

EXISTENTIAL CATEGORIES IN SOME WORKS OF HEMINGWAY AND CAMUS

A Thesis

Presented to

**the Faculty of the Department of English
University of Houston**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts**

by

Edward J. Maseika

August 1958

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The purpose of this thesis is to apply a method of criticism that has been proposed by Dr. James V. Baker. This method proposes that an examination of literature through the "lens"¹ of existentialist philosophy will produce a heightened sense of appreciation. Existential criticism is not intended as a substitute for all other methods of criticism; rather, it is primarily a means to the appreciation of the literary work of art viewed as a whole.

Existentialism and four categories--aloneness, dread, death, and absurdity--are defined in the early part of this study. Two short stories: "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," and one novel, A Farewell to Arms by Ernest Hemingway are then examined in the light of existential criticism. This method reveals that Hemingway's subject matter is almost identical with the concerns of existentialist philosophy; that the reason certain aspects of these works of Hemingway have been misunderstood is that the facts of the human condition have not been understood. It is seen that, in attempting to present the facts of the human condition honestly, Hemingway developed his famous style.

It is proposed that, if the existential method of criticism is helpful in appreciating the literary works of intuitive artists such as Hemingway, then it is almost indispensable in the appreciation of novelists who are both literary artists and philosophers, such as Camus and Sartre. One novel, The Stranger by Albert Camus is examined through the "lens" of existential criticism. This philosophico-literary work is then compared with A Farewell

¹This term was coined by Dr. James V. Baker.

to Arms. This comparison reveals that Camus not only borrowed Hemingway's early style, but many of the aspects of the characters of Lt. Frederic Henry and Catherine Barkley. Further, it is demonstrated that Catherine Barkley is almost identical with the "absurd" hero described by Camus in The Myth of Sisyphus. This parallel is seen to be highly significant because it permits an original interpretation of the character of Catherine Barkley.

Finally, it is predicted that the examination of literature through the "lens" of the existential method of criticism will be of considerable value in revealing much that has been heretofore unobserved.

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INTRODUCTION

A study in existentialism is necessarily a personal matter. For this reason I feel I should state briefly how I became interested in this thesis. After completing the B. A. degree in psychology at the Pennsylvania State University in 1951, I gradually came to realize that my interests were broader than those encompassed by the omniscient "scientific method" employed by psychologists. Upon reflection I realized that, as an undergraduate, I had enjoyed my philosophy and literature courses most. Ironically enough, I decided to do graduate study in literature while working as a psychiatric aide in a mental hospital.

While studying literature in graduate school, I found that my interest in psychology and philosophy still persisted. This interest became especially apparent while studying Samuel Taylor Coleridge in a course taught by Dr. Charles Hagelman. Dr. Hagelman, upon learning that I was searching for a thesis subject, suggested that I consult Dr. James V. Baker. Following a consultation with Dr. Baker, I decided to audit the course in literary criticism taught by him in the hope that, as soon as a proper subject came to light, preparatory work on the thesis could begin. A decision to work in Coleridge had almost been reached when I attended Dr. Baker's lecture on existentialism which was sponsored by the U. S. Steel Company. In this lecture Dr. Baker mentioned the possibility of developing a method of criticism based on existentialist philosophy. It immediately became apparent to me that this method would provide the crucible wherein psychology, philosophy, and literature could be compounded. Shortly thereafter, I proposed this thesis as a "test case" for existential criticism.

I feel compelled to remark that this thesis is the most exciting academic venture in which I have yet engaged. One can not seriously study existentialism and existential literature without being affected in some way. To scrutinize the foundation of one's existence is rather unsettling to one's entire structure; to experience this through literature, even more so. If this examination is unsettling it is for the purpose of enabling a reconstruction of the foundation of one's existence. This, to some extent, I have done. This study has provided the means whereby the very basis of my character structure, and fond, sheltered beliefs could be re-examined. This process of re-examination was, and is, difficult. However, the results of this task more than compensated for the discomfort.

CHAPTER I

A DEFINITION OF EXISTENTIALISM AND THE FUNCTION OF THE CATEGORY

I. DEFINITION OF EXISTENTIALISM

The term "existentialism" derives from its concern with human existence. However, as it will soon be shown, existence is only part of the problem. Considered in a purely philosophical sense, existentialism is a study in phenomenological ontology.

This latter statement leads to a brief consideration of the history of existentialism. There is little disagreement over the fact that Soren Kierkegaard is the modern father of existentialism. Edmund Husserl, as the founder of phenomenology, laid the "scientific" foundations of existentialism. Today, the major figures are Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre, who were students of Husserl, and are the representatives of the atheistic view. On the Christian side stand Gabriel Marcel and Karl Jaspers. Of course there are many others, such as Martin Duber, Simone de Beauvoir, and Paul Tillich who have made significant contributions.

From what has been said, the fact emerges that "in at least an historical sense . . . there is no philosophical position which is 'existentialism'; instead there are a number of existentialist philosophers who represent existentialism in very different ways."¹

¹Maurice Matanson, "Existential Categories in Contemporary Literature," Carolina Quarterly (reprint; issue unknown), p. 18.

Although the above is true, and, although it is also true that some philosophers such as Martin Heidegger refuse to be called "existentialist" philosophers, still, it is true that there exists a "core" of existentialism. Ronald Crisley points out this fact in the following statement about "existentialist" philosophers:

. . . All of them, however, have similar preoccupations--the desire to treat human existence in its concrete singularity, the determination to use the descriptive rather than the a priori method, the intention to bring out the full significance of certain basic moods in their relation to human personality and its attitude toward reality as a whole, and, finally, a concern with the unique and irreducible character of human 'freedom.'²

Since it is generally agreed upon by most philosophers that Heidegger and Sartre present the most complete systems of existentialism, this thesis will rely almost entirely on the works of these men. In general, Heidegger and Sartre are quite similar in their philosophy; however, since Sartre presents a more complete system, the definition of existentialism will be based on his philosophy.

In any study of existentialism a considerable problem of language arises out of the fact that both Heidegger and Sartre have had to alter or invent words to make the subject-matter communicable. Since Heidegger wrote in German and Sartre in French, one is faced, not only with the problem of using translations, but, with the fact that many of the meanings of the words can only be approximated. Hence, following the

²Ronald Crisley, Existentialist Thought (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1955), pp. 10-11.

example of most explicators of existentialism, foreign terms will be employed where it seems that an English equivalent would alter the meaning.

