

The trial by franz kafka. novel critique

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The Sixth Amendment in the Bill of Rights ensures that any American citizen accused of a crime has the right to a fair trial; in other words, they must be informed of the crime they are accused of, and are given the opportunity to prove their innocence. Contrarily, in *The Trial* by Franz Kafka, the main character Josef K. wakes up one morning arrested under unnamed charges. He spends the entire novel not only attempting to identify the crime he is accused of, but proving that he is guiltless. The fictional society in *The Trial* is filled with corruption and is similar to a totalitarian government. The fraudulent regime inculcates K. to believe he is guilty, which leads to the loss of his sovereignty and transforms him into another defenseless subject of the system.

The fictional society that K. lives in has a government whose foundation is built upon rumors rather than proof. The system is described as one that “doesn’t seek out guilt among the general population, but ... is attracted by guilt” (Kafka 8-9). Instead of seeking out true criminals, officials arrest those who have been accused of being guilty by other people, without any real evidence. This illogical process of finding culprits in the society is even more flawed after the government detains suspects. After K. is arrested and speaks to the inspector of his case, he still has “learn[ed] nothing about why he had been arrested and on whose orders” (Kafka 14-15) and is told not to spend his time attempting to prove his innocence. Throughout the story, K. is never informed of why he has been arrested. By the end of the novel he even questions “Where was the judge he’d never seen? Where was the high court he’d never reached?” (Kafka 231). Left in the dark, K. has no say or power in the result of his case, showing how corrupt the standards of the

government are. The government has no limit to its authority, controlling every aspect of his case, and restricting K.'s right to a fair trial. By not informing K. of any information regarding his situation, the government's regulations and system strongly resembles one of a totalitarian government.

As K.'s cluelessness and lack of knowledge about his conviction slowly persuade him that he is guilty, he loses his identity and becomes dominated by the society. Even though he initially believes he is "not guilty. It's a mistake. How can any person in general be guilty? We're all human after all, each and every one of us," (Kafka 213) he is met with a rebuttal of "that's how guilty people always talk" (Kafka 213). Despite no concrete evidence, K. is repeatedly told that he is guilty, and he eventually begins to accept it. He tells himself "if I'd behaved sensibly, nothing more would have happened, everything else would have been nipped in the bud" (Kafka 23). The corruption of the government, as well as the other subjects who have already been manipulated by the authorities, convince K. that he is guilty. He eventually becomes one in a crowd of people who are under the government's control. In the first sentence of the novel, Kafka refers to the main character as Josef K. Yet, as Josef's situation is revealed, Kafka refrains from giving him a full surname, referring to him as K. throughout the rest of the novel. This inhumanely reduces K. to an object, showing how the government's standards and systematic processes strip him of his individuality. The main character is slowly brainwashed by the government and begins to doubt not only who he is, but his innocence as well.

The fictional society that Kafka presents in *The Trial* is one filled with corruption and bureaucratic standards, strikingly mirroring a totalitarian justice system. The main character's confusion along with the Court's nefarious and unprincipled restriction of his rights manifest the immorality of the society and its system. The standards which build the foundation of the fictional society affect the main character throughout the novel as he undergoes his unfair trial. Josef K. becomes another subject of the society as "K.," and forfeits his autonomy, just as many others have, as he surrenders his fight for innocence. The rights presented to citizens in America by the Constitution, the same rights K. was refused, are there to prevent the government from being like the the fictional society presented in Kafka's novel.