Metamorphosis

By

Franz Kafka

Wednesday 13th September 2023

Good afternoon and welcome to the Theatre Royal Plymouth for this world premier of the incredibly new adaptation by Lemn Sissay O.B.E of Frantz Kafka's 1915 novella, Metamorphosis. Commissioned and produced by Frantic Assembly, in a co-production with Theatre Royal Plymouth, Curve, MAST Mayflower Studios and Lyric Hammersmith Theatre.

I am Veryan and will be describing the show, which runs for approximately two and a half hours including a twenty-minute interval.

Franz Kafka was a German-speaking Bohemian novelist and short-story writer based in Prague, who is widely regarded as one of the major figures of 20th-century literature. His work fuses elements of realism, the fantastic and typically features isolated protagonists facing bizarre or surrealistic predicaments. Apart from Metamorphosis, his best know novels include, The Trial and The Castle.

Lemn Sissay's retelling of Franz Kafka's shocking tale of cruelty and kindness combines his renowned fluidity and lyricism with Frantic Assembly's rich and intense physicality. This inherently visceral production is about the limitations of the human body and mind; of imagination and aspiration that extends far beyond one character's sudden transformation and is a devastating portrayal of a man trapped and crushed under the heel of a system that no longer finds him useful. In his book Kafka explores themes of humanity, alienation, family, and responsibility and delves into what it means to be human, to be perceived as human, and then have those perceptions taken away by no fault of one’s own. This innovative production encourages and stimulates the audience's own imaginations.

**Synopsis**.

The play centers on Gregor Samsa, a fabric salesman, who works hard travelling long distances at a job he hates in order to support his parents and younger sister Grete. It is a tense situation where a word said or an action taken out of place can open old wounds, which can't be undone. Every morning day in day out, Gregor gets up and quietly leaves the family home to take the same train to work to pay off the family debt. That is until one morning when his world explodes in a brutal metamorphosis when he awakes to find himselfchanged into a giant insect. The change is surprising to Gregor, but less worrying than the impossibility of providing for his family. He struggles briefly with his physiology, but struggles even more with his humanity and holding onto the shreds that remains of it.

To those around him he has become a dangerous, untouchable vermin. Worse than that, he is a burden, unable to work. The story is both absurd and horrific, tragic and heart breaking.

**Sets, Characters and Costumes**

As the audience takes their seats the stage is open and the set in full view. Standing center stage, it is an open fronted, three-sided room that's raised a couple of feet above the ground, the sloping floor supported by exposed joists. The walls are crooked with the far wall slanting down to the right. Set into the wall on the left at the front of the room, is a white paneled door, the paint chipped and dirty. This door leads to a small landing and flight of three steps down to the stage, the steps with a wooden handrail supported by white spindles. The rooms' dingy and damp marked white walls are composed of a fine white cloth, while the ceiling with its heavy cornicing is also white, although badly mottled and stained with mildew. At times, these cloth walls billow inwards or get dragged sideways in a rather surreal manner. The room looks tired, run down and in dire need of a lick of paint.

This is Gregor's bedroom. Set at a slight angle against the far wall is a single white metal-framed bedstead, with rails at the head and foot. On the bed is a large pillow and rather lumpy looking white bedclothes along with a fine lightweight white cover that spills over the edge of the bed where it pools on to the floor. On the left of the bed is a medium sized chest of drawers with a framed picture of a woman standing on the top. To the right of the bed stands a bedside table with a lamp. The wall on the right opens into a wide recess where a brown armchair strewn with piles of different coloured fabrics stands. Place against the wall on the left, just along from the door, is a table and rather utilitarian metal framed stacking chair with a wooden seat. Further along is a freestanding cheval mirror and beyond that in the far corner, another chair.

The stage on either side of the room is completely dark and occupied by banks of lighting equipment, whist in front of the house the dark stage remains empty and is used to represent many different areas.

The dim and evocative lighting throws eerie shadows against the white walls, which also, at times, are used as screens for projected images. Apart from the table lamp the only lighting in the room comes from an exposed light bulb hanging from the middle of the ceiling.

The first person we meet here is seventeen-year-old **Grete.** She is a tall, slender and striking young woman of mixed race with thick curly black hair worn in plaits, full lips and expressive brown eyes. She wears a beige patterned short-sleeved dress with a white collar, the hem of the dress ending well above her knees and showing off her long legs. Her shoes are flat. At times she also wears a long dark green cardigan. She plays the violin.

Next we meet her brother, **Gregor** who is older than her, maybe in his early thirties. He is fair skinned with very short dark hair, a moustache and suggestion of a beard. He too has brown eyes and is of athletic build.

He is dressed in brown and cream stripped trousers with braces, a rather grubby shirt, brown waistcoat, a cravat tied around his neck, and when going out he pulls on a short tweed jacket, puts on a brown felt hat and carries a leather Gladstone style bag.

Outside Gregor's room we encounter his and Grete's mother and father, Mrs Samsa and Mr. Samsa. **Mrs Samsa** is a slim, submissive, middle aged woman with dark hair pulled back in a knot at the nape of her neck, and kept in place by a twisted cloth band. She is dressed in a nondescript green frock covered by a pale pink wrap-around pinafore and low-heeled buckle shoes. **Mr. Samsa** is a tall thin black man with a long face, thick black hair, cut close to his head with rather hooded dark eyes. He wears black trousers with braces over a white granddad style long sleeved vest and lace-up shoes.

The last person we meet is The Chief Clerk from the firm Gregor works for. He is thickset with pale skin, piercing blue eyes, a square jaw line, close cut dark hair and a tidy beard. He is formally dressed in a dark suit, white shirt, tie and black bowler hat. He also wears black leather gloves, lace-up shoes and carries a cane.

Throughout the production there will be strange discordant noises coming from all sides of the auditorium.

**Cast and Creatives**

**Felipe Pacheco** - Gregor

**Hannah Sinclair Robinson** - Grete

**Troy Glasgow** - Mr Samsa - Father,

**Louise Mai Newberry** - Mrs Samsa - Mother

**Joe Layton** - Chief Clerk / Lodger

Creatives/Company

Book by: **Franz Kafka**

Producer(s): **Frantic Assembly**, **Theatre Royal Plymouth**, **Curve**, **MAST Mayflower Studios**, **Lyric Hammersmith**

Adapted by: **Lemn Sissay** (OBE)

Director(s): **Scott Graham**, **David Gilbert** (associate director), **Will Burton** (CDG - casting)

Design(s): **Jon Bauser**, **Ian William Galloway** (video)

Music: **Stefan Janik**

Lighting: **Simisola Majekodunmi**

Sound: **Helen Skiera**

Costume: **Becky Gunstone**

The second Act continues as before, but with the addition of a casually dressed lodger who's staying at the Samsa home. We meet him briefly over the breakfast table.

The set remains the same, only now the room is somewhat untidy with the bed having been pushed across the far right hand corner with all the bedclothes piled at one end and the armchair now lying on its side in the recess, the fabrics spilling over the sides and onto the floor.

Gregor is there, looking, despite his metamorphosis, just the same as before, although his feet are now bare and his clothes dirty as he slithers and writhes around on the floor or climbs the walls. The central overhead light has now been pulled down on its cable to hang about a meter off the floor.

Gradually pieces of furniture are removed from Gregor's room and placed on the bare stage where they form another room in the house, the room where we meet the lodger having breakfast.

During this Act bright lights will flash on and off, however they do not penetrate the auditorium.

The next audio described performance at TRP will be The House with Chicken Legs on Saturday 7th October at 2.30pm.