From what has been said it becomes apparent that a study of existentialism presents unique problems. A brief definition of existentialism will be given before the main obstacle to understanding is examined. One of the most concise definitions is provided by Maurice Natanson: "What I take to be central and decisive for all existentialist philosophy is a concern for what I wish to call man's being in reality."³ The key word here is "being." In his explication of Heidegger's work Grimsley observes:

Heidegger points out at the very outset that the great difficulty attendant upon all discussions of Being is that although we cannot help using the idea it is really indefinable. It is the most general of all concepts and yet the most incomprehensible; it cannot be derived from any higher concepts and it cannot be represented by lower. The generality of the problem might exclude the possibility of finding a solution were it not that the very asking of the question means that the answer is in some sense present to the mind of the questioner. To ask ourselves concerning the meaning of Being implies that Being is (however obscurely) present to us. Already then we find a clue to the correct approach to the problem. Being assumes many diverse forms, but if we wish to examine exhaustively one particular form it is best to begin, not with the world which cannot give us a direct answer, but with the only form which willingly lends itself to interrogation by us--'the being which we ourselves are' (SZ, p.7). It is the major characteristic of human existence that it can question the meaning of its own Being.⁴

The main reason for the obscurity of the meaning of our being is a commonsense, everyday attitude toward life. The reason this attitude

³Natanson, op. cit., p. 19.

⁴Grimsley, op. cit., pp. 39-40.

is difficult to remove is its failure to make itself an object for its own inspection. Commonsense life "does not reflect upon commonsense life . . . Yet it is exactly that absolute awareness of the style of our being in commonsense life which must be made an object for inspection if the datum of being in reality is to be gotten."⁵

An examination of "being" in greater detail is now possible. The following analysis is based on Sartre's Being and Nothingness and explic- of this work. Sartre's entire system is based upon an analysis of etre-pour-soi (being-for-itself, hereafter referred to as For-itself) and etre-en-soi (being-in-itself, hereafter referred to as In-itself). The For-itself, Nothingness, Human Consciousness, Freedom, and Free Choice are one and the same thing. In contrast to the For-itself, the In-itself is non-conscious being; all we can say about it is that it is. The supreme achievement of the For-itself would be to become an In-itself and yet remain a For-itself. To achieve this union is impossible because in doing so one would be God. This does not mean that the For-itself and the In-itself are completely autonomous:

The In-itself and the For-itself are not juxtaposed. Quite to the contrary, the For-itself without the In-itself is something like an abstraction. It could no more exist than a color without form or than a sound without highness and without timbre; a consciousness which would be consciousness of nothing would be an absolute nothing.⁶

Slatanson, op. cit., p.21.

⁶Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), p. 621.

The For-itself is some sort of absence of being (of being-in-itself), or, as Sartre says, "The For-itself, in fact, is nothing but the pure nihilation of the In-itself; it is like a hole of being at the heart of Being."⁷ Because of this hole in being-in-itself the world appears, or, to use Sartre's terminology, thanks to the For-itself the world is. The For-itself does not create the being of things; rather it reveals and organizes them.

The flexibility of mind required for an understanding of Sartre is revealed in the following explication of his concept of "nihilation." The For-itself "nihilates" the In-itself in the following way: it (human consciousness) is conscious of a tree and it says that it is not that tree; therefore, the For-itself actually knows the tree (because it is not that tree) and knows what it is (human consciousness). For the For-itself to be this "nihilation" it must be empty. In order to effect this drastic emptying Sartre describes the For-itself as a pure "Unselbständigkeit": it is impersonal, non-substantial, a lack. There is no Subject-Object. There is only an object. This object is the Being-in-itself, of which the For-itself is nothing but the appearance or revelation.⁸

The For-itself is not a "nihilum absolutum"; rather it is a continual nihilation. Because of this capacity of "nihilation," Sartre considers human reality as the source of nothingness in the world; "being the only reality by which nothingness can happen in the world, it is itself 'non-being.'"⁹

⁷Ibid., p. 617

⁸Wilfrid Desan, The Tragic Finale (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 130.

⁹Ibid., p. 131.

Before describing the function of the category, it is necessary, first, to define the term "category." As Natanson states:

A theme is, most simply, a problem for inquiry; a category is an instrument for inquiring into a problem. As I interpret them, then, the existential categories operate specifically as philosophical instruments for exploring human experience. To suggest, as I have, that these categories are generated out of the awareness of man's being in reality is to claim that what is new and commanding in existentialism is its very procedure in exploring man's being through categories which are independent of commonsense experience and scientific method and which take as their object not particular features of human existence but existence itself.¹⁰

The procedure, then, will be to look at some of the works of Hemingway and Camus through the "lenses" of the existential categories of aloneness, dread, death, and absurdity. In each case the problem will be to show the relationship between the category and the general ground of being in reality as revealed in the selected works of Hemingway and Camus. When the experience of, let us say, dread, is encountered in the literature it will be this substantive experience, and not a theoretical need, which will give rise to the category. In other words, "the category is made possible by the experience and then the category makes possible the interpretation of the experience. This order is essential, for . . . [dread] is not an idea but an encountered experience which makes the idea possible."¹¹

¹⁰Natanson, op. cit., p.23.

¹¹Ibid., p.25.

CHAPTER II

DEFINITION OF THE CATEGORIES

I. ALONENESS

The following description of the existential category of aloneness, with its corollary of dread, is based almost entirely on Martin Heidegger's philosophy. Not only is Heidegger's description of aloneness and death more thorough than Sartre's, but it is also evident that the German language is particularly well-suited to express these concepts. Hence, throughout this thesis certain German terms will be utilized.

Heidegger's entire system is based on his description of Das Dasein, which is the "being-there" which is human existence (Heidegger's Dasein and Sartre's For-itself can be considered to be almost identical). Das Seiende is the "existent" or "what-is" (this is similar to the In-itself of Sartre).

In order to understand the meaning of "aloneness" it is necessary, first, to look at the structure of Das Dasein. Da-sein literally means "being-there"; "being-there" means being-in-the-world because the Dasein (a person) can only become aware of its possibilities through the existence of a reality that is other than itself, i.e., the "world."

