

## Existentialism On The Novel “The Trial” By Franz Kafka

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### Abstrak

*Jurnal ini diambil berdasarkan novel “The Trial” oleh Franz Kafka. Novel ini mengisahkan pria bernama Josef K. yang berusaha memasuki dunia pengadilan dan bertemu dengan berbagai macam orang. Studi ini dipilih karena hanya ada beberapa sastra yang membahas mengenai eksistensialisme. Teori yang digunakan adalah teori eksistensialisme yang menjelaskan mengenai karakteristik dari eksistensialisme. Teori selanjutnya adalah teori karakter oleh Wellek dan Warren. Hasil dari studi ini menunjukkan bahwa cerita ini memiliki beberapa poin yang berhubungan dengan eksistensialisme. Hasil lain dari studi ini adalah karakteristik Josef K. di dalam novel.*

Kata Kunci: eksistensialisme, karakteristik

### 1. Background of Study

Existentialism is a movement in early 19th and 20th. It explains about philosophy which grasps individuality, freedom and choice. Existentialism defines the meaning behind human life and how to be responsible for the action despite the situation. The reason to write about existentialism is to get better knowledge on the ideology in simple way. Another reason is to introduce Franz Kafka. He has interesting style in writing. The way of his writing is described in specific term called “Kafkaesque”.

### 2. Problems of the Study

The problems that the writer would like to discuss in this study are:

- a) How existentialism is shown in the novel The Trial?
- b) How existentialism is reflected in Josef K.’s life?

### **3. Aims of the Study**

The aims of this study are:

- a) To explain existentialism in the novel *The Trial*.
- b) To analyse existentialism reflected in Josef K.'s life.

### **4. Research Method**

The data source of the story is novel *The Trial*. It was a novel published in 1925. The novel is consisted of 271 pages. *The Trial* was later translated by Willa and Edwin Muir in 1937.

The paper used documentation method of technique and collecting data. There were some steps to collect the data. First, there was comprehensive and intensive reading to know the idea of *The Trial*. Next, was to analyse the component of novel related to existentialism. The other step to find the main character of *The Trial* was analysed.

In method and technique of analysing data provided information with qualitative analysis. The technique was divided into several steps to analysis the data. The first step was to learn about the story of novel “*The Trial*”. The second step was to interpret the story based on the main character inside the data. The last step was to relating between the interpretation of story and existentialism.

### **5. Result and Discussion**

#### **5.1 Existentialism Reflected in Life of Josef K.**

##### **5.1.1 Philosophy as A Way of Life**

In philosophy as a way of life, there is an immanence where people study philosophy from inside. Something has to be acted, felt and lived. In Josef K.'s situation, he preferred to think instead of doing the act itself. The example is when K.

failed to free the policemen. He thought he could offer himself as the policemen's substitution. However, this one was only a scenario on his mind.

If that had been his intention then it would almost have been easier, K. would have taken his own clothes off and offered himself to the whip-man in the policemen's place. The whip-man would certainly not have accepted this substitution anyway, as in that way he would have seriously violated his duty without gaining any benefit. (Kafka, 1937: 105)

### **5.1.2 Anxiety and Authenticity**

In anxiety, a character will be thinking about their existence, whether they capable of doing something important or asking about their ability in coping with situation. Josef K. was uncertain with possibility of taking his own trial. This leads him to thinking what would happen if he defended himself. He asked himself whether he capable of taking it.

How could he have sat there totally convinced of the need to do his own defence? How would it be later? What would his life be like in the days ahead? Would he find the way through it all to a happy conclusion? Did a carefully worked out defence and any other sort would have made no sense did a carefully worked out defence not also mean he would need to shut himself off from everything else as much as he could? Would he survive that? And how was he to succeed in conducting all this at the bank? (Kafka, 1937: 158)

Authenticity is the true personality of character. This personality is not influenced by anything or external pressure. This part was also related to the faith or believes of a character. In The Trial, Josef K. true personality is reflected in his thought. The personality related to this part is taking life lightly.

K. was living in a free country, after all, everywhere was at peace, all laws were decent and were upheld, who was it who dared accost him in his own home? He was always inclined to take life as lightly as he could, to cross bridges when he came to them, pay no heed for the future, even when everything seemed under threat. (Kafka, 1937: 6)

### **5.1.3. Freedom**

Freedom in existentialism means free in choosing without disturbance from any deity. However, freedom is followed by responsibility. In the story, Josef K. stayed at

his place after The Priest called him. He had two choices at that time. The first choice was pretending not to be Josef K. and walked free from cathedral. The second choice was turning around and admitted himself as Josef K. then trapped inside cathedral.

