

6. A critic has said that one important measure of a superior work of literature is its ability to produce in the reader a healthy confusion of pleasure and disquietude (anxiety). Select a literary work that produces this “healthy confusion.” Write an essay in which you explain the sources of the “pleasure and disquietude” experienced by the reader of the work. Avoid plot summary.

Healthy confusion seems to be what Franz Kafka was trying to portray in his unfinished novel *The Trial*. A man found in many uncomfortable situations not only intrigues the reader because of the unprecedented situations, but instills an unsureness derived from personal experience and relations to the character.

A well respected man, K., lived a relatively normal life working at a bank. So when authoritative officials intrude into his home unannounced claiming he committed a crime, things go awry. It is in this first scene, of many, that the “healthy confusion” is present. The reader understands K.’s surroundings but not at all why they are happening, so both the reader and character are in the same confused position. No one will tell this man what crime he has committed and this engages the reader, because although they are as confused as K., they aren’t experiencing it, only observing. They first have to start with the mindset of the observer, they feel bad for K. but officers rummaging through his home without his knowledge also intrigues them, which was the idea for tragic plays, to promote pleasure in the audience while they watch the characters lives unfold into potentially awful situations. The pleasure here stems from curiosity, the reader wants to know why these events are taking place and because they can’t relate to them, fear is not yet something they experience.

Then the reader's mind shifts from K.’s misfortune with intruders, to the law which seems omnipresent and intangible. This change balances the pleasure derived from the intrusion scene. This is when the anxiety begins, Kafka does a marvelous job at introducing a paradox. K. is basically free to do whatever he wants, but everytime he makes a move he is thinking about what the higher power is doing and how they will act toward him. His mind is imprisoned by the law and it consumes him. Readers understand the presence of the omnipresent, and this instills fear into them because although K. is the one being tried, they grow uncomfortable as they can see themselves in his position, within their own life battles.

One scene that promotes the “healthy confusion” is when K. goes to see a painter whom he thinks will be of assistance to him during the trial. The pleasure in this scene is derived from hope, because the painter tells K. of all the ways this trial could go, and how he could be free if the high law eventually let him. This excites the reader as they feel K. is coming closer to what he wants. However the light at the end of the tunnel is diminished when the reader realizes that most of the options do not guarantee freedom, and the uneasy feeling once again enters their heart. They can feel themselves in that situation, although they’ve not been deemed guilty of a crime no one will tell them about, they understand the feeling of entrapment and comfortability as K. is “free” to do what he wants but the unknown is always lurking over his shoulder.

Kafka has written a piece that created this mix of feelings through making the characters relatable. Although published in 1925 anyone can read this novel and relate to the idea of it, knowing what you want, and not knowing how to get it. This creates the “healthy confusion” present throughout the novel.