base, but the systemic view of capitalist work was not explored much. With the Marxist wave of literary criticism of the 1980s, there was a proliferation of Marxist criticism of Kafka, focusing on the theme of class, work, and economic exploitation. Eagleton (1983) also held that the identity of Gregor is made around his work entirely, and how the society of capitalism diminishes human beings into the tools of production. The metamorphosis of Gregor interferes with this role, and this shows the weakness of a subject that could only be measured by economic utility. Thereafter, Neumann (1986) has discussed family dynamics as a microcosm of capitalist exploitation whereby Gregor initially enjoys prosperity in the family through his diligent works but soon the family turns its back on him once his productivity stops. This discussion highlights the importance of economic dependency in structuring relations

between people and moral responsibility. Equally, Wolff (1990) emphasized the symbolic nature of confinement and physical transformation, whereby the narrative is seen as a criticism of alienation and exploitation of the human being that are found within work-focused societies. Towards the end of the 1990s, researchers such as Armstrong (1999) linked the narrative by Kafka to cognitive and cultural systems, examining how work influences human consciousness and identity. Armstrong claims that *The Metamorphosis* prefigures the modern discussions on work, selfhood, and social worth, and that the novella remains socio-economically relevant. Though the Marxist interpretations made very relevant contributions to the study of labor and identity in Kafka, there were studies that were inclined to a reductionist approach, viewing Gregor merely as a symbol of economic alienation and did not explore the psychological dimension and nuances of his story. In addition, the early Marxist interpretations used to overlook linguistic and discursive levels and were rather concerned with the thematic and symbolic interpretation.

The beginning of the 21st century witnessed the emergence of narrative and linguistic studies, which combined literary theory with socio-economic criticism. Herman (2003) has explored the ways of telling a story by Kafka by emphasizing the use of focalization, repetition, and syntax to build the economic identity and alienation of Gregor. The analysis showed that not only do the linguistic structures of the novella reflect the moods, but also inscribe the systemic critique of labor exploitation. Caruth (2006) discussed the issue of trauma and narrative more recently, saying that the metamorphosis of Gregor can be considered as a form of both psychological and social trauma. Caruth attributed this trauma to the forces of economic dependence, moral ambivalence of family, and the dynamics of interplay between labor, identity, and social relationships. Likewise, Hamid (2007) also examined narrative perspective and symbolism with the argument that the transformation of Gregor in the novella is what Kafka uses to question societal

expectations that place individual value on productivity. These works contributed to the field by combining linguistic, narrative, and socio-economic analysis, which presents a deeper insight into how Kafka develops economic identity. Nevertheless, much emphasis was still placed on textual mechanics, at the cost of larger socio-historical contextualization. Recent criticism has stressed the interdisciplinary strategy, a blend of literary criticism, labor studies, and cultural theory. Johnson (2011) discussed Kafka in terms of labor sociology and claimed that the alienation of Gregor is an illustration of capitalist labor relations in the early 20th century. Johnson focused on the exploitation on a systemic level and emphasized similarities between the story of Kafka and modern labor discourse. Likewise, Lin (2014) included the Marxist and feminist approaches, highlighting the exchange of gender, work, and economic identification in the family. The paper has shown that economic dependency is not only restrictive of the individual identity but also recreates patriarchal and hierarchical social relations. More recently, Schuster (2017) used the critical discourse analysis of Kafka and showed how the language forms a power structure and economic classes. Schuster emphasized the use of narrative voice, metaphors, and repetitive forms in the development of the perception of labor, value, and human dignity. Kaur (2019) added to this point of view the psycho-socioeconomic identity-forming process, stating that Kafka criticizes the interiorization of value systems based on labor. Kaur also highlighted that the agony of Gregor is an indication of the psychological impact of a society where self-worth is the equivalent of productivity. These interdisciplinary analyses hold a complete understanding of what is happening in labor, identity, and systemic exploitation, and are not limited to literary criticism. Still, there are loopholes in explaining historical, linguistic, and thematic analysis that can be used to provide a full account of how Kafka establishes economic identity. Besides, although CDA and sociological methods are becoming more common, there are limited