K. stood still and looked down at the floor. In theory he was still free, he could have carried on walking, through one of three dark little wooden doors not far in front of him and away from there. It would simply mean he had not understood, or that he had understood but chose not to pay attention to it. But if he once turned round he would be trapped, then he would have acknowledged that he had understood perfectly well, that he really was the Josef K. (Kafka, 1937: 250)

#### **5.1.4 Absurdity**

Absurdity in the existentialism means amorality and unfairness in the world. At any point, bad thing can happen to everyone. The unfairness was seen at the very early of the chapter. Two men came to his room at the morning and turned out the two men were police officer. Josef K. then spoke to one of the man and he answered Josef K. had been arrested. The police officer did not tell Josef K. he had been arrested.

“You can’t go away when you’re under arrest.” “That’s how it seems,” said K. “And why am I under arrest?” he then asked. “That’s something we’re not allowed to tell you..”(Kafka, 1937: 4)

#### **5.1.5 Existence**

Existence Human being has a necessity to do an action and the result of the action proves the existence of human. This means human existence is determined by their action. Every activities Josef K. did in the story proved his existence in real life. One of the example of existence in the story is about Josef K.’s job. He was the financial bank chief clerk and he had high position.

He felt well and confident, he had failed to go into work at the bank this morning but that could easily be excused because of the relatively high position he held there. (Kafka, 1937: 10)

#### **5.1.6 Situatedness**

Situatedness is a necessity of understanding life and existence from inside by knowing the situation. Josef K. did not show a sign of situatedness in the story. While

Josef K. was thinking a lot based on the situation, he never showed any understanding about life or his existence.

Perhaps, if he opened the door of the next room or even the front door, the two of them would not dare to stand in his way, perhaps that would be the simplest way to settle the whole thing, by bringing it to a head. But maybe they would grab him, and if he were thrown down on the ground he would lose all the advantage he, in a certain respect, had over them. So he decided on the more certain solution, the way things would go in the natural course of events, and went back in his room without another word either from him or from the policemen. (Kafka, 1937: 10)

### **5.1.7 The Crowd**

The crowd means public opinion about standard how something is accepted in society. This part of existentialism blocks individual preference and desire. Josef K. never did what other defendants did. He did not bother to wait in the court office. He never made application for evidence. He thought it was not necessary for his case.

“A month ago I made some applications for evidence to be heard in my case, and I’m waiting for it to be settled.” “You certainly seem to be going to a lot of effort,” said K. “Yes,” said the man, “it is my affair after all.” “Not everyone thinks the same way as you do,” said K. “I’ve been indicted as well but I swear on my soul that I’ve neither submitted evidence nor done anything else of the sort. Do you really think that’s necessary?” (Kafka, 1937: 77)

## **5.2 The Analysis of Characters**

The analysis of character focused on Josef K. as the story revolved around him.

### **5.2.1 Physiological aspect**

Physiological aspect is an aspect dimension about appearance of character like sex, age, eyes, skin colour, hair, etc. Josef K. was a thirty years old man. This is shown in his conscious thought. He was arrested right at his birthday day. He thought the arresting probably a joke from his colleagues.

He could have taken it all as a joke, a big joke set up by his colleagues at the bank for some unknown reason, or also perhaps because today was his thirtieth birthday. (Kafka, 1937: 6)

### 5.2.2 Psychological aspect

Psychological aspect can be observed through the psychological background as in the behaviour, mentality, ego, personality, emotion, attitude, etc.

- Taking life lightly

Josef K. took his life lightly. This is based on his behaviour or attitude. This later affected how he handled his case. He believed he did not need to solve a problem unless it became big. This is the way Josef K. handled his case and lived his life through the story. This is part of authenticity is existentialism.

K. was living in a free country, after all, everywhere was at peace, all laws were decent and were upheld, who was it who dared accost him in his own home? He was always inclined to take life as lightly as he could, to cross bridges when he came to them, pay no heed for the future, even when everything seemed under threat. (Kafka, 1937: 6)

- Hardworker

Josef K. was a financial chief bank. He was described a hard working man, spending most of his time on his work. Josef K. became important person in the bank. His effort in working was proving his existence.

In the bank, for example, I am well prepared, nothing of this sort could possibly happen to me there, I have my own assistant there, there are telephones for internal and external calls in front of me on the desk, I continually receive visits from people, representatives, officials, but besides that, and most importantly, I'm always occupied with my work, that's to say I'm always alert, it would even be a pleasure for me to find myself faced with something of that sort. (Kafka, 1937: 25)

- Indecive

Despite looking determined and firm, Josef K. was indecive. He tend to do nothing and let everything went according the course. One of the example was how Josef K. thought about

Perhaps, if he opened the door of the next room or even the front door, the two of them would not dare to stand in his way, perhaps that would be the simplest way to settle the whole thing, by bringing it to a head. But maybe they would grab him, and if he were thrown down on the ground he would lose all the advantage he, in a certain respect, had over them. So he decided on the more certain solution, the way things

would go in the natural course of events, and went back in his room without another word either from him or from the policemen. (Kafka, 1937: 10)

- Shrewd

Josef K. was rather manipulative person. This part includes in existentialism because this was proving his freedom. Josef K. would do anything to achieve his goal. He used Mrs. Grubach to make sure she listened to everything he said. Josef K. knew Mrs. Grubach was dependable to him and had to believe his explanation.