The "world" does not mean a mere aggregate of things. We can think of the objects as interconnected only if we already have some idea of the world as a "whole" or "totality." As Heidegger puts it, the world is a "basic metaphysical concept," "the highest connecting unity of the whole," and the "absolute totality of objects which are available in finite knowledge." As such, the world is an "idea" rather than a collection or even co-ordination of facts and substances. The everyday, common-

sense attitude does not treat the world as a "metaphysical concept" but as an "environment" largely determined by immediate preoccupations. In other words, the determining factor in an environment is not its physical proximity but the "concern" it arouses in the Dasein.¹

Having described the way in which the Dasein is related to the world, it is now necessary to examine the Dasein as it exists in itself; thus the categories of aloneness, dread, and death will be revealed.

The Dasein:

. . . illuminates its own existence . . . As far as the Dasein is concerned the idea is clearly linked to its existence as 'pro-ject', as a being which is 'ahead-of' and 'outside' itself, for it is this basic characteristic which is at the source of all human knowledge and truth. In the immediate context of 'in-being', however, the view of the Dasein as human is tied to its awareness of itself as 'being-there' (Da-sein).²

This sense of "being there" forms one of our most essential features as human beings. And, as Grimsley explains:

This apprehension is not an intellectual reaction but a basic mood or feeling (Stimmung) which precedes all thought and which delivers us over to a sense of being 'there' in a fundamental situation which is inescapably given to us as something that is not and cannot be of our own choosing. To this feeling of being there, this sense of thereness, Heidegger gives the name Befindlichkeit. This original mood, which constitutes one of the Dasein's primary 'existentials' and so cannot be considered as a purely psychological reaction, is inseparable from the conviction that the Dasein is an existent that is 'thrown' or 'cast' into the world. This 'thrownness' or 'abandonment' is called Geworfenheit and is intended to express more than a mere awareness of ourselves as things. . . .

¹Ronald Grimsley, Existentialist Thought (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1955), p. 48.

²Ibid., p. 52.

A fact of this kind . . . is ever present to us as something that is always ready to call us back to an awareness of our position as beings who are incapable of getting behind or beyond the fact of our finitude.³

The sense of there-ness (Befindlichkeit) and the sense of abandonment (Geworfenheit), then, are the elements of the category of aloneness. It can be seen that this category is composed of other "existentials"; however, for our purpose of literary criticism it remains only to examine the "existential" of "fallenness" (Verfallenheit).

Verfallenheit refers to the almost irresistible urge of the self to see itself as "unauthentic" by immersing itself in the world of objects or das Man ("one" like many). This latter term will become clearer in the following description of the three features of Verfallenheit.

First, the Dasein may seek to obscure its aloneness by "chatter" (Gerede). This is the "small talk," the "appliance talk" that is used to fill up holes of silence. The second feature is "curiosity" (Neugier), in which the self moves restlessly from one object to another, ever seeking something new (cigarette filters, toothpastes, etc.) and concentrating on the surface of things to the exclusion of interest in our real being. The third characteristic of this everyday attitude is "ambiguity" (Zweideutigkeit). This is the inability to distinguish between the authentic and the unauthentic, between what is genuinely disclosed and what is inessential covering. It is an attitude of mind which:

. . . moves in the world of 'hearsay' and is preoccupied with being 'in the know' and listening to what 'they' say instead of to the call of 'abandoned Existence'. Such knowledge is in fact ignorance, for it stands in no relation to what really is.⁴

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 57.

II. DREAD

It has been shown that the category of aloneness is ultimate in itself; however, it may have a number of psychological derivatives, the chief of these being fear. The origin of fear is always to be located in some particular existent in the world, whether it be an object or another Dasein. Fear is always fear of "something," but the real source lies in the Dasein's sense of being "there." This relation of fear to the intimate structure of the Dasein:

. . . tends to be obscured through our habit of living in solidarity with others, but even there it is significant that we never experience genuine fear of someone with whom we have no kind of relationship. The constituent elements of fear may vary. When suddenness is associated with fear it becomes 'fright'. Fear of something strange or unfamiliar is 'horror'. If horror and suddenness are both present then we have 'terror'. . . In any case, fear is not ultimate in itself but must be derived from a more basic mood—that of dread (Angst).⁵

Unlike fear, which always depends on specific objects (consciously or unconsciously):

. . . dread is always undetermined in the sense that it does not depend on specific objects. We express this by saying it was a dread of 'Nothing'. . . the object of dread is 'nowhere': dread is of Nothing. It is this which explains the 'uncanny' nature of dread, the feeling that it is not a question of 'you' or 'me' but of 'one'. In dread we are, so to speak, in 'suspense' (wir schweben). We feel as though we have shed our meaningful identity as personal beings and that we have lost contact with the familiar world in order to be plunged into an awareness of crude existence. That is why we say that the object of dread is Nothing.⁶

The affective awareness of dread is inseparable from comprehension (Verstehen), which means more than mere rational apprehension in the

⁵Ibid., p. 58.

⁶Ibid., pp. 58-59.

"existential" sense that it is related to the sense of being "there." In this case the Dasein comprehends itself as being "nowhere," because it is unable to identify itself with the world's objects. Existential language will, therefore, express this comprehension in terms of aloneness which is the inevitable accompaniment of pure being-in-the-world. The "fallen" self, however, fears this type of language for it wants to talk about what it knows. It seeks refuge and peace in the familiar world of objects and chatters about them in order to escape from this disturbing feeling of strangeness. The function of dread is to tear the Dasein away from this false peace and this unauthentic preoccupation with objects in order to confront it with its possibility as genuine Dasein and so to free it for an authentic choice of itself as "abandoned" Existence.⁷

III. DEATH

In describing this category it is necessary, first of all, to distinguish between the everyday and the existential views of death. It is obvious that death is not an experience that can be undergone and then understood. If we try to solve this difficulty by considering the death of others we are faced with the obvious fact that another's death can never be the same as our own, and "that 'nobody can take away his dying from another' (SZ, p.240) . . . 'In so far as death is, it is essentially mine.' Thus Death is inseparable from Existence, for it is an essential characteristic of Existence to be 'mine' (cf. *supra*, p.46)."⁸

⁷Ibid., p. 61.

⁸Ibid., p. 63.

