

Escapism in the Works of Existentialist Writers

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ABSTRACT

Existentialist writers like Camus or Beckett question the idea of mundane existence while simultaneously holding the belief that life must continue, we must all live without bothering about finding the actual meaning of life just like Sisyphus, who accepted his doom, never got tired, For him, the boulder, mountain and dirt were the moving forces of his existence and in the end Camus writes "one must imagine Sisyphus happy" and so should be the case of human beings. The dominant feeling of Existentialism, the feeling of no purpose, nothingness can only be countered by embracing existence. In *Waiting for Godot*, the enthusiastic readers often comment on the friendship between Vladimir and Estragon as they both go through the dreadful time of waiting and waiting for Godot. This paper seek to question the subsistence of mortality through the literary works of select existentialist and other modern writers from all over the world. These works as a whole come under the sphere of literature, a means of reassembling the reality, which the intellectual of humanity created, explored and developed. This paper also aims at analyzing the significance of the abrupt ending to the modern moral or existential plays. It was left up to the audience to interpret, to find the answers and proper endings. The conclusions were subjective, optimistic audience would always find hopeful answers parallel to the escaping tendencies of characters.

Keywords: existentialist, mortality, modern writers, existentialist philosophy, escapism.

INTRODUCTION

It wouldn't be a crime to regard existentialism as a literary movement rather than a philosophical ideology. Indeed, it represents the state of an individual or the society as a whole but it was literature which bestowed this movement an enormous recognition. Although critics like David E Cooper do not agree to the prior recognition. For him, existentialism is not a mood, theme or vocabulary, it revolves around the field of philosophy. However, canon of Literature highlights it as a written discourse which explore the existence of the narrative and the characters of the plots. Jean Paul Sarte (1905-1980) took the term existentialism in the 1940s stressing om individual existence, liberty, freedom of choice. It states in this irrational universe, humans have to define their own meaning in life. In the world of literature, Existentialism has been traced to the ancient times of Socrates in that way many philosophers have pushed this movement back to several centuries.

EXISTENTIALISM

Unlike other fields of philosophy, Existentialism stressed on subjectivity and individuality over objectivity. It did not contend an individual as a "concept" and thereby it wouldn't be a justice to limit the entire concept to one space of time or one period of literature. Whether we contemplate any of the world's author of any period of past or present times as an Existentialist or not but it has been anticipated that there are always glimpses of individuals, their journey, ideologies, existence in the society and characters struggling with diverse crisis wrapped under the blanket named 'life'. We all are born in multi-cultured societies and regions but every religion preaches the same ideologies to the whole race of humanity, these discourses makes us believe that God rewards Chapter 3 virtue and chastens evil, the concept of Existentialism make its way when we find it difficult to cope with the injustice or cruelty imposed by malicious acts on virtuous communities or individuals. With existentialism, comes the alienation and an agitating urge to escape the surroundings into an ideal fantasized shrine. The life becomes meaningless and the spirit to engage in the daily course of life fades. Thus, the purpose of our existence becomes completely absurd. For Camus, the absurd originates from a combination of two things: the way we want the world to be and the way the world actually is. The difference of which makes the individual desire to get away and shrink into his own bag of comfort where he can attain euphoria. "But in the end one needs more courage to live than to kill himself", were his words which according to me, he meant by the struggle to breathe a conscious breath which is very much more than the yearning to escape.

ALBERT CAMUS'S WORKS

The Stranger by Albert Camus is one of the prominent works of Absurd literature. The story revolves around the protagonist Meursault, who feels no connection to the people around him. The plot starts with the famous lines "Mother died today. Or maybe it was yesterday, I don't know." which distinctly delineated the rootlessness and the lack of belonging to his own dead mother. He clearly discerns situations but cannot find meaning in his reality "Do you wish?" he asked indignantly, "my life to have no meaning?" Really I couldn't see how my wishes came into it, and I told him as much. Here, the magistrate encounters Meursault's open disbelief of God and stresses on the fact that there can be vital repercussions of holding on to such strange ideologies. To which, Meursault argues that presuming life has meaning doesn't make it so.

Camus himself claimed that a being would never 'live' if he is looking for the 'meaning' of life. The incident of mother's demise and the fact that the unfortunate news came in the telegram depicts how valueless, unsympathetic and undignified the aura of mother was and her death was just an irritating inconvenience in the modern world of shipping offices, where time is money and the highest value is materialistic possessions. Camus through this narrative also tries to showcase how our society manipulates the course of life and how individuals are bound to act in a specific way to attain an image of a citizen. According to society's unspecified norms, taking Marie to Fernandel's farcical comedy the day after his mother's funeral ceremony was a sign of unsympathetic indifference. When Meursault enters the courtroom, he noticed everyone greeting each other as if they were attending any sort of social gathering, forming groups according to tastes, The prior felt alienated as he marked himself as a "gate crasher". During his court hearing on murdering one of the Arabs, he wonders about the futility of the process. He says "I felt like vomiting, and I had only one idea: to get it over, to go back to my cell, and sleep ... and sleep." His escaping tendency became quite assertive and the readers could sense it in the later part of the novel. A man is about to go on trial with his life in the balance

and he is the one who feels out-of-place. That is where absurdism takes place and that is where we become a stranger to our own lives. He embraces the existential freedom and he enjoys knowing and accepting the purposelessness in what he considers as an absurd, godless universe.

