

THE
METAMORPHOSIS
FRANZ KAFKA



TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY
STANLEY CORNGOLD

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

The Translator and Editor

STANLEY CORNGOLD is Professor of German and Comparative Literature at Princeton University, where he has taught since 1966. He is an Executive Committee Member and past President of the Kafka Society of America as well as advisory editor of the *Journal of the Kafka Society of America*. He is the author of *The Commentators' Despair: The Interpretation of Kafka's Metamorphosis*, *The Fate of the Self: German Writers and French Theory*, and *Franz Kafka: The Necessity of Form*, as well as many articles, mainly on German literature, and the co-author of *Borrowed Lives*, a novel. He has also edited *Ausgewählte Prosa by Max Frisch* and co-edited *Thomas Mann: 1875–1975* and *Aspekte der Goethezeit*.

THE METAMORPHOSIS

TRANSLATION

BACKGROUNDS AND CONTEXTS

CRITICISM

W. W. NORTON & COMPANY
also publishes

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE
edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay et al.

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE
edited by Nina Baym et al.

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY FICTION
edited by R. V. Cassill and Joyce Carol Oates

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE
edited by M. H. Abrams et al.

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF LITERATURE BY WOMEN
edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF MODERN POETRY
edited by Richard Ellmann and Robert O'Clair

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF POETRY
edited by Margaret Ferguson et al.

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF SHORT FICTION
edited by R. V. Cassill

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF WORLD MASTERPIECES
edited by Maynard Mack et al.

THE NORTON FACSIMILE OF
THE FIRST FOLIO OF SHAKESPEARE
prepared by Charlton Hinman

THE NORTON INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE
edited by Jerome Beaty and J. Paul Hunter

THE NORTON INTRODUCTION TO THE SHORT NOVEL
edited by Jerome Beaty

THE NORTON READER
edited by Linda H. Peterson, John C. Brereton, and Joan E. Hartman

THE NORTON SAMPLER
edited by Thomas Cooley

THE NORTON SHAKESPEARE, BASED ON THE OXFORD EDITION
edited by Stephen Greenblatt et al.

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

Franz Kafka

THE METAMORPHOSIS



TRANSLATION
BACKGROUNDS AND CONTEXTS
CRITICISM

Translated and edited by
STANLEY CORNGOLD
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY



W • W • NORTON & COMPANY • *New York • London*

Copyright © 1996 by Stanley Corngold

THE METAMORPHOSIS by Franz Kafka,
translated by Stanley Corngold.

Translation copyright © 1972 by Stanley Corngold. Used by permission of
Bantam Books, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc.

All rights reserved.
Printed in the United States of America.
First Edition.

The text of this book is composed in Electra
with the display set in Bernhard Modern.
Composition by PennSet, Inc.
Manufacturing by Courier Companies.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Kafka, Franz, 1883–1924.
[Verwandlung. English]

The metamorphosis : the translation, backgrounds and contexts,
criticism / Franz Kafka ; translated and edited by Stanley Corngold.

p. cm. — (A Norton critical edition)

Includes bibliographical references.

I. Corngold, Stanley. II. Title.

PT2621.A26V42613 1996

833'.912—dc20 95-20582

ISBN 0-393-96797-2 (pbk.)

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 10 Coptic Street, London WC1A 1PU

6 7 8-9 0

Contents

Preface	ix
The Text of <i>The Metamorphosis</i>	1
KAFKA'S MANUSCRIPT REVISIONS	43
Backgrounds and Contexts	
Franz Kafka • <i>From Wedding Preparations in the Country</i>	61
Letters and Diaries	61
Gustav Janouch • <i>From Conversations with Kafka</i>	74
Criticism	
Stanley Corngold • <i>Kafka's <i>The Metamorphosis</i>: Metamorphosis of the Metaphor</i>	79
Iris Bruce • <i>Elements of Jewish Folklore in Kafka's <i>Metamorphosis</i></i>	107
Nina Pelikan Straus • <i>Transforming Franz Kafka's <i>Metamorphosis</i></i>	126
Kevin W. Sweeney • <i>Competing Theories of Identity in Kafka's <i>The Metamorphosis</i></i>	140
Mark M. Anderson • <i>Sliding Down the Evolutionary Ladder? Aesthetic Autonomy in <i>The Metamorphosis</i></i>	154
Hartmut Binder • <i>The Metamorphosis: The Long Journey into Print</i>	172
Eric Santner • <i>Kafka's <i>Metamorphosis</i> and the Writing of Abjection</i>	195
Franz Kafka: A Chronology	211
Selected Bibliography	215

Preface

Franz Kafka's novella *The Metamorphosis* is perfect, even as it incessantly provokes criticism. Its perfection was noted by the Nobel Prize-winning author Elias Canetti: "In *The Metamorphosis* Kafka reached the height of his mastery: he wrote something which he could never surpass, because there is nothing which *The Metamorphosis* could be surpassed by—one of the few great, perfect poetic works of this century." But what is distinctive about such *literary* perfection is that it does not leave the reader's mind settled, satisfied, at peace with itself. Its perfection is not aesthetic. Instead, it never stops irritating the reader to produce a kind of brother or sister work in the mind that will be simpler, plainer, and altogether better-behaved, intellectually speaking, than the story itself. For this story, if Kafka is to be trusted, is not only *about* a monster; rather, it comes into the world trailing clouds of monstrosity. "What is literature?" Kafka declared. "Where does it come from? What use is it? What questionable things! Add to this questionableness the further questionableness of what you say, and what you get is a monstrosity." The monstrous aspect of the story is clear, no doubt, but where, then, is its perfection? It must be, first, in the perfection of the hopelessness that settles on Gregor Samsa and his family in the face of a nightmare they have never before seen or heard of. And it must also lie in the supreme irony with which this hopelessness is depicted, as if from the standpoint of an unnamed god who has arranged it all for his amusement.

The Metamorphosis raises such questions, certainly, but it also states facts as hard, concrete, and undeniable as the armorlike shell in which Gregor Samsa is born again one rainy morning. This disparity between the underlying structure of impossibility and the wealth of atrociously detailed facts makes for the uncanny disturbance at the center of the story. Everything is in place in the family to deny the arrival of this monster in its midst. All the explanations are at hand, especially in the average, everyday awareness of Gregor himself, who thinks at various times that his metamorphosis is only a fantasy, a bad cold, a hindrance, or—as his mother puts it—a momentary absence of the real Gregor, who will surely "come back to us again." But the vermin refuses to be any of these things. It is what it materially is and does not let itself be denied so long as Gregor is alive: it is his wildly waving legs, his snap-