Absurdist Fiction

Absurdist fiction uses illogical or irrational events to point out that life is mysterious and cannot be easily comprehended. In the early Twentieth Century science has shown man that he is not king of the animals, that Earth is not at the centre of the universe and that God and heaven do not exist. All the things that gave a man’s life meaning before have been pulled from under him and Absurdist Fiction seeks to reflect that meaninglessness. Bizarrely, it also finds humour in this situation — some compensation at least.

As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect. He was lying on his hard, as it were armour-plated, back and when he lifted his head a little he could see his domelike brown belly divided into stiff arched segments on top of which the bed-quilt could hardly keep in position and was about to slide off completely. His numerous legs, which were pitifully thin compared to the rest of his bulk, waved helplessly before his eyes.

‘What has happened to me?’ he thought. It was no dream. His room, an ordinary human room, if somewhat too small, lay peacefully between the four familiar walls. Above the table, on which an assortment of cloth samples had been unpacked and spread out — Samsa was a commercial traveller — there hung the pictures which he had recently cut out of a glossy magazine and put in a pretty gilt frame. It represented a lady complete with fur hat and fur stole, who was sitting upright and extending to view a thick fur muff into which the whole of her forearm had vanished.

Gregor’s eyes turned next to the window, and the dull weather — raindrops could be heard beating on the metal window-ledge — made him feel quite melancholy. ‘Suppose I went back to sleep or a little and forgot all this nonsense.’ He thought, but that was utterly impracticable for he was used to sleeping on his right side and in his present state he was unable to get into that position. However vigorously he swung himself to the right he kept rocking on to his back again. He must have tried it a hundred times, he shut his eyes so as not to have to watch his struggling legs, and only left off when he began to feel a faint dull ache in his side which was entirely new to him.

Taken from ‘Metamorphosis’ by Franz Kafka