Since one of the characteristics of the Dasein is that it is the projective being which is free to choose its own possibilities, and since, moreover:

. . . possibility involves the idea of pro-ject and of being 'ahead', the Dasein may be described as a being that pro-jects itself 'towards' or 'for its own death' (Sein-zum-Tode), the word 'toward' (or 'for') expressing the present inference of the idea as a form of pro-ject. 'As soon as a man enters life', quotes Heidegger, 'he is old enough to die' (52, p. 245). Death is no mere accident but an expression of the Dasein's deepest possibilities.⁹

It has been shown that aloneness derives from the Dasein's awareness of being-in-the-world; also, that the ultimate possibility of the Dasein is death; therefore, it follows, that, if I am "thrown" into the world, it is in order to die there. Moreover, being-in-the-world as such was revealed through dread, so that dread of being-in-the-world inevitably involves dread of death. Being-for-death, therefore, "expresses the Dasein's supreme possibility as a being which pro-jects itself--in its 'abandonment'--for this end. In this sense we may speak of death as the Dasein's 'impossible possibility'.¹⁰

Since the Dasein is subject to Verfallenheit, this feature must be considered. The Dasein is constantly being lured away from its existential possibilities by the everyday attitude (das Man) toward death. By talking constantly (and reading the obituary column) about:

. . . the commonplace fact that people die daily and hourly, das Man transforms death into an event which (as we admit) must come to all

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

of us in the end but which has not happened to us personally and so is not yet to be feared . . . The attraction of this attitude is that it enables a man to escape from the disquiet which inevitably accompanies a frank grasping of the real meaning of death as an existential event which each individual must experience for himself. 'People know about certain death but they are not genuinely certain of their own' (SZ, p. 253).¹¹

Since the everyday attitude toward death is one that seeks to mask its awfulness, the authentic existence will accept the full meaning of death by "anticipating" or "running forward" (vorlaufen) to meet it. This does not mean that one should commit suicide because this would destroy the ultimate possibility of the Dasein. Authentic existence will "take on an attitude of expectation, of living with the thought of death, while still living its role as a being concerned with the world. A conscious realization of the finitude of existence will give us the power to detach ourselves from the tyranny of death by allowing us to live on without being death's dupes."¹²

Heidegger sums up "authentic" Being-toward-death as follows:

The running forward in thought reveals to Dasein that it is lost in the 'oneself' and brings it face to face with the potentiality of being itself, primarily unaided by the care of others, but itself in the passionate, actual Freedom-towards-death (Freiheit ~~zum~~ Tode), being certain of it and dreading it, yet being independent of the illusions of the 'one like many'.¹³

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., p. 64.

¹³Martin Heidegger (Werner Brock, translator), Existence and Being (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1949), p. 73.

IV. ABSURDITY

The following description of the category of absurdity is taken almost entirely from The Myth of Sisyphus by Albert Camus. In a brief note to the reader at the beginning of the book, Camus emphasizes the fact that his purpose is to "deal with an absurd sensitivity that can be found widespread in our age--and not with an absurd philosophy There will be found here merely the description, in the pure state, of an intellectual malady. No metaphysic, no belief is involved in it for the moment."¹⁴

Camus explains that an awareness of absurdity may come about in several ways. After a period of monotonous routine a certain weariness is produced, then, one day the "why" arises. After the inauguration of the impulse of consciousness, one either returns to the former mode of living, or, one is definitely awakened to the absurdity of existence. In this awakened state one feels that "tomorrow" is his worst enemy, and that one must come to terms with the present. And, at the end of this awakening comes, in time, the consequences: suicide or recovery.¹⁵

This "awakening" also produces the feeling that the world is "thick and strange." Nature appears to be foreign and inhuman. Camus interprets this to mean that the images and designs that have been attached to nature for centuries have now fallen away and nature is transformed

¹⁴Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1955), p. 2.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 13.

and rebecomes itself before our eyes.

The feeling of absurdity also reveals the foreign and inhuman aspects of other men:

. . . At certain moments of lucidity, the mechanical aspect of their gestures, their meaningless pantomime makes silly everything that surrounds them. A man is talking on the telephone behind a glass partition; you cannot hear him, but you see his incomprehensible dumb show: you wonder why he is alive. This discomfort in the face of man's own inhumanity, this incalculable tumble before the image of what we are, this "mauxaise," as a writer of today calls it, is also the absurd. Likewise the stranger who at certain seconds comes to meet us in a mirror, the familiar and yet alarming brother we encounter in our own photographs is also the absurd.¹⁶

This awakening to the foreignness of the world and of other men does not find its full substance until the certainty of death is brought to mind. The horror of death comes from "the mathematical aspect of the event. If time frightens us, this is because it works out the problem and the solution comes afterward."¹⁷

Camus explains that he does not enumerate these things as discoveries; rather, these experiences which are common in literature and philosophy had to be spoken of to open the discussion of the consequences of these experiences. Before examining these consequences, Camus makes an inventory of absurdity on the level of man's intelligence. Here he finds that a man is only certain that he exists and that the world exists, and that all the rest is construction. Even the certitude of man's existence cannot be justified or defined by the intelligence. Our mind desires to

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 14-15.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 15.

understand the world, to find unity in it, but finds only paradox.

Thus, Camus sees three "absurd walls" which block the mind's search for truth, for unity, and for a meaningful life based on hope.

A complete definition of absurdity is possible now that the affective and cognitive aspects of the absurd have been examined. As Hanna explains:

. . . the absurd always involves a contradiction between a given state of affairs and reality itself, between one's intentions and the given possibilities, between an action and a world which is not in accord with that action. Obviously, then, the Absurd is not a fact which can be pinned down; it is a comparison between two things. The Absurd is neither one nor the other of its two terms; it arises from the confrontation, or, more precisely, from their divorce. . . . For the moment, then, we experience the Absurd as the unique and vital link between man and the world. And through the Absurd we know three things with certainty: (1) what man desires, (2) what the world offers, (3) what unites man and the world.¹⁸

Now, what are the consequences of this "absurd line of reasoning"? Since the absurd is our one certainty, there are but two courses of action remaining: we may escape this certainty through suicide, through "philosophical suicide" (in which we deny one of the terms), make the Kierkegaardian "leap" of faith and hope; or, on the other hand, "we may take upon ourselves the agonising burden of the Absurd in which we unlearn to hope, cling to our lucidity, and remain in continual revolt against the world."¹⁹

These latter consequences need to be examined in greater detail. In the first, revolt, the absurd man's only desire is to live "without

¹⁸Thomas Hanna, The Thought and Art of Albert Camus (Chicago: Henry Regnary Company, 1958), pp. 17-18.