Camus wittingly expresses his ideological concept of Existence as he give this work the title "The Stranger". This very man changed the image of Sisyphus before the whole world of criticism. Bringing him back as an 'absurd hero' was a creative working that only Camus could have made possible. Sisyphus, adhered with the assigned, never-ending task i.e., pulling the boulder up the hill just to witness it fall back again and so on. The readers were quite content about the absurd life and hardships of Sisyphus and the best possible way out for him was thought to be escapism from the cycle of eternity. However, as Camus stressed that the ideal solution is to accept and find happiness in what the universe has to offer. For Sisyphus his bliss is the mountain, dirt, boulder and his strength and Camus too agree with this ideal state as he writes "One must imagine Sisyphus happy". It is a pathway for man to walk on and reach the harmony of his existence in this senseless world. From Stanley's irritating impression of everyone around him yet surrendering himself to compete strangers in the end to Mrs Alving's lifelong struggle with keeping up the 29 matrimonial morals only to see her son die before her eyes. The audience can only grasp the meaningless and inconsequential journey to one's doom. From Jean-Paul Sartre's work *Nausea* (*La Nausée*, 1938) and Albert Camus' *The Outsider* (*L'Étranger*, 1939) to Samuel Beckett's masterpiece *Waiting for Godot*, a pioneer of absurd literature, the writers of the past century stressed on the question of mundane existence and the desire to escape on an extensive level. In the play *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett gives the audience a glimpse of absurd course of waiting. There has been number of debates and speculations over the decades on what the playwright might mean by the term "Godot" and the fruitfulness of the humanity who looks for him/her/it. The prior is one of the most prominent modern absurd works of literature. One peculiar thing about playwrights like Beckett is they never provide the audience a clear ending and leave the latter to speculate. We were left with an abrupt ending as both the characters, Vladimir and Estragon were still waiting for someone or something named "Godot". Was it someone with an authorized position? Was it the doing anything". The questions still linger around in an immortal way and the answers are quite subjective in nature. Frank Rineck, a fourth-year English major student who plays Estragon in theatre, said when he read between the lines of the play, it didn't make sense however, it made us "sad". The play indeed has sights where characters are craving to run away from their situations, to escape from the atrocious reality. almighty? Will "Godot" help the two characters in getting out of the miserable state of "not At one point Estragon mentions "Nothing happens Nobody comes, nobody goes It s awful." The characters are stuck in an never-ending loop of time with recurring things and futile act of passing the period. The characters talk about hanging themselves on the tree to end this loop and again, "escape" the nothingness but nobody does so, this very act resembles the tragic human state, just like we all have had the childlike thoughts to escape, to hang, to harm ourselves at a certain threshold point filled with anger, disparity and emotional weakness. Those were just naive thoughts we knew; we would never act upon. The very presence of these suppressed emotions is evoked when we encounter capricious situations or come across the stories of misery. "Let it go, depart, escape!" a harsh voice runs around until we choose to shut it down or unconsciously follow it. Camus advocated that meaning is not provided by the natural order but rather be thought and created subjectively. With the post war period, wind of faithlessness lingered around the whole world the idea of existence of God was questioned on a large scale by the scholars, leaders

and different communities. People who lost their families, children in the war were left numb and spiritless. The holy Bible and its preaching were criticized in the modern and post-modern society.

SARTRE AND IONESCO

However, Jean Paul Sartre in his Lecture given in 1946 declares, that even if the Almighty, the so called center of the universe existed, it would not make any difference as he believes, that the actual dilemma is not the controversy around divine existence; what the mankind needs is to find itself and to understand that nothing can save it and anxieties, not even a valid clue of the God presence. The play No exit is the source of Sartre's world famous phrase "L'enfer, c'est les autres" or "Hell is other people". In the play, three deceased souls are being punished in a way that is ambiguous to the surface, however Satre suggests an ontological agitation of being caused to see oneself as an object from the view of someone else's consciousness. The idea of tolerance and not being able to seek solace is a kind of hell itself and that's what Sartre's proposes through this play. Like any other piece of social work, this too criticizes the anesthetized state of post-war society where a human is unable to tolerate other human without the presence of personal gluttony and greed.

CONCLUSION

Existentialism may be generally pictured as a revolt against views of the world and policies of action in which individual human beings are considered as helpless tools of historical games and natural processes. Eugene Ionesco directs that the man is lost, if he is parted from his transcendental roots and all his activity becomes absurd. His play the Rhinoceros is a critique on the overlapping thoughts of modern minds. The protagonist, alcoholic Berenger doubts that his life is pointless and means nothing but void. Alcohol helps Berenger to feel less afraid and though Jean, a 'perfect man' refuses to accept his emotional state and blab his ideologies about how a man should be and should appear to the world. He also tries to help the prior to get through the day energetically and to participate as an active, enthusiastic member in society. However, when rhinoceroses and metamorphosis grip the town, both Jean and Dudard, the men advocating enthusiasm and zest suggest that becoming a rhinoceros should be a fair decision in order to loosen up and escape professional life of pointless work which is, in many respects, the exact same state that Berenger attempts to attain by drinking. The act of metamorphosis or capitulating into an animal in this play showcase a fragile state of man and the traumas associated with social discourses, ethics, morals and perceptions.

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