

THE INFLUENCE OF EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHERS TO SOME OF AMERICAN WRITERS IN THE 20th CENTURY LITERATURE

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Received: 25 Jan 2018

Accepted: 09 Feb 2018

Published: 16 Feb 2018

ABSTRACT

This scientific writing is about the influence of Existential philosophers to modern American writers. This influence indicates individual aspects toward American existence illustrated in thenovels,plays, poetry and short stories by modern American authors in today's time.The aspects of individuality of the man elaborates human exile related to Absurdity

KEYWORDS : *Absurdity, Existence, Existential, Existentialist, Influence*

INTRODUCTION

The central problem in existential philosophy by the philosophers of existentialism is the meaning of existence (What does exist mean? What are the implications of answers to this question for man's action in daily life?).This problem has concerned philosophers since the beginning of time, but the twentieth-century existentialism has given it a special emphasis.The modern movement began to be recognized in Europe in the year following World War I and achieved great popularity during and following World War II(Oscar G.Brochett,1964 :344)

If we are talking about the influence of existential philosophers to some of American writers, we may not get rid of talking and seeing the most widely known writers of this school Jean-Paul Sartre (1905) and Albert Camus (1913-1960).The two figures of the writers to modern existential philosophers. Sartre has been one of the principal spokesmen for existentialism.The concept of Sartre through existentialism is that he has stated all his works as an attempt to draw logical conclusions from a consistent atheism (G.Brochett,1964 :344).While Albert Camus,a french philosopher had much the same view of man's condition but he called it "The Absurd". Camus said that the absurdity arises from the clash between human hopes and desires and the meaningless universe in which man lives.

DISCUSSIONS

Based on the concepts of the two existentialists' ideas about the meaning of existence, a question may be presumably asked such as what is the real influence of existentialists to modern American writers in the 20th century literature? This question may be presumably asked such as

What is the real influence of existentialists to modern American writers in the 20 th century literature? This question may arise due to the fact that some of the American writers had been influenced since the human existence.The first of the absurd dramatist to come into prominence in America was Samuel Beckett(1906) with his work Waiting for Godot.As the implication of the above,the four characters of the play seem to have absurdity.

The four characters have different characteristics of life. Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for Godot which leads them to wait for nothingness. They are waiting for Godot, because they think that Godot comes down and gives them a help and protection. But, Godot will not appear.

In *Waiting for Godot*, Samuel Beckett also exposes the human relationship among the characters like Vladimir, Estragon and Pozzo, as a master. Pozzo who has been considered a master treats Lucky very badly like an animal. His concern with Lucky is tied up using a rope as a symbol of human relation. Even though Lucky is only a slave treated by Pozzo, but he knows that Pozzo may not separate himself from Lucky himself. As a matter of fact, Pozzo says that he may not be isolated from societies. Let's see the conversation of the characters as an implication of Pozzo's statement.

Pozzo : Up hog! (Noise of Lucky getting up and
Picking up his baggage. Pozzo jerks the rope)
Whip! Lucky advances, stoops, Pozzo snatches
The whip from his mouth, Lucky goes back to his place)
Yes, gentlemen, I can not go for long
Without the societies of life. (Beckett, 1965: 24)

The influence of existential philosophers to modern American writers can be seen to some of American writers like Robert Frost, Edward Albee, John Barth, Saul Bellow, Emily Dickinson and some other American writers of the 20th century literature. In Robert Frost' *The Mending Wall*, he emphasizes that human existence seems to be absurd as the aftermath of the Second World War.

Robert Frost directly stated that the relationship among them had broken a true civilization and specific tradition of human condition. It seems that man is rather selfish. Man only thinks of himself without having a response to others. This can be seen in Frost' work, *The Mending Wall*.

Something there is that doesn't love wall, that
sends the frozen ground-swell under it, and
Spills the upper boulders in the sun, and makes
Gaps even two can pass a breast. (Frost, 1-4:216)

Frost seems to hate man's separation with wall that will not give them a fresh relationship. Man, however, may not be egoist, he should be involved in societies. In the above poem, Frost emphasizes that man is chaotic. Frost himself does not like separation from another, he would like the man were united. He, therefore, gives a warning for men, not to be exiled from societies.

