

Kafka's hamlet and shakespeare's the trial



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

William Shakespeare and Franz Kafka are two writers in essential yet they apparently differ in method, style, mood, and the timeframe in which their writing made a noteworthy impact in the history of English Literature.

Shakespeare is known for his poetic genius and his main thematic use of love, betrayal and tragedy in all of his plays. On the other hand, Kafka's writing style and method focuses more on a garbled introduction of plot followed by a sudden conclusion of the story as found in *The Trial*.

In contrast to the literary implications of Shakespeare's work, Kafka focuses on existentialist views such as choice, existence, and death. Apart from the inarguable differences from both literary men, the themes espoused in the selected works *Hamlet* and *The Trial* share similar literary characteristics and themes. The paper will first enumerate the characteristics of the story if both writers switch in writing their own respective masterpieces, followed by a close analysis of the last lines of both characters.

Ay, there's the rub: *The Trial* On Shakespeare's part, *The Trial* would be written in a more straightforward and poetic manner, as compared to Kafka's garbled picture on his own plot in *The Trial*. The story itself does not contain any motive since the main protagonist of the story, Joseph K. , is arrested one day without any valid conviction or cause. Throughout the progression of the story, there is no mention as to whether what specific case the multitude of courts tries to impose on K. But even the main character itself, is highly unconcerned of whatever sentence the men of law may try to convict him, apparent even up until his death.

However, the main point of the unfinished story is the manner and nature of the courts of law during Kafka's time where justice becomes diminished to non-existence when law makes necessity one of its universal principles; the sole reason to convict someone with non-existent charges to further imply the grandeur and self-imposing nature of law without any precept to judgment or equality.

Shakespeare's method and style of writing would further emphasize on the story and character's idyllic tragedy. Joseph K's character, shares the same psychological symptoms as that of Hamlet, where K's nature is reserved, arrogant and shrewd when it ultimately degenerates because of the 'accused man's' nature. Hamlet on the other is a more centric type of character motivated by the cold revenge.

But there is question on Hamlet's own nature - has he really seen the ghost of his dead father or is he suffering some sort of delusional or post-mortem feeling of withdrawal or angst? Yet, both characters remain essentially similar in some aspects and Shakespeare's approach to the tragedy in his plays would further emphasize on the struggling character of Joseph K and his admission on the guilt of his existence. On the other hand, The Trial and Hamlet are two different genres of literature; one a short story, the other a play.

The obvious method for Shakespeare is to transform the story into his own version of a tragedy, though the method of storytelling would differ drastically where Shakespeare would use his usually poetic language in delivering some of the important lines in The Trial. However, it can be noted

that Shakespeare's changes on Kafka's story would be a more definitive change with regard to the story's main plot. Kafka's storytelling style gradually presents a multitude of characters with roles that eventually disappear in the story.

In total, it was only Joseph K's character that benefited importance, while the other characters in the story, even with long or short or seldom encounters with the main character, ultimately does not possess any importance to their role compared to the magnitude of the main character. In Hamlet, there is a clear description of the antagonist, while K's character forces himself to battle with some unknown judicial power and in the end, himself.

Shakespeare would clearly identify some sort of antagonist in his own version of The Trial, either through the implication of a clear and definitive motive or some sort of past crime with evidential basis. The characters in The Trial would be transformed as 'real' and imposing villains in contrast with Kafka's attempt at a vague, philosophical interpretation of life and death. The mysterious court magistrate that may hold some grudge against the protagonist may become, in Shakespeare's pen, the main villain because of some unresolved grudge or crime.

Similarly, Shakespeare's concept of betray in Hamlet may also filter out into two or more characters such as K's uncle, his land lady Frau Grubach or others. Ultimately, Shakespeare's take on The Trial will deviate from the semi-allegorical and philosophical approach of Kafka's storytelling manner into a more dramatic, symbolical reference through poetic language, the

complication of the main plot, and the utilization of the main character's personal struggle with himself and the world around him.

