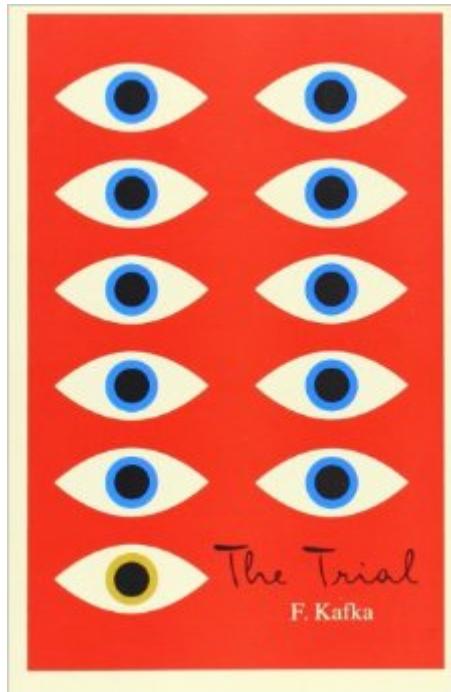


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The Trial: A New Translation Based On The Restored Text (The Schocken Kafka Library)



Synopsis

Written in 1914, *The Trial* is one of the most important novels of the twentieth century: the terrifying tale of Josef K., a respectable bank officer who is suddenly and inexplicably arrested and must defend himself against a charge about which he can get no information. Whether read as an existential tale, a parable, or a prophecy of the excesses of modern bureaucracy wedded to the madness of totalitarianism, Kafka's nightmare has resonated with chilling truth for generations of readers. This new edition is based upon the work of an international team of experts who have restored the text, the sequence of chapters, and their division to create a version that is as close as possible to the way the author left it. In his brilliant translation, Breon Mitchell masterfully reproduces the distinctive poetics of Kafka's prose, revealing a novel that is as full of energy and power as it was when it was first written.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Well, I've just finished reading *The Trial* for the sixth, maybe even eighth time, and as usual my brain is buzzing with all the unanswered questions and unspoken quandaries that this book embeds in the reader's mind. An aside - this is the first time I have read this particular translation, having read the Muir's work before. Perhaps this translation is a bit livelier, and the chapters, or sequences, are grouped a bit differently, but the general experience of reading and digesting this book was much the same as with the Muir's version. One caution, if you are a first time reader do not read the introduction first. The author gives away much too much of the story and ending in the

introduction. Now, back to the book itself. As "they" say, the mark of a true classic is that you can reread the book several times and always find it fresh. This is most certainly the case with *The Trial*. I always struggle with the question of K.'s innocence. The reader is told, unequivocally, that the Law is attracted to guilt. Is this an illustration of the unreasoning, monolithic madness that so often surrounds totalitarian states, or is Kafka telling the reader indirectly that K. is guilty? I think most readers, especially me, want to like and identify with the central protagonist of a novel, but on this particular rereading I noticed that K. is really a pretty nasty character. He is arrogant beyond belief, selfish, treats women and most everyone else as objects, and is even potentially violent. He alienates and insults people who have the desire and the means to help him navigate the formalities and uncertainties of his arrest and trial.

I have two problems with the Breon Mitchell translation. First, the subtitle "Based on the Restored Text" is misleading in suggesting that the prior edition was somehow faulty. One German critic argued way back in 1957 that the Cathedral chapter with the famous "Before the Law" parable (Kafka had previously published it as a short story) should be moved from the second to last chapter where Max Brod, Kafka's editor, put it and put just before the Painter chapter. The order of the chapters has always been controversial because Kafka did not leave a table of contents behind when he died. There is nothing to be restored since the original order will always be unknown. Brod's order has stuck, and this edition does not alter Brod's order at all and includes the same fragments he did and in the same order. There is no difference between the text of this translation and the text of the earlier translation by the Muirs. To call Mitchell's version "restored" is merely a marketing trick. Second, it is to be expected that a new translation of a famous work of literature like *The Trial* will trumpet its superiority over any previous translation, and translator Breon Mitchell does just that in his introduction to the new edition. In his introduction, he finds various fault with the earlier translation of *The Trial* by the Muirs. But similar kinds of faults may be found in Mitchell's less readable translation. For example, in "The Painter" section, Mitchell mistranslates the German word "ErklÄ¤rung," which means "affidavit," as "certificate."

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