Edward Albee as one of the American writers in the 20th century literature was also influenced by the concept of existentialists' philosophy whereas he tried to expose the human relation throughout *The Zoo Story* which might be seen in some of the characters' behavior. The two characters of the play, Jerry and Peter seem to have no good relationship. The conversation of the two characters can be identified as follows:

Jerry : I'll tell you why I do it.I don't talk to many

Many people except to say like : give me a beer,or

where's the John,or what time does the feature

go on, or keep your hands to yourself, buddy,

You know-things like that,

Peter: I must say I don't.....

(Edward Albee,1959 : 17)

The style of *The Zoo Story* is absurdist. The Conversation between the two characters, Peter and Jerry shows a great difficult which people have communicated,They simply do not understand each other. Jerry gives Peter a knife and makes Peter kill him. With this self-sacrifice, and his talk of love, Jerry becomes a Christ figure.Actually,the message of the play is not absurd at all.Albee is really saying that people can and must break out of their loneliness. Peter can not return to be a person at all alone in the world after his experience with Jerry.

Another figure of American writer of the 20th century literature who was influenced by existentialism was John Barth.His work,*The Floating Operas* and *The End of the Road* are typical Existential Comedies. The first novel of Barth is about a man who decides to commit suicide because the world is meaningless.

The extension of the existentialists' influence to American writers in the 20 th century literature had emerged and the novelist like Saul Bellow was also involved to be the most of the Jewish American novelist. His first novel, *Danglin Man* (1944) is about a man waiting to be called the army during World War II, Saul Bellow wants to know what we are,and what we are for.He seems to fail to get any answers.In fact, he concludes that the world is meaningless and his life is has no purpose.In this novel, Saul Bellow replaces a hero who feels unhappy with his life in New York City. The tall faceless buildings and crowded street seem inhuman. He feels "alienated", unconnected to the world around him.

In accordance with some of the modern American writers about the influence of existentialists, the American writers seem to be affected and their concepts towards the influence was true according the condition of societies in modern time. In the *Outline of American literature*, P:13), Saul Bellow directly states that the existentialists had a specific purpose to determine the human action in today's time. The existentialists in their philosophy of existentialism say that man is completely alone in a meaningless world without God or absolute moral laws.We are completely free. But, this is not always happy freedom since we have no "god-given"nature, free choices and action in life become extremely important.They determine our nature as human beings.Existential writers such as Sartre and Camus become popular in America at this time.

In case of human relationship, Emily Dickinson was one of the modern American writers who was influenced by existentialism. She scrutinized the condition of American societies in the 29th century. Emily Dickinson's poem entitled "There's been a Death", is a narrative poem which talks about the social problems and human relationship.She tends to acknowledge that the American people at that time were so much individualistic and human relation becomes degraded. The poet seems to be hopeless to see her people behave in modern time.The American people become selfish and like to be isolated from the societies. Let's see Dickinson's poem of how she explains the characteristics of American people at this

time.

There's been a death in the opposite house
 As lately as today
 The neighbor rustle in and out
 The doctor drives away
 A window opens like a pod;
 Abrupt, mechanically.
 Somebody thinks a mattress but,
 The children hurry by
 They wonder—it died and that
 I used to when a boy
 The minister goes stiffly in.

CONCLUSIONS

Having studied the influence of existentialists to modern American writers, the writer of this scientific writing tends to draw conclusions as follows:

- Most of the modern American writers are influenced by existentialists' philosophy since the philosophers of existentialism study the condition of man's life in the meaningless universe.
- Since existentialists' philosophy concerns about man's existence, modern American writers begin to think and expose the quality and the characteristics of American people in today's time. The American existence seems to show individualism. This effect may arise in relation to modern technology and new invention in the era of globalization and the belief of man towards religion becomes less and less.

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Siamir Marulafau was born in Nias, North Sumatra-Indonesia, May 17, 1958. He is a lecturer in English language and literature at the Faculty of Cultural Sciences, University of North Sumatra-Indonesia. He received his Master Degree in Linguistics in 2004. In 1985, he became a teaching staff of English language and literature at the Faculty of Cultural Sciences, University of North Sumatra, Medan-Indonesia. He is a poet, short story writer. He has been writing many poems in English and Indonesian language.

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