

REFUND

By Fritz Karinthy(1887-1938)

The play Refund is written by Fritz Karinthy, a famous Hungarian playwright in 1938. He is known for his works You Write Like This, A Trip Around My Skull and Professor. The one-act play Refund was adopted and translated by the American playwright Percival Wilde.

The Refund is an absurd and satirical play. It satirizes the present day education system, which doesn't prepare students for their career. It is full of humor which deals with an unusual situation. The play is about a former student of a school in Hungary named Wasserkopf. In German Wasserkopf means a "Waterhead", an eccentric person. He is forty years old and unable to get any employment. Even if he succeeds in getting a job he cannot keep it for a long period. Wherever he goes the people tell him that he is fit for nothing and hasn't learned anything worth in the school. Once he meets his old classmate Leaderer in the street and when he tells about investment in foreign exchange and the Hungarian currency, Wasserkopf expresses his inability to understand them. He starts asking questions about foreign exchange. For which Leaderer says that if he doesn't know about such a small thing he hasn't learned anything in the school. Hence better he goes back to his school and gets his tuition fees back. For Wasserkopf, who is jobless and broke (penniless) that idea appeals and seems beneficial to him. So he comes back to his old school after eighteen years and demands for his tuition fees back claiming he hasn't learned anything and they haven't taught him anything worth. The principal is shocked after hearing such an absurd demand. Wasserkopf even threatens to go to the education minister if justice is denied to him. He demands a re-examination and if he fails in it he must get back his money. The flabbergasted principal finds himself in a peculiar situation and calls for an urgent meeting of all the teachers. They decide to conduct the re-examination and agree to prove his answers, whether right or wrong, correct. Because they realize that Wasserkopf would

intentionally give wrong answers to fail in the exam and to get back the refund. So they decide to outsmart him and to help each other by sticking together.

Wasserkopf uses abusive and derogative words to each teacher intending to be thrown out of the school. But the teachers outsmart him by proving him excellent in Manners, Physical Culture, Alertness, Perseverance, Logic, and in Ambition. Then the first question is asked by the history master on how many years the 'Thirty Years War' lasted. Even though the answer is there within the question, Wasserkopf is eager to give a wrong answer and says that the war lasted for seven meters. When the history master is unable to prove his wrong answer right, mathematics master aids him. He argues that according to Einstein's relativity theory years can be represented in terms of meter and the actual war took place only for seven years. Because the war was waged only during the half of each day (twelve hours), three hours in a day was given to eating and three hours more for non-war like activities. So the answer seven meters given by the candidate is right in Einstein's equivalence of seven years.

Next, the physics master asks him whether clocks in the church become smaller if one walks away from it or is it because of optical illusion. Wasserkopf calls the master as an ass in answer. But the answer is accepted by the master as the correct one. Because an ass doesn't have any imaginative powers as it is a sad creature. So it must have an optical illusion and Wasserkopf has given a metaphorical answer.

The geography master asks him to name the capital city of the same name Brunswick, a German province. Wasserkopf answers as 'same'. The master proves the answer to the correct one by claiming the city has another name as 'Same' too. According to a legend, the emperor Barbarossa was once riding in the city and met a peasant girl. He asked her the name of the city after wishing her 'God Bless You'. The girl answered 'same to you sir' only as she was munching a bun in her mouth. But the emperor mistook the city name as 'Same'. So they mark Wasserkopf excellent in geography.

Finally, the mathematics master comes forward to ask his question and declares about asking Wasserkopf an easy question and a difficult question. First, he asks him an easy question on the circumference of 109 degrees sided polyhedron with irrelevant data for the calculation. Wasserkopf gives an incorrect answer. The mathematics master gets angry and declares that his answer is incorrect. So he tells that Wasserkopf deserves the refund of tuition fees back. Then, he asks the exact amount which he has to get. Wasserkopf without realizing the trap tells them the exact amount 5682 crowns and 38

hellers. At that time the mathematics master declares that was his tough question and the answer is correct.

Thus by justifying all his answers to be correct, they mark him distinction in all the subjects and throw him out of the school. The play also shows the ability of the school teachers to manage the absurd situation and how they tackle Wasserkopf without spoiling their school's reputation.