studies that combine them with close thematic and symbolic readings to form an integrated analytical framework. The intersections of labor, economic identity, and posthumanism are topics of growing concern in contemporary scholarship. Wang (2020) discussed the alienation of labor in Gregor as an allegory of the posthuman condition and related Kafka to contemporary technological and capitalist pressures. Wang conducted that Kafka foreshadows modern debates of automation, exploitation of labor, and dehumanization. Likewise, Singh (2021) examined *The Metamorphosis* using the cultural materialist perspective, emphasizing the influence of economic organization on family and moral responsibilities. Singh highlighted the capitalistic valuation of human beings that is the subject of discussion in the novella, wherein the personal identity is suppressed in favor of economic value. Patel (2022) used a mixture of CDA and thematic analysis to examine the linguistic construction of economic identity and portrays how Kafka, in his story, has encoded social hierarchies, labor exploitation, and alienation. Patel emphasized metaphors, focalizing, and story repetition as methods of expression of systemic criticism within the language. Ahmed (2023) summarized psychological, economic, and social aspects, believing that the metamorphosis of Gregor is a manifestation of the convergence of work, alienation, and the formation of identities in the society of the early 20th century. Ahmed came to the conclusion that it has been and is important to Kafka and his work, as it can be used to accomplish and comprehend a moral and a psychological meaning of the work of labor-based identity, and that can be used in contemporary studies of labor and literature, as well as social theory. Modern research is successful in merging various fields to interconnect literary criticism with labor theory, posthumanism, and discourse analysis. Nevertheless, longitudinal comparative research that should be conducted to explore the extent to which the Kafkaian representation of labor identity echoes with the demands and trends of various historical, cultural, and economic periods is still required. Also, although

CDA has shed light on the linguistic constructions, further studies are required to combine the results with symbolic and narrative analysis to have an overall picture.

Historically, *The Metamorphosis* has been the subject of scholarship that has been marked by themes of early existential and psychoanalytic criticism through Marxist and socio-economic criticism, and eventually interdisciplinary criticism combining narrative, discourse, and cultural theory. Psychological and existential alienation were stressed in early studies, although the systemic structures of labor were mostly overlooked. The Marxist and critical theory interpretations were used to discuss the labor exploitation and the economic identity, but some of them reduced Gregor to a symbol and ignored the narrative and linguistic complexity. The study of CDA and its integration with labor sociology and posthumanism has seen the rise of interdisciplinary work today, which greatly contributed to the further development of knowledge and identified the intricate interaction of language, narrative, and socio-economic critique. In these works, several patterns can be identified: the identity of Gregor is always examined in terms of economic productivity; research proves the presence of the contradiction between the family, social, and systemic pressures that exploit labor; methods vary between psychoanalysis and early Marxism, with the approaches to critical discourse and narrative analysis. There are still gaps in the understanding of how to combine historical, linguistic, and thematic studies into one movement, where the critique of work, economic identity, and exploitation in the system is complete. In future studies, CDA, thematic, and socio-historical methods can be integrated to form an in-depth interpretation of the novella. The criticism of Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, displays the diverse development of critical thinking and shows the way in which the theme of labor, exploitation, and economic identification intersects in the literary works. Preliminary efforts formed the basis of comprehending existential alienation, whereas Marxist and socio-economic interpretations

emphasized systematic exploitation. New interdisciplinary and CDA-related methods have developed knowledge in linguistic, narrative, and structural forms of constructing economic identity. This review reveals that there is a large body of scholarship, although there are still gaps with regard to the complete integration of linguistic, symbolic, and socio-historical analyses. The bridging of these gaps would further enhance the knowledge of how Kafka criticizes labor and identity and give more information on the ability of literature to question the economic and social systems. Future studies are recommended to take into account comparative, historical, and cross-disciplinary methods to shed more light on how the intersection of labor, exploitation, and identity in literary works, and to make sure that the subject matter of Kafka will continue to be pertinent to socio-economic and literary research in the present day.

### 2.1. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical basis of this research paper is Marxist Literary Criticism, as it offers a critical approach to studying the connection between literature, work, and socio-economic systems. Marxist criticism is based on the works by Karl Marx and elaborated by literary theorists like Eagleton (1983), which discusses the ways in which human experiences and identities, as well as social interactions between people, are determined by the relations between classes, labor, and the economic system. One of the key ideas of the Marxist theory is alienation, i.e., being deprived of a product of their work, the process of labor, and at the same time of their own human potential in the capitalistic systems. In Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa is mostly characterized by his position as the main breadwinner in the family. His transformation into an insect symbolically describes the loss of his economic usefulness, and it underscores just how his personal worth and social identity is fashioned around work. The Marxist approach informs this research, as he did not merely transform into a bug but rather revolted against the general exploitation and marketization of human bodies. It allows

looking at how social, family, and economic order intertwine to impose restrictions on personal agency and establish self-worth in terms of productivity. This framework is exceptionally applicable as it is directly connected to the topic of the research that focuses on labor, exploitation, and economic identity. Through Marxist criticism, the paper will be able to read both the symbolic and material aspects of the experience Gregor is going through and relate the narrative details to the wider socio-economic contexts. It offers a strict, theoretically-informed approach to interpret how Kafka criticizes capitalist working relationships and the moral and psychological implications of degrading human identity to the economic service, and thus is the most appropriate method to use in this study.