Kafka's Hamlet As evident in *The Trial*, Kafka's approach to the whole story is the conviction and guilt of an individual's personal existence. The manner in which Joseph K attempted to question his own life, he then witnessed the courts of law that gave him severe insecurity and physical incomprehension toward the 'feeling' it gives him when walking the corridors. The courts merely represent the method of individual personal reflection that in turn, convinces the individual of his guilt.

Kafka would turn the physical representation of revenge and delusion from Hamlet's character to a more philosophical and existential-based approach through the use of the different emotions felt by Hamlet and how he reacts to the plot. Taking from Hamlet's semi-delusional nature, Kafka's approach would be then on the essence or nature of the concept of revenge itself, contemplating on his own suicidal actions while people around him hover with concern.

A Kafka version of the Shakespearean play would entail several changes on the main character itself through a more personal and self-centered approach of inquiry while the other characters in the play would represent major roles but not entirely given importance compared to Shakespeare's method. In addition, some of the characters in Kafka's eyes may be transformed into allegorical representations of the feeling they produce - insanity, love, betrayal - while the main character continues to battle with such and himself.

Hamlet's friends, Guildenstern and Rosencrantz for example, may either be two symbolical figures in Hamlet's mind that continually represent sanity and delusion; and Hamlet's uncle Claudius may represent the drive for his revenge. The manner in which the play is staged may differ from Kafka's viewpoint. Deviating from the intricate Shakespearean stage make-up, Kafka's style may attempt to deliver the play into a more personal and symbolical approach rather than a straightforward manner. Like a dog, the rest is silence

The two last words of the main character share similar characteristics as both had uttered the words upon their dying breath. Joseph K's mention of the phrase ' like a dog' implies the manner in which he dies, where he is unceremoniously executed by two strangers in a deserted alleyway like some stray animal. After all the contentions and the experiences he had to endure, he inevitably dies through the ' justice' brought about by the courts upon questioning of his own existence.

" As his eyesight failed, K. saw the two gentlemen cheek by cheek, close in front of his face, watching the result. Like a dog! " he said, it was as if the shame of it should outlive him" (Kafka, 225). The last lines connote Kafka's philosophical view on death, where the point of human existence inevitably leads to death even after a multitude of experience with personal struggle on existence and the mundane activity of life. In addition, social status of K as a head clerk in a bank is completely disregarded in the eyes of the law. Without any pretensions, the two strangers of unknown origin execute K without any valid excuse.

This implies the idea of Kafka's allegory on the court as the representation of mental reflection that kills the soul of the individual upon learning of some truth about themselves and ultimately, their own existence. On the other hand, Hamlet's dying word contrasts with the philosophical implications uttered by Kafka's character. Hamlet utters 'the rest is silence' as a means of finality in achieving his revenge. "On Fortinbras. He has my dying voice. So tell him, with th' occurences, more or less, which have solicited. The rest is silence" (Act V, Scene 2, 688).

Because of his delusional nature, Hamlet's paranoia, unstable psychological behavior and motivation for revenge, has consumed him throughout since he had not wavered in his commitment of avenging his father's death. His death, similar to that of Kafka's view, releases him from his emotional prison, without fear while accomplishing his revenge. Shakespeare and Kafka, though different literary figures, share a similar characteristic in their selection and formation of characters. Both protagonists of the story and play are individuals to themselves, motivated by their own selves without any consideration for people unknown to them.

Joseph K is cunning, shrewd, arrogant and calculating all the while consumed by his existential guilt while Hamlet is consumed by his desire to avenge his father's death through the apparition of the old king's ghost. In addition, the importance of comparison between the two lines of the characters lies with the similarities of the character's nature itself, the instances that brought about their deaths, and the implications. Both characters have suffered a great ordeal in their lives and death is the common factor between them - a

release from their physical emotion, finally free of worldly suffering and struggle.