¹⁹Ibid., p.23.

appeal" to anything beyond human experience; to maintain an obstinate absurdity which is in constant revolt against the world. And, underlying all this, the absurd man "feels innocent. To tell the truth that is all he feels—his irreparable innocence. This is what allows him everything."²⁰ This revolt "restores greatness to life; it is the beauty of the human mind at grips with a reality which exceeds it. Nothing is equal to this spectacle of human pride reaffirming itself in defiance of the world. Man must die unreconciled to the world, even as he has lived in defiance."²¹

The second consequence of the absurd is freedom. The ordinary man who lives thinking of the future, deciding upon an aim, having a preference has, to the extent that he has planned his life as though it had meaning, limited his freedom. The absurd man, on the other hand, who sees no meaning in anything that can be thought or done is no longer restricted to one thought or action. Absurd freedom, "placing existence in the perspective of death, diverts the attention of the individual from his aims, that have suddenly become paltry, and concentrates it upon the will to live."²² This, says Camus, is the only freedom that the human heart can live and feel.

The third consequence of the absurd is passion. Once a man is awakened and becomes indifferent to the future he will live in acute

²⁰Camus, op. cit., p. 53.

²¹Camus, op. cit., pp. 23-24.

²²Albert Maquet, Albert Camus: The Invincible Summer (New York: George Braziller, 1958), pp. 46-47.

awareness of the present. If the world has no meaning, there is no scale of values by which to judge our conduct. Being conscious of "one's life, one's revolt, one's freedom, and to the maximum, is living, and to the maximum."²³ What counts is "not the best living but the most living."²⁴

Having completed the description of the consequences, Camus states:

Having started from an anguished awareness of the inhuman, the meditation on the absurd returns at the end of its itinerary to the very heart of the passionate flames of human revolt.²⁵

After elaborating upon the above basic concepts, Camus concludes his essay with an explanation of the myth of Sisyphus. As the myth goes, the Gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly roll a rock to the top of a mountain, whence it would roll back of its own weight. For Camus, Sisyphus is the absurd hero:

He is, as much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing.

.....

If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would his torture be, indeed, if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him? The workman of today works every day in his life at the same tasks, and his fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious. Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition: it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn.²⁶

²³Camus, op. cit., p. 63.

²⁴Ibid., p. 61.

²⁵Ibid., p. 64.

²⁶Ibid., p. 121.

Camus points out that the tragedy of Oedipus begins from the moment he knows his fate. "Yet at the same moment, blind and desperate, he realizes that the only bond linking him to the world is the cool hand of a girl. Then a tremendous remark rings out: 'Despite so many ordeals, my advanced age and the nobility of my soul makes me conclude that all is well.'"²⁷

According to Camus, happiness and the absurd are inseparable. They are two sons of the same earth. Although happiness does not necessarily spring from the absurd discovery, the feeling of the absurd does spring from happiness. The "all is well" of Oedipus is sacred to Camus. It teaches that all has not been exhausted; it makes of fate a human matter, which must be settled among men.

Camus concludes his essay with the following lyrical passage:

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negated the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.²⁸

²⁷Ibid., p. 122.

²⁸Ibid., p. 123.

CHAPTER III

TWO SHORT STORIES OF HEMINGWAY

I. A CLEAN, WELL-LIGHTED PLACE

This short story is one of the most succinct examples of existentialism in literature that this writer has yet encountered. In fact, some of the passages read like the text of Sartre's Being and Nothingness.

In the very first page we are provided with a superb example of the category of aloneness and its concomitants of dread and anguish. An old man, who has recently tried to commit suicide, is sitting alone in a clean, well-lighted cafe drinking brandy. Two waiters, one young the other an older man, are waiting for him to leave—as they do almost every night—so that they can close. When asked why the old man tried to commit suicide, one waiter replies, "He was in despair." The other asks, "What about?" He receives the reply, "Nothing."

Indeed, what better answer could be given when it is realized that human reality is the source of nothingness in the world. In the case of the old man, his age and lack of friends have made him more acutely aware of this nothingness, and necessarily, the aloneness and dread that are a part of being-in-the-world. The old man has tried to escape these facts of the human condition by attempting suicide. But he has failed, and has returned to his "unauthentic" mode of existence.

In order to clarify, let us consider how this old man should act if he were an "authentic" person. In this sense the old man would choose

to accept his aloneness with its dread and anguish (which can never be eliminated because it is part of being-in-the-world), and loneliness (which could be changed if he wished). Also, he would undergo the "dreadful freedom" of constructing of the absurd world an ordered absurdity that only he—as everyone—can make.

The older waiter is almost in the same situation as the old man. He is reluctant to close because there may be others who need a clean, well-lighted cafe. After turning off the light he holds the following conversation with himself:

. . . It is the light of course but it is necessary that the place be clean and pleasant. . . . What did he fear? It was not fear or dread. It was a nothing that he knew too well. It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too. It was only that and light was all it needed and a certain cleanliness and order. Some lived in it and never felt it but he knew it all was nada y pues nada y nada y pues nada. Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name thy kingdom nada thy will be nada in nada as it is in nada. Give us this nada our . (etc.) . . .¹

Then, after having a cup of coffee in a bar that was open all night:

. . . he would go home to his room. He would lie in bed and finally, with daylight, he would go to sleep. After all, he said to himself, it is probably only insomnia. Many must have it.²

One can readily see why this story has so often been called "pointless" or "meaningless." It would probably surprise those who express the above view that the point of the story is meaninglessness—the meaninglessness of life.

¹The Hemingway Reader, Charles Poore, editor (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 421.

²Ibid., pp. 421-422.

Now it seems to this writer that it would be quite difficult to appreciate this story fully without an understanding of existentialist philosophy. As such, it provides an excellent test case to help determine the value of the method of criticism being proposed here.

As it has been stated previously, the for-itself is necessarily Nothingness because being must reveal itself to non-being. Awareness of this fact means that one is aware of the strangeness and absurdity of the world. This awareness emerges in a mood of dread, and the object of dread is Nothing. Also, it was shown that an awareness of the absurdity of the world produces a sense of aloneness.

Although all humans, sooner or later, experience the aloneness which is a fundamental feature of Dasein, still, circumstances can help to accelerate this awareness. In the case of the younger waiter, his youth, job, and the wife waiting in bed for him "protect" him-most of the time-from an awareness of "abandoned" existence. On the other hand, in the case of the old man and the older waiter, their age, lack of friends and family have almost forced upon them the realization of the nothingness that is the foundation of "pure" existence.

Now, as Camus explains, an awareness of the absurdity of human existence leads to the "one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy."³

³Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays," Translated by Justin O'Brien. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955.)

