



Be Ready for “The Trial”

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Abstract:

This article explains the absurdity of human life by comparing “The Trial” text with reality. “The Trial” is a magnum opus by Franz Kafka. Kafka (1883-1924) was a German language writer from Prague. The novel was originally written in German in 1914 and 1915. It was published in 1925. The entire story of the novel revolves around the character of Joseph K, chief clerk of a bank. He is informed by two warders that he is under arrest. Joseph is on trial from the very beginning to the end. In the end of the novel, he was executed by them even without telling him his crime.

Keywords: Absurdism, Oppression of law, Authority.

Introduction:

Everyone wants to be happy in their life but sometimes our fate takes us away from happiness like Joseph K , the main character of the novel “The Trial” by Franz Kafka. On his thirtieth Birthday, two warders came to Joseph K’s boarding house and inform him that he is under arrest. The novel begins with-

“Someone must have been telling lies about Joseph K. He knew he had done nothing wrong but, one morning, he was arrested.”

The original title of the novel is “Der Process”. There are a lot of surreal and absurd elements used in this novel. Surrealism was a 20th century movement in art and literature in which the unrelated things are combined like in a dream. Absurdism is also a movement which means that life is meaningless.

The novel is greatly influenced by Dostoevsky’s “Crime and Punishment”. Dostoevsky was a famous Russian novelist, short story writer, essayist and journalist. This novel is incomplete because Kafka never finished it.



This novel is an example of Kafkaesque (having a bizarre or illogical quality where the individual feels powerless to understand or control what is happening). It shows that the life of an individual is not easy but full of struggles. It is a dystopian novel. We don't know when we are going to become a victim. Joseph K was living a normal life until he came to know that he is under arrest. He was telling everyone that he was innocent but no one was listening him. Nobody helped him. He was badly trapped by law. Everyone knew about his case but nobody has any solution to give.

The absurdity in this novel is actually the absurdity of our life too. We don't know that what is going to happen with us next. We don't know that what is written on our next page of life. In "The Trial" many people told Joseph to take help from various people but nobody knows about the judge or the highest power who operates this case. When Joseph went to Dr Huld's house for help there he came to know that he was ill which again shows the absurdity that a person who is ill himself cannot help others.

One day, Joseph received a call through which someone told him that he had to come to court on Sunday. When Joseph visited court for the first time he did not like the court. The air was suffocating and the court was situated in a dark and nasty place. The darkness of court symbolises injustice and the bad air of court symbolizes the oppression of court. Joseph felt unconsciousness there. The court was opened on Sunday. Joseph entered into the court room, Magistrate asked him if he is a painter which clearly shows that even Magistrate knew nothing about his client. Joseph met with a washerwoman there. She allowed him to read the books kept on judge's table. The books were not about law but contained pornographic pictures. Dark building of court, the court was opened on Sunday, books kept on table in court contained pornographic pictures are the surreal elements mentioned by Franz Kafka.

One day, Joseph saw a whipper, whipping two warders – Franz and Willem. Whipper told Joseph that they are beaten because he complained about them. Joseph tried to give bribe to the whipper but he refused to take bribe. From this scene, one can say that the law is everywhere and the power is not static.

The manufacturer advised Joseph to meet Titorelli – a painter who might help him. Joseph went to meet him and he told—

“The highest court is inaccessible to you, to me and to all of us”

This line shows us that even he did not know the official judges. He told Joseph that he had never seen the judge, he paints. He suggested him three types of acquittal – Actual acquittal, Apparent acquittal, Deferment acquittal. Joseph did not find it interesting.

Joseph went to Cathedral to meet his Italian client. He met with a priest who told him that his case is going worse. Joseph believed that Chaplain's intentions were good, and hopes that the chaplain might be able to give him some advice that will point a way. K was disappointed when the chaplain simply dismissed him. The chaplain reminds Joseph that –

“The court wants nothing from you. It receives you when you come and dismisses you when you go.”

In the Last section of the novel Two warders (Franz and Willem) came to arrest Joseph on his 31st Birthday. He was totally helpless in the end. His efforts would be effortless. Joseph had not any other way except to submit himself to the law which is most powerful and controls everyone's life. One of them grabs Joseph's neck and the other pushed knife into his heart. His last words were –

“Like a dog”

There is a deep meaning hidden in these three words. We all are working under some authoritative powers. We are nothing more than a dog for them. From the character of Joseph K one can imagine the meaninglessness of life. As Joseph says –

“The only thing for me to go on doing is to keep my intelligence calm and discriminating to an end.”

When Joseph met Block, another client of Huld, he told him that he became Huld's dog –



“The client ceased to be a client and became a lawyer’s dog.”

Block was a rich tradesman. His case was five years old. Huld mistreats him and behaves rudely with him. He told Joseph that he had also hired many other famous lawyers for his case. From the condition of Block one can imagine the condition of each that person who came under the oppression of court. Here we came to know that not only Joseph but Block and maybe many other clients are struggling under the influence of authoritative powers. Block was also willing to obey all orders of Huld. Even the nurse of Dr Huld misbehaves with Block. One can see the effects of the trial there.

Three types of Systems are depicted in the novel - Social System, Judicial System, Bureaucratic System. Social is related to the society, Judicial is related to law and Bureaucratic is a system of government by a large number of officials who are not elected.

In the end of the novel, on his 31st Birthday, two warders came to arrest him and took him away with them. He was completely silent. He was not willing to do anything because he understood that the life is meaningless and the death is inevitable. He is doing nothing for his defence. The Warders were shocked with the behaviour of Joseph because he was not doing something to defence him.

The theme of “The Trial” is that universe is absurd. Joseph tried to find logic and reason for the law, but he cannot fight against something which is merely Chaotic. “The Trial” is about receiving justice. Joseph K often feels alienated and isolated, unable to connect with others or make sense of the world around him. The ending reinforces this theme of isolation, as K dies alone, surrounded by those who seem indifferent to his fate. The protagonist Joseph K is brutally murdered by the law.

If one compares this novel “The Trial” with the novel “Crime and Punishment” then Joseph is better than Raskolnikov – the main character of the novel. Raskolnikov killed an old woman deliberately but Joseph is innocent and tries to prove his innocence in the whole story. The famous dialogue used by Raskolnikov in the novel is-



“Power is given only to him who dares to stoop and take it...one must have the courage to dare.”

Overall, the novel show us the absurdity, the meaninglessness of life. In the entire novel, Joseph wants to know his crime and tries to prove his innocence but he is unable to do so. He went to court for his case and to prove that he has done nothing wrong but nobody was interested. He requested for help but nobody cares. In the last section of the novel Joseph says –

“Where was the judge he'd never seen? Where was the high court he had never reached?”

This novel shows the reality of everyone's life. One should always be ready for “The Trial”.

References:

1. “The Trial” by Franz Kafka
2. “Crime and Punishment” by Fyodor Dostovesky