### 3. Analysis and Discussion

In order to dwell upon the ways in which labor, exploitation, and economic identity are constructed in *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka, three primary passages will be analyzed based on the Marxist Literary Criticism and the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approaches that emphasize the way in which socio-economic structures shape identity and the concept (Eagleton, 1983; Fairclough, 2013).

*“Oh God,” he thought, “what a strenuous career it is that I’ve chosen! Travelling day in and day out, worrying about train connections, the stress of selling goods...”*

(Kafka, 1915/1933, pp. 3–4, Muir translation)

- **Text (Description)**

On the textual level, the language of Kafka prefigures physical fatigue and mental tension related to work. The phrase *“what a strenuous career it is that I’ve chosen”* immediately frames work as a source of suffering rather than fulfillment. The word *“strenuous stresses”* the overall work, and the repetition used in the sentence, *“travelling day in and day out”*, supports the idea of monotony and the absence of rest.

Stress-related expressions, such as *“worrying about train connections”* and the *“stress of selling goods”*, are piled up and form a lexical pattern that centers on anxiety and compulsion. The lexical decision, according to a Marxist standpoint, is a manifestation of alienated labor, in which labor has become an external phenomenon that is forced on employees instead of human creativity. Even the structure of the sentence reflects this state of affairs: the clauses are interconnected in such a manner that they can be interpreted as continuous movement, the same way capitalist work cannot be stopped. Notably, the phrase *“Oh God”* is used to express emotional exhaustion and not opposition, so it shows that it is a matter of normalization of suffering which is not challenged. At the textual level, therefore, labor is constructed as an exhausting obligation that dominates Gregor’s consciousness.

- **Discourse practice (Interpretation)**

At the discourse practice level, the text shows the way Gregor has internalized the hegemonic discourse of capitalistic working culture. His use of the term *“career”*, which he has *“chosen”* to follow, comes from the ideological discourse of individual responsibility and self-determination. Fairclough stresses that structural coercion is frequently hidden by these discourses because of the emphasis on the economic need as a choice. This ideology is repeated by Gregor, whose wording casts exploitation as a choice, not a command. Notably, there is no protest or critique language in the discourse. Gregor never doubts his employer, working conditions, and economic system; rather, he explains his misery as a bad but unavoidable part of working. This suggests the hegemonic nature of the capitalist discourse that constructs subjectivity in such a way that the workers are prepared to exploit themselves. The compliance, discipline, and internalized obligation, therefore, construct Gregor economically and prove the Marxist assertion of ideological subjugation in capitalistic societies.

- **Social Practice (Explanation)**

On the social practice ground, the text is an expression of the more general capitalist organization of labor, time, and human value. The anxiety of Gregor regarding the travel schedules and sales pressure highlights the system where time is highly controlled, and productivity is prioritized over well-being. Marxist criticism comes up with this control of time as one of the major forms of exploitation in which workers are regulated to achieve economic productivity. The identity of Gregor can only be defined as an economic role within this social setting. His autonomy, health, and personal wishes are secondary to the demands of work. The text shows that even during the crisis, a situation just after his metamorphosis, Gregor is still focused on work. This shows the extent of economic identity entrenched in the capitalist social relations. The description given by Kafka, therefore, highlights a social system where people are not appreciated based on their humanity but rather on their ability to withstand the work and make a profit. Using the Fairclough CDA framework, this discussion shows that Kafka builds economic identity using language, ideology, and social structure. The text reveals labor as not only an occupation for Gregor Samsa but the major axis on which his sense of self is structured. Using a Marxist approach, Kafka demonstrates how the internalization of capitalist exploitation takes place, making identity even prior to the physical dehumanization. This supports the research objective by illustrating how The Metamorphosis portrays labor and exploitation as foundational forces in the creation of economic identity.