As we have seen, the old man has judged that his life is not worth living, and one feels that he will soon try again to commit suicide. The older waiter, on the other hand, is aware that "It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too"; but, we know--from the fact that he is alive--that life is worth living. And one of the main things that makes life worth living is a clean, well-lighted cafe. "It was the light of course but it is necessary that the place be clean and pleasant."

Employing our method of criticism, we see that the older waiter has decided to make what he can out of this absurd existence without appealing to anything beyond human experience (Our nada who art in nada...). Thus, a clean, well-lighted cafe is an oasis of Something in this vast desert of Nothing. If life has meaning, it is the meaning we find in it. Cleanliness implies that one is making the best of the human condition; it implies a respect for life. The warm light of a quiet cafe ("You do not want music.") enables a person to be aware of something other than one's thoughts. Of course it has been stated that an awareness of one's aloneness and dread is a part of authentic existence. This is true; however, to be aware of these conditions constantly would be morbidity.

Upon reading this short story this writer had the definite conviction that he knew what Hemingway was about. This writer's family owned a neighborhood bar in a mining town in Pennsylvania and has known some of these old men who need a clean, well-lighted place, who would sit silently for hours contentedly sipping a schooner of beer.

Because of the above personal experience, this writer feels that this story—one of Hemingway's own favorites—is a truly great work of literary art. To present such subtle, inexplicable feelings in a mere five pages is certainly a stroke of literary genius.

In looking at Hemingway's technique in this story, we see a superb example of the perfect embodiment of subject matter in style. Nothingness is the subject matter and it is presented in simple, bare sentences without explanation or commentary. Mark Schorer remarks that "Hemingway's early subject, the exhaustion of value, was perfectly investigated and invested by his bare style, and in story after story, no meaning at all is to be inferred from the fiction except as the style itself suggests that there is no meaning in life."⁴ In the same article, discussing the tension between the subject matter and the artist's perspective upon it, Schorer observes that "Hemingway's early work makes a moving splendor from nothingness."⁵

Now, we may properly inquire: What has our method of criticism revealed? First, it has reaffirmed the view of other critics that Hemingway's purpose is to express the nothingness of human existence. Secondly, while these critics intimate that this subject is anxious, our method of criticism has revealed that nothingness is the foundation of being in reality. As such, it is not a morbid,

⁴Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery," in Forms of Modern Fiction, ed. Van O'Connor (ed.), (U. of Minn. Press, 1943), p. 20.

⁵Ibid., p. 28.

meaningless subject; on the contrary, it is one of the most realistic and meaningful of all subjects.

II. THE SHORT HAPPY LIFE OF FRANCIS MACOMBER

This short story is a very clear, dramatic illustration of the category of death. Francis Macomber and his wife are on safari in Africa. When the story opens Macomber has already shown himself to be a coward by running away from a charging lion. In addition, he continues to commit errors. He asks Wilson, the guide, not to mention his cowardice to other people. When Wilson insults him because of this, Macomber spinelessly apologizes. To make matters worse his wife hounds him without mercy.

The next day Macomber has a chance to redeem himself when a lion, which he has wounded badly, lies in wait for the hunting party. Again Macomber displays his cowardice by running wildly in panic when the lion charges. After Wilson kills the lion, Margot Macomber, who has witnessed the incident, celebrates the complete loss of her husband's authority by leaning in front of him and kissing Wilson on the mouth. Later that night Margot spends two hours with Wilson while Macomber lies awake waiting for her to return.

Needless to say, Macomber presents a pathetic figure. Later, however, while hunting buffalo, Macomber suddenly loses his fear. Ecstatic over his new discovery he tells Wilson, "You know I don't think I'd ever be afraid of anything again...Something happened in me after we first saw the buff and started after him. Like

a dam bursting. It was pure excitement."⁶

Hemingway explains the change in the following passage:

It had taken a strange chance of hunting, a sudden precipitation into action without opportunity for worrying beforehand, to bring this about with Macomber, but regardless of how it had happened it had most certainly happened... Fear gave like an operation. Something else grew in its place. Main thing a man had. Made him into a man."⁷

Wilson, who is quite pleased with the change, reveals to Macomber part of his philosophy of life by quoting the following passage from Shakespeare:

By my troth, I care not; a man can die but once; we owe God a death and let it go which way it will he that dies this year is quit for the next.⁸

Philip Young points out that Hemingway cited this passage in an introduction to a collection of his war stories in 1942 in which he revealed that he learned courage in 1917 from a British officer (Wilson is very British) who quoted the identical passage.

In any case, Macomber's new, happy life proves to be a rather short one. His wife, who has been witnessing the entire transformation, realizes that she has now lost control over her husband. When Macomber goes after a wounded buffalo she, ostensibly aiming at the charging beast, kills him.

Before proceeding with the application of the category, it needs to be pointed out that the subject of death runs throughout all of Hemingway's work. Young offers the explanation that his

⁶Hemingway Reader, p. 563.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

preoccupation with death results from an overexposure to it. And, Young goes on to say that Hemingway spent much time witnessing and participating in many wars and bullfights, and a great deal of time killing animals and fish "in order that he might not kill himself. He said it again in writing that 'when a man is still in rebellion against death he has pleasure in taking to himself one of the god-like attributes: that of giving it.'"⁹

Young examines Hemingway's personality in the light of Freud's theory formulated in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, and some recent theories of psychopathology. The brief analysis is well done, and many sections are quite reasonable. If one wishes the ground for this psychological explanation, however, it is necessary to turn to existentialism. But our concern here is not primarily Hemingway's personality. The above has been included to show that the subject of death in Hemingway's work is extremely appropriate for existentialism because almost all of the violent experiences of Hemingway's heroes have been experienced by Hemingway himself. We can be sure then, in applying our category here and elsewhere in Hemingway, that there is not very much that is "made up." In the light of this knowledge we can venture to say that what will be said about Macomber can also be partially applied to Hemingway.

At the onset of the story Macomber can be seen to be a highly "unauthentic" person. And, since he is wealthy, we can assume that

⁹Philip Young, Ernest Hemingway. (New York: Rinehart, 1952), p. 133.

this has made him especially vulnerable to the methods used by das Man to avoid looking at the existential facts of the Dasein.

When Macomber does realize himself as Sein-zum-Tode (being-toward-death), it is not a conscious, deliberate act. Rather, as we have already said, it was a "strange chance of hunting, a sudden precipitation in a action without worrying beforehand, to bring this about with Macomber..."