“Although this might be unpleasant for you you’re not in any real danger. You know how much esteem Mrs. Grubach has for me, she’s the one who will make all the decisions in this, especially as the captain is her nephew, but she believes everything I say without question. (Kafka, 1937: 35)

- Ignorance

Josef K. tend to ignore situation. He could not learn from the other defendants. Josef K. preferred to ignore his trial and pretended it did not exist. This is related to his anxiety. He was never worried about his case but it changed because he had lawyer repe and had little awareness with people around him.

“When I first came here with my uncle you probably noticed I wasn’t greatly concerned about my case, and if I wasn’t reminded of it by force, as it were, I would forget about it completely. But my uncle insisted I should allow you to represent me and I did so as a favour to him. I could have expected the case to be less of a burden than it had been, as the point of taking on a lawyer is that he should take on some of its weight. But what actually happened was the opposite. Before, the trial was never such a worry for me as it has been since you’ve been representing me. When I was by myself I never did anything about my case, I was hardly aware of it, but then, once there was someone representing me, everything was set for something to happen, I was always, without cease, waiting for you to do something, getting more and more tense, but you did nothing. (Kafka, 1937: 222)

- Agitated

At first, Josef K. did not care about his case. As time go, he showed sign of disturbed about his case. In existentialism, this led to anxiety. The case finally started disrupting Josef K.’s head. His trial finally disturbed his work. He focused on making his document for the court and neglected some of his work.

He remembered one morning when, already piled up with work, he suddenly shoved everything to one side and took a pad of paper on which he sketched out some of his thoughts on how documents of this sort should proceed. (Kafka, 1937: 151)

- Unable to receive advice

Josef K. was unable to receive feedback. People are free to follow or listened to any advice but Josef K. was somehow lack of reflection to himself. A lot of people told him about his future, but he did not pay mind to it. Josef K. somehow made a reason not to do any advice people suggested.

“You look for too much help from people you don’t know,” said the priest disapprovingly, “and especially from women. Can you really not see that’s not the help you need?” “Sometimes, in fact quite often, I could believe you’re right,” said K., “but not always. Women have a lot of power. If I could persuade some of the women I know to work together with me then I would be certain to succeed. (Kafka, 1937: 252)

### **5.2.3 Sociological aspect**

In Sociological aspect, most of people related to Josef K. was used for his purpose. This showed his shrewd personality. He got close to people to get information about the court. The example was his relationship with the painter, Titorelli. However, Titorelli knew Josef K. tried to get on his good side.

The painter immediately put his crayons down, stood upright, rubbed his hands together and looked at K. with a smile. “Always straight out with the truth,” he said. “You want to learn something about the court, like it says in your letter of recommendation, but then you start talking about my pictures to get me on your side. Still, I won’t hold it against you, you weren’t to know that that was entirely the wrong thing to try with me. Oh, please!” (Kafka, 1937: 175)

Josef K. relationship with other people also reflected existentialism. This was proven from his relationship with Deputy Director. K. thought this was an effort he made to improve their relationship.

“One question, Mr. K.: Would you like to give me the pleasure of joining me on my sailing boat on Sunday morning? There’s quite a few people coming, you’re bound to know some of them. One of them is Hasterer, the state attorney. Would you like to come along? Do come along!” K. tried to pay attention to what the deputy director was saying. It was of no small importance for him, as this invitation from the deputy director, with whom he had never got on very well, meant that he was trying to improve



his relations with him. It showed how important K. had become in the bank and how its second most important official seemed to value his friendship, or at least his impartiality. (Kafka, 1937: 39)

## 6. Conclusion

There are some parts of existentialism included in the story. In anxiety, Josef K. was worried about his case and became impatient. Authenticity showed about his true belief to take life lightly and only believed in himself. Freedom as in existentialism showed in K.'s way of choosing and leading the story from his choice. Absurdity in the story was about the unfairness of the court and how abrupt Josef K. life ended. In story *The Trial*, Josef K. proved his existence through his works.

Existentialism is a philosophy regarding individual existence, finding self and freedom of choosing. It was obvious K. was lack of understanding life as in philosophy as a way of life and situatedness. Another example of existentialism denied in story was the crowd. Josef K. did the opposite of the other defendant in defending himself.

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