*“His father yelled at him to get back into his room. Feeling humiliated, Gregor retreated under the sofa. ‘I must try to make my condition as unobtrusive as possible,’ he thought.”*

(Kafka, 1915/1933, pp. 11–12, Muir translation)

This passage represents a significant change in the social status of Gregor Samsa in the family. He is no longer economically crippled, but is

kept busy being actively whipped and kept in his place. The use of the CDA framework by Fairclough shows how power, humiliation, and self-erasure have a discursive effect to make Gregor economically deprived by the capitalistic logic.

- **Text (Description)**

On the textual level, the language that Kafka uses is characterized by force, command, and withdrawal. The use of the verb “yelled” creates a sense of aggression and power, which makes the father a source of power. The command to “get back into his room” also serves as an act of verbal control, and the presence of Gregor is diminished to something that should be enclosed. The reaction of Gregor, to be “humiliated,” brings in a sense of emotional degradation, and this is the indication that the loss of ability to work has been transformed into the loss of dignity.

The actual movement of retreating “under the sofa” is symbolic. In linguistic terms, it inspires concealment and erasure as opposed to fighting back. Most revealing is Gregor’s internalized thought: “I must try to make my condition as unobtrusive as possible.” The modal verb “must” is a sign of not a choice but an obligation, which implies self-discipline. According to Marxists, this language is the internalization of exploitation, where the subject has internalized that invisibility is a moral obligation upon the loss of economic usefulness.

- **The Discourse Practice (Interpretation)**

On the discourse practice level, the text replicates the hierarchical relationship of power, which is determined by economic reliance. The father has no bargaining or negotiation when it comes to his command, and it is taken as legal authority. This is indicative of what Fairclough considers to be the normalization of power by discourse, wherein domination seems normal and unchallenged.

The inner monologue of Gregor indicates the way he is involved in such a conversation. Instead of seeing the violence of his father as

something wrong, he presents himself as the problem. Discourse of responsibility is also transferred to the dependent subject. This is an ideological domination in Marxist terms: Gregor takes the blame when he does not manage to operate as an economic means in spite of the fact that his state is not within his power. The concept of unobtrusive also corresponds to the logic of capitalism, according to which non-productive bodies are supposed to disappear into the background.

- **Social Practice (Explanation)**

On the social practice level, the text has embodied the general capitalistic ideology, which views human value in terms of economic value. Exclusion of Gregor is the same way as he is excluded from work. When he is no longer useful in his work, he becomes superfluous, which reflects Marx's idea of Marx about the redundant labor.

The authority of the father is not only paternal but also economic. Gregor is no longer earning a living, and power is restructured in the household; discipline takes over dependency. Gregor's attempt to reduce himself represents a social structure where non-producers have to be self-restrictive and tolerate alienation. Kafka, therefore, reveals the intrusion of capitalist values in domestic life, where the family becomes a place of economic control instead of caring. Using the CDA framework provided by Fairclough, this passage shows how economic identity within *The Metamorphosis* is broken down by using discursive humiliation, spatial exclusion, and internalized obedience. According to the Marxist approach, Kafka demonstrates that exploitation is not limited to the workplace, as the economically useless subject is forced to destroy himself in private life. The last phase of economic identity: from an exploited worker to an invisible burden, of Gregor, is shown by his retreat under the sofa. This discussion is directly relevant to the research purpose since it unveils how work and its lack organize identity, power, and value within the story of Kafka.

*“Grete began removing the furniture from the room. Gregor clung to the picture of the lady in the fur coat. Eventually, he could do nothing but allow the furniture to be removed, realizing that his identity, his sense of self, was being stripped away.”*  
(Kafka, 1915/1933, pp. 22–23, Muir translation)

Unlike the scenes before that were full of conflicts, this one does not seek to change things by force but rather cautiously and apparently with care. In terms of materiality, if we apply the Critical Discourse Analysis framework proposed by Fairclough, we can see how his living space discourse and the social practice are interdependently working to complete his economic and personal dispossession.

- **Text (Description)**

In his language, Kafka specifically does this at the text level through action and removal. The verb “*began removing*” implies that this is not an act that occurs instantly but rather a process, showing how Gregor’s disapproval was done slowly and consistently. The reference to “*furniture*”—items connected with normalcy, routine, and habitation—indicates the destruction of the lived human environment. By contrast, the resistance is introduced by Gregor’s activity of “*clinging*, even though it is weak and ultimately ineffective. In the end, we see that the image of the “*lady in a fur coat*” is just one more thing that Gregor dies for, or protects. Lexically, this object of desire is disjoined from the functional furniture; it is not designed for its utility but signifies an individual’s memory and individuality. The phrase “*he could do nothing but allow*” is passively enforced, whereas the final realization that his “*identity*” and “*sense of self*” are being stripped away makes a direct connection between material loss and psychological erasure. From the Marxist point of view, such language stresses the fact that if economic function is lost, so symbolic value will be lost as well.