Whatever the cause, the effect is the same: Macomber "ran forward" (Vorlaufen) to meet death (through his fairly dangerous situation); he has freed himself from the tyranny of death and laid the foundations of freedom as freedom-for-death which is "certain of itself and full of dread."

Whether Macomber would have accepted the dread, which undoubtedly would have emerged later, we can only guess. And if he had, we can be certain that he would have been led to accept the dread that necessarily accompanies the aloneness of being-in-the-world; and thus would have freed himself from his wife. That he did become "authentic" for a short, happy time we are certain-- because that is why his wife murdered him.

CHAPTER IV

A FAREWELL TO ARMS

Because of the length of this novel it will be necessary to change the method by which the categories are applied. Here, and in The Stranger, each significant character will be examined through the "lenses" of the categories, rather than in the manner previously applied.

The way in which the characters of Hemingway (and Camus) reveal themselves is exquisitely suitable for existential interpretation; or, as Sartre observes:

The heroes of Hemingway . . . never explain themselves--do not allow themselves to be dissected. They act only. Some have said they were blind and deaf, that they allowed themselves to be buffeted by their own destiny. This is false and unjust. On the contrary, each of their spontaneous reactions is completely what it would be in real life--something that lives and does not contemplate itself. We learned from Hemingway to depict, without commentaries, without explanations, without moral judgments, the actions of our characters. The reader understands them because he sees them born and formed in a situation which has been made understandable to him. They live because they erupt suddenly as from a deep well. To analyze them would be to kill them.¹

The existentialist philosophers constantly point out the rather disturbing fact that a person is what he does, and has done; not what he intended to do. That Hemingway's characters act like beings in reality is the very reason they "stick to" the reader's personality--the reason why an entire generation imitated Lady Brett

¹Jean-Paul Sartre, "American Novelists in French Eyes," Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 178 (August, 1946), p. 117.

Ashley, Jake Barnes, and others.

To say this is also to say that these characters have been presented to the reader in a very vivid way. Or, putting it another way, Hemingway is a skilled artist. And, like many great artists (especially great ballet dancers), his work is deceptively simple—as many who have tried to imitate him will testify by their failures. Oddly enough, the writers who have successfully imitated Hemingway have been the French; however, this will be discussed later. Briefly stated, the point is that Hemingway's characters are real because they are existentially real. This is not to say that Hemingway did this consciously; rather, that he did it as an intuitive artist. Since it is one of the purposes of literary criticism to analyze these intuitive products, it follows that our purpose here will be to describe Hemingway's characters in the light of existentialism in order to make them more understandable. Further, it can be said that it is difficult to understand these characters without the help of existential philosophy—because existentialism describes us to ourselves.

Now, Hemingway's characters do not act on a bare stage. Much of his skill as an artist derives from his ability to depict his backgrounds subtly and powerfully. As Carlos Baker has observed about the opening chapter:

...It is a generically rendered landscape with thousands of moving figures. It does much more than start the book. It helps to establish the dominant mood (which is one of doom), plants a series of important images for future symbolic cultivation, and subtly compels the reader into the position of a

detached observer.²

The two most important symbols Hemingway employs are those of the "Home and Not-Home," as Baker calls them. Neither "is truly conceptualistic; each is a kind of poetic intuition, charged with emotional values and woven like a cable of many strands."³ Baker finds that the Home-concept;

.....is associated with the mountains; with cold-dry weather; with peace and quiet; with love, dignity, health, happiness, and the good life; and with worship or at least the consciousness of God. The Not-Home concept is associated with low-lying plains; with rain and fog; with obscenity, indignity, disease, suffering, nervousness, war and death; and with irreligion.⁴

Another symbol of importance which Hemingway employs is that of rain. It is a disaster-symbol: the rains begin just before Henry's return to the front, it rains intermittently throughout the disastrous retreat, Henry's flight to Stresa, the time of his reunion with Catherine, the escape to Switzerland, and at the time of Catherine's death.

I. LT. FREDERIC HENRY

In looking at the character of Lt. Henry through the "lens" of existentialism, it immediately becomes apparent ~~that~~ his life is permeated with the indifference which characterizes the absurd man. Reminiscing about his leave, he remembers "nights in bed, drunk, when you know that that was all there was, . . . and the world all

²Carlos Baker, Hemingway, The Writer as Artist (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton U. Press, 1952), p. 94.

³Ibid., p. 102.

⁴Ibid.

unreal in the dark and so exciting that you must resume again unknowing and not caring in the night, sure that this was all and all and all and not caring."⁵

When asked by Catherine why he had joined the Italian army, he replies, "I don't know . . . There isn't always an explanation for everything." Then, a few days later, while kissing Catherine, he thinks, "I did not care what I was getting into." In Milan, when Catherine asks him if he is enjoying the races, he replies, "Yes. I guess I do." Or, when asked by the priest what he believes in, answers, "In sleep." Finally, there is the very striking example of Henry's awareness of the finitude, the "mineness" of human existence which is revealed in his remark to Catherine that, "You always feel trapped biologically."

Lt. Henry's only interests in life seem to be liquor and his love for Catherine Barkley. Even this love is on a day-to-day basis--he never seriously thinks about the future. In fact, he frequently makes remarks, such as, "Let's not think about anything"; or, "I lay down on the bed and tried to keep from thinking."

It can be pointed out that it is war time, which is conducive to this kind of behavior. However, when we compare Lt. Henry's behavior with those around him (Rinaldi thinks of the fine surgeon he is becoming; Ettore, the loud-mouthed hero, hoped to become a captain), we are left with the feeling that he has always been this way--at least as an adult. Even his slight patriotism has been

⁵Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms (Grosset and Dunlap, 1929), p. 13.

washed away by his plunge into the river; and, after this escape he makes "a separate peace." Further evidence of this "separate peace" is provided in the following remarkable passage:

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and had read them, on proclamations that were slapped up by billposters over other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to bear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of the places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.⁶

Here we see the paradoxical picture of a man who acts as though he were aware of the absurdity that arises when one is "awakened" to the strangeness of the universe, yet, has not revealed any of the consequences of this awakening. From what we know of Lt. Henry, we must conclude that this is the situation; that he acts like the "absurd" man, but is not conscious of this absurdity—with the exception of his passion for the present: going to bed with Catherine, liquor, lack of plans for the future, etc.

