

The trial analysis: the political, juridical and philosophical interpretations.



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The Trial is the most well-known novel of Franz Kafka, published in Berlin in 1926. The original manuscripts were collected and prepared for publishing by Max Brod, Kafka's closest friend, two years after the author's death. Brod says that the manuscript didn't have a title, but Kafka always referred it as 'The Trial'. Kafka considered this book unfinished, even though the last chapter was already written. Kafka thought that he needed to add some more facets to the mysterious trial, however Brod says that if he didn't know that Kafka wanted to continue this work, he wouldn't be able to realise the book was not finished.

The novel tells the story of a banker, who one day gets arrested by two police for a crime that isn't told to him or to the reader. The unusual arrest for unnamed charges leaves the ill-fortuned Joseph K confused and lost in the labyrinths of the juridical system. Desperate and overwhelmed, he imagines scenarios and tricks that eventually lead him to live the legal nightmare and the absurdity of life. Not knowing anymore whom to trust, he compiles his own 'defense' and in which he accepts the crime and begs for forgiveness, signing so his punishment and eventually his execution. In the last chapter, Joseph K is killed 'like a dog', stabbed by the two guards who first arrested him.

In the political aspect, the citizen is charged for something that he never did. In the end he is not charged according to the rules, but he only needs to present himself in the court room and ends killed 'like a dog' not even knowing his charge, never having seen the judge. This is a citizen of any unquestionably authoritarian country. In the context of the Habsburg Monarchy, where Kafka's novels often take place, maybe every citizen feels

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guilty in front of the law, guilty for something that no one could tell. In this case, *The Trial* can be argued as a critique of the bureaucracy and the overall political and social situation in the Monarchy. According to this political interpretation, the Trial is a prophetic roman, that came into life with the horrors of the Second World War. Millions of people were killed tragically like Joseph K, and Joseph K is an early genius representative of that time, when the human rights were formally written, but never executed.

Kafka has always been fascinated by the complexity and paradoxes of law. In the juridical aspect, law is created for the common good of the society, and therefore it must be respected, regardless of its understanding or knowledge of it. This theory is shown in Kafka's parable 'Before the Law'. Before the Law tells the story of a man who wants to understand and have access to the law, but he was given a challenge by the gatekeeper to access the law. The man eventually gets old trying to access the law, and before he dies he asks the gatekeeper one more time if he can enter the door. The gatekeeper answers that that door was just made for the man and since the man is now dying, the door (and entrance to the law) would be now closed. In other words, this can be called 'the death gate'; which is a paradox why would the door to the court be the death gate? It is the law that brings the man there and again the law that doesn't allow him to approach it. Joseph K's last thoughts before death are: 'Where was the judge he'd never seen? Where was the high court he had never reached?' Kafka suggests that the law is abstract and being inaccessible, people who are subject to it do not even know its fundamentals, therefore people are obeyed to something they don't understand, just like Joseph K in the Trial. As a critique to the juridical

system, Kafka suggests that the system does not function according to the human logic; instead the system is controlled by the strongest. Kafka clearly states: 'The logic cannot be refuted, but someone who wants to live will not resist it.' The system is therefore such that one is condemned to be guilty.

In the philosophical level, Kafka also presents the story of every man as an heir of the original sin. The man was cast out of paradise and accused of having sinned against the original law, the first law. In this world, man is suffering the consequences of the original sin. Joseph K does not accept this, he tried to defend himself that he is not a believer, or has forgotten the essence. At this point, Josef K. loses sense of reality; he doesn't even know any longer if he is in prison or free. What started as a drama of suspicion, ended as a drama of human destiny. At the end of the novel, everything ends like it never happened before. The absurdity in the human life continues to exist. Everything happens in a city where the idea of innocence is murdered; 'He must have done something; therefore, he is being arrested'. The Trial develops a range of existentialist themes, especially guilt. The main existentialist concept is that everyone's is responsible for their own choices and honest choices are not always the best choices. It is therefore impossible for Joseph K not to feel guilty for his end, because maybe he didn't make the right decisions and did not fulfil his life's potentials. In this point of view, K. can be seen an anti-hero who makes 'bad choices'; ceases to defend himself, surrenders and accepts his ill-fate. The actions of Joseph K are absurd and in the last chapter paradoxes and the absurd take over. He knows that he is going towards execution, but he doesn't not try to save himself, and he ceases to say he is innocent.

Absurdism, much adhered by existentialist, suggests that the reason for human life has no real meaning. Joseph K just accepts his fate passively, he has lost his faith and the meaning of life, and he has become as one with his captors, as they symbolically walk together as one towards the place of execution. The absurd death penalty is associated with an even more tragic death. Joseph K constantly looks out of the windows; most of them are closed in this tragic moment. Only one window is open, and a weak man can be seen; 'Who was that? A friend? A good person? Somebody who wanted to help?'. These last thoughts show the loneliness before death, and finally the tragedy culminates as Joseph K feels that his body would survive, instead of his spirit. Symbolically, the society survives as a body without a soul.

The tragic fate of Joseph K is not only fantasy; everyday people are wrongfully convinced, and throughout all the history innocent lives are taken without any reason. The Trial is a masterpiece because it makes the readers reflect about our destiny, meaning of life, the way we live, justice and liberty. Kafka has masterfully combined these themes in a powerful story of a normal citizen like any of us living in 'a normal state where the rule of law is strong'.