# Franz Kafka's Enduring Influence Across Pop Culture



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A century after Franz Kafka's death, his influence remains deeply embedded in pop culture, transcending the relatively narrow readership of his works. The term "kafkaesque" has become a cultural touchstone, often used to describe surreal, oppressive experiences characterized by a sense of futile struggle against an incomprehensible authority. The phrase has gained traction not just in literature but in various media including films, TV shows, and social media.

Kafka's work is frequently alluded to in modern storytelling. For instance, the 1977 film *Annie Hall* features a character likening a romantic experience to Kafka’s surreal, oppressive world, while the 2010 show *Breaking Bad* uses the term to describe a situation involving drug dealers' complex scheme. The ubiquity of "kafkaesque" also extends to shows like *Severance*, a dystopian workplace thriller, and even in cultural staples like *The Simpsons*.

Social media, particularly TikTok, continues to revive Kafka's work among younger audiences. Users like Margarita Mouka integrate Kafka into their online identities, citing his alienation and existential angst as resonating with their experiences. Kafka’s life and work are being interpreted and presented anew, often reflecting modern-day digital alienation.

Kafka's legacy also navigates legal and political complexities. After his death from tuberculosis in 1924, Kafka's friend Max Brod controversially ignored his request to destroy his manuscripts, leading to the publication of his now-famous works. Custody battles over Kafka's original manuscripts continued into the 21st century, concluding in 2016 with a ruling by Israel's Supreme Court to house them in the National Library of Israel.

Despite calls for the banishment of the overused term "kafkaesque," it remains a vital part of cultural vocabulary, well-suited to describe experiences in today’s complex, often oppressive world. Kafka's own ambivalence about his work’s popularity would likely contrast sharply with the admiration it receives today, yet his acute awareness of modernity’s dehumanizing aspects continues to strike a chord in contemporary society.