Now we may properly ask if Hemingway's intuition of "pure" existence has reached its limits. Not exactly. Lt. Henry does reveal occasionally that he is vaguely aware of the meaning of being in reality. In a hotel room with Catherine, shortly after the retreat, he thinks to himself:

⁶Ibid., p. 196.

...I know that the night is not the same as the day: that all things are different, that the things of the night cannot be explained in the day, because then they do not exist, and the night can be a dreadful time for lonely people once their loneliness has started.....If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks every one and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry.⁷

Here we see both an obscure awareness of aloneness and Sein-zum-Tode, with the necessary dread that accompanies these—but, tinged with a note of bitterness, indicating that Lt. Henry is not fully aware of the meaning of "being-there."

Lt. Henry's "awakening" is not far distant, however. The death of the woman he loves will produce a total awareness of the meaning of human existence—an awareness that was inevitable in view of his "absurd" mode of living. Learning that the baby has been born dead (it is raining outside), he thinks to himself:

....Poor little kid. I wished the hell I'd been choked like that. No I didn't. Still there would not be all this dying to go through. Now Catherine would die. That was what you did...You died. You did not know what it was about. You never had time to learn...they killed you in the end. You could count count on that. Stay around and they would kill you.⁸

The inevitable "Awakening" has come about through an awareness of Sein-zum-Tode: Henry realizes that one is born in the world in order to die there without knowing why—"That was what you did. You died. You did not know what it was all about. You never had time to learn...." Henry's vivid realization of the meaning of

⁷Ibid., pp. 265-266.

⁸Ibid., p. 350.

human existence brings to mind a similar experience in his past:

Once in camp I put a log on top of the fire and it was full of ants. As it commenced to burn, the ants swarmed out and went first toward the centre where the fire was; then turned back and ran toward the end. When there were enough on the end they fell off into the fire. Some got out, their bodies burnt and flattened, and went off not knowing where they were going. But most of them went toward the fire and then back toward the end and swarmed on the cool end and finally fell off into the fire. I remember thinking at the time that it was the end of the world and a splendid chance to be a messiah and lift the log off the fire and throw it out where the ants could get off onto the ground. But I did not do anything but throw a tin cup of water on the log, so that I would have the cup empty to put whiskey in before I added water to it. I think the cup of water on the burning log only steamed the ants.⁹

The thought "that it was the end of the world" reveals the source of Lt. Henry's indifference. At some time in the past he realized that one is cast into the world in order to die there; and apparently the vague memory of this experience has helped to form his basic attitude toward life--indifference. It is this indifferent attitude which enabled Henry to say: "I'm happy. I've always been happy."

Without the aid of existentialist philosophy this combination of happiness and indifference seems quite paradoxical. On the other hand, the application of our existential method of criticism shows us that this combination is "authentic." Thus, it provides a remarkable insight into Hemingway's intuitive ability to portray real characters. It helps to explain the reason why Hemingway's characters are readily absorbed by the reader's personality.

Now, it has been said that, once one awakens to absurdity,

⁹Ibid.

certain consequences must follow. This is true; however, the plot of the novel is such that it was almost impossible for Hemingway to reveal these consequences in Henry without weakening the unity of the novel considerably. Thus, the character of Lt. Frederic Henry does not entirely parallel the description of the "authentic" individual of existentialism. That Hemingway can portray a completely "authentic" character will be seen in the following analysis of Catherine Barkley.

II. CATHERINE BARKLEY

One of the most exciting and rewarding results of this thesis was the interpretation of the character of Catherine Barkley. It was exciting because it was the first opportunity for this writer to present what seems to be an original interpretation of one of Hemingway's heroines.

The complaint most often heard about Hemingway's heroines is that they are not real, that they represent two extremes; either they are "deadly" such as Lady Brett Ashley, or "amoeba-like" females, such as Maria in For Whom the Bell Tolls. These latter types, Edmund Wilson remarks, "are incredible wish-projections, youthfully erotic dream girls, or impossibly romantic ideals of wife-hood. They bear, it seems, little resemblance to the women with whom one is acquainted....." Catherine Barkley and Frederic Henry, at least during the period of their Swiss idyll, strike him as "not in themselves convincing as human personalities." Their relationship is

merely an idealization, "the abstraction of a lyric emotion."¹⁰

Mr. Malcolm Cowley evidently shares the above view. "To me," writes Cowley, "Catherine is only a woman at the beginning of the book, in her near madness."¹¹

Carlos Baker defends Hemingway against the above criticism by pointing out that:

....all of Hemingway's heroines, like all of his heroes, are placed in a special kind of accelerated world. We do not see them pattering in their kitchens, but only dreaming of that as a desirable possibility. They are never presented as harassed mothers; their entire orientation tends to be, in this connection, premarital. Wars and revolutions, the inevitable enemies of peace and domesticity, set them adrift or destroy their lives. Yet they contrive to embody the image of home, the idea if not the actuality of the married state, and where they are, whatever the outward threats, home is.¹²

Baker further proposes that part of the reason Catherine is not convincing to Mr. Wilson is "the fact that a majority of the characters in the first two novels are oddly rootless. . . . We know nothing about Henry's background, and next to nothing about Catherine Barkley's. . . . We are seldom permitted to know them in depth. The inclination is to accept them for what they do more than for what they are."¹³

This feeling, says Baker, can be accounted for in two ways: one is Hemingway's esthetic assumptions as of 1923-1929; the other is a natural consequence of the kind of stories he chose to tell. His assumption that character is revealed through action will tend to

¹⁰The three remarks by Wilson are quoted in Baker, op. cit., pp. 110-111.

¹¹Quoted in Baker, Loc. cit.

¹²Ibid., pp. 113-114.

¹³Ibid.

produce a kind of fiction in which characterization-in-depth is in a measure sacrificed to the exigencies of narrative movement. Even here a close reading will reveal more in the way of nuances of light and shade, or in subtle shifts of motivation, than one at first imagined was there. This half-concealed power is explained by Hemingway's carefully controlled habit of understatement. It might be pointed out, also, that nearly all of the important characters in the first two novels are "displaced persons"--persons severed from nearly everything they have known before.¹⁴

In the absence of other evidence, concludes Baker, it is wisest to assume that Hemingway knew what he was doing. To support this claim, Baker points out the skill with which Hemingway could quickly draw a minor portrait fully and roundedly. Two examples are the wonderful old Count Greffi, with whom Henry plays at billiards and philosophy, and the Milanese surgeