

What existentialist artists attempt to communicate through their respective work

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Lecturer Existentialist Artists Have you ever taken a moment to relax, and become aware of your decisions that have been influence by the outside world? People mostly never take the chance to take a break from their daily activities in order to reflect on the decisions they made throughout their life. In the book *Waiting for Godot*, the author, Samuel Beckett, uses symbolism to send the message to readers how people have to be more aware for themselves instead of letting the outside influences take control over their lives. Furthermore, the movie, *Garden State* written by Zach Braff, shares a similar message to Samuel Beckett about how life should be made by the individual, not by others. After thinking about my own thoughts and reading *Waiting for Godot* and watching *Garden State*, I believe that existentialist artists are attempting to communicate the message of how people let others control their decisions instead of deciding for themselves what to do in the future.

In *Waiting for Godot*, the story revolves around the life of Vladimir and Estragon who undergo strange experiences as they seek to wait for entity identified by the name Godot whose arrival is long awaited, but not forthcoming. Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for Godot to make the decisions for them; however, they lose track of time and self awareness of their lives. " Let's go. We can't. Why? We're waiting for Godot... What did we do yesterday," (Beckett, 8-9). They are so dependent on Godot to make the decisions for them that they can't even remember the events that happen yesterday in their lives. Through this scene, Samuel Beckett is trying to tell his readers that if they rely too much on others, then they will lose the precious memories they made throughout their life because they lost track

of time of waiting for someone to forge their future. In addition, Samuel Beckett wants his readers to know how people have the strength to make their own decisions. For example, when Pozzo is trying to ask for help, Vladimir says, " Let us not waste our time in idle discouragement! ... Let us make the most of it, before it is too late," (Beckett, 90). Every individual has the choice to make an impact on other people's daily lives. It is not up to others to make the decisions for us, but for us to. Beckett wants his reader there are many opportunities, such as saving someone, that we can take and make impact on history. Another example of individual decision making is when Vladimir realizes that Godot has not greeted them.

The experiences of Vladimir and Estragon can be relied upon to show how writers can use the concepts of existentialism in writing their stories. This author says, " The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep somewhere else another stops. The same is true of the laugh" (P. 37). Meaning, just like this author, with existentialist ideas, a writer has to prove to the audience how the characters' decisions are shaped by their individuality, autonomy and self-existence as independent personalities who are always free to determine their actions by will. An existentialist prioritizes self-consciousness which is believed to be at the core of decision making process. It does not mean that a person has to be rational. To an existentialist, what matters is the individual's peculiar position evidenced in their own actions which is closely associated to the authenticity of their choices.

As evidenced in this play, circumstances play a significant role in determining the authenticity of individual deeds. It is not necessary that a

person has to be influenced by external pressure. At one point, Estragon says, " We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?" (P. 51). It is absurd that that the facticity of a matter is directly dependant on the character. Thus, in waiting for the unknown Godot, Vladimir and Estragon have to encounter sporadic reactions from Pozzo and Godot with whom they interact in different circumstances. Estragon affirms this when he asserts, " People are bloody ignorant apes... Im like that. Either I forget right away or I never forget" (P 17). This implies that the comedy is subject to interpretations from different people. This is the only way through which its real meaning can be ascertained.

Based on this play, it is evidenced that individual human beings, should be autonomous in their decisions. Since everyone is unique in a way, it is obvious that they would perceive things in different ways. Therefore, there is no need of creating unnecessary external pressure on them. Instead, everyone should be left alone to make their decisions based on their worldview. As explained by Zach Braff in the Garden State, self-consciousness is paramount in the life of everyone. Because of this, he says, " Let us do something, while we have the chance! It is not every day that we are needed. Not indeed that we personally are needed. Others would meet the case equally well, if not better. To all mankind they were addressed, those cries for help still ringing in our ears!" (P. 19).

In the play Garden State, existentialist decisions are evidenced when Andrew Largeman is aboard a plane. While other passengers are panicking and frustrated by the crashing plane, Andrew is not bothered at all. Unlike his colleagues, nothing worries him. Another example is seen when Andrew

becomes so bold and climbs atop a certain structure then stares at the ground and screaming. Meanwhile, other people are tensed and meandering around a quarry. To Andrew, life is short, meaningless and cannot be dictated (Khalb 58). Existentialist decision is also observed after Andrew rejoining his old buddies-Dave and Tim during the burial of his late mother. When everyone is busy engaging in romantic affairs, Andrew chooses not to do the same. Instead, he sits comfortably in the sofa and separates himself from them. Meaning, unlike his friends, he has chosen to detach himself from the erotic pleasures. Thus, it means that he has opted to live a life which is not associated with any true emotional feelings. If it were so, he would have joined his friends in experiencing romance which in his conscious mind is a mere burden. These decisions show that Andrew, as an existentialist, had chosen to make his independent decisions without giving in to any force. Thus, he opted to pursue his life in full without letting it slip away from him. As a person, I strongly believe that I should be making my own decisions without unnecessary influence from other forces. However, the ideal situation is that I am living in the midst of different people with diverse worldviews (Cohn 172). Therefore, in order to conform to the societal standards, I have to be flexible in my decisions. However, to Beckett and Braff this is totally uncalled for because, as existentialists, I should be autonomous and base all my decisions on my own self-determination.

Works Cited

Cohn, R. From Desire to Godot. New York: Riverrun Press, 2007. Print.

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