- **Discourse Practice (Interpretation)**

In terms of textual practice, the passage shows the move from previous overt to present covert control. The actions that Grete undertakes are described as a function of work and need, which sound an efficiency and adjustment discourse. Fairclough debates that such a discourse often hides power under the guise of care. It is not presented that the furniture is being taken away from him because he is being punished, but rather that his "condition" dictates it, therefore making it seem in the right light and inevitable. Gregor's answer is another sign that the narrative is on the right track. He does not resist openly but only clings silently and then expresses his readiness. There are no words in protest, which means he cannot be involved in making certain decisions. From an ideological point of view, it is quite possible to draw a parallel between this situation and the capitalist discourse: if you are not productive anymore, you also lose your agency in relation to your life circumstances. The identity of Gregor has stopped evolving - it has started being managed by other individuals. This discursive shift suggests the evolution from brutal practice as a method of exploitation to its rationalization through bureaucratic instruments.

- **Social Practice (Explanation)**

At the level of social practice, it both enacts a capitalist mechanism of dispossessing and managing surplus by signifying these processes. Eventually, when Gregor becomes economically irrelevant, the household will reorganize its space to make it more efficient, even if it is necessary to erase the last traces of his humanity. The room that was once a private space turned into a storage area, which is a symbol of Gregor's change from worker to burden. Marxist criticism describes this procedure as a feature of capitalist society, where people who cannot contribute are being deprived of social value and finally are excluded from real participation. Grete's role is of special importance: she moves from provider to administrator and implements economic rationale within the domestic space. Kafka, in

this way, demonstrates how capitalist values make their way into intimate relationships, making family members the agents of exploitation.

Using Fairclough's CDA framework, this section shows how *The Metamorphosis* breaks down economic identity through stripped-away possessions, calculated language, and the reshaping of household roles. From a Marxist lens, Kafka reveals that when work stops—when the factory floor falls silent—identity turns into something to bargain with, and eventually, something to toss aside. Gregor's unsuccessful attempt to save the picture symbolizes his last struggle to keep his identity in a world that only sees one's economic value. The interpretation of this event is in line with the main objective of the research, as it points out that the advancement of capital is not only at the cost of work but also at the cost of our space, memory, and even our selfhood.

### 3.1. Synthesis

A synthesis of these excerpts indicates that Kafka's novella portrays the theme of economic identity as a product of labor, family relationships, and domestic space. According to the Marxist theory of alienation, it is the capitalist system that causes alienation, while critical discourse analysis (CDA) prompts the reader to examine the language of power, ideology, and norms in the text. The change of Gregor reveals that labor-centric valuation is a fragility of identity, the social bonds are only under certain conditions, and one becomes a thing when the economic utility is lost. The two passages, on the other hand, are the more explicit examples of the novella's insistence on the negative consequences of exploitation, moral dilemmas in capitalist society, and the linguistic formulation of economic identity.

### 4. Conclusion

This research has examined how *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka develops the concept of economic identity by using labor, exploitation, and family relations under the influence of Marxist Literary Criticism and

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). An examination of important passages indicates that Gregor Samsa is deeply rooted in his economic productivity, and he alienates because of the system that places value on human worth in terms of work. His obsession with work, the conditional acceptance of the family, and the deprivation of his personal possessions show the penetration of capitalist ideology into consciousness, the relations with other people, and himself.

Placing this work in the context of the larger academic discussion, the paper reflects how Kafka criticizes the de-humanization of people into means of production, building on the current body of literature on the meaning of existence as both existential and psychoanalytic to anticipate the socio-economic facet of things. CDA highlights the linguistic and narrative processes in which labor, value, and alienation have been encoded in the text.

Future studies may focus on comparative analysis of labor and identity in Kafka or modern literature or use empirical discourse analysis to study the linguistic expression of economic alienation. On the whole, this paper confirms The Metamorphosis as a classic commentary on exploitation, showing that the social, psychological, and moral impacts of defining human value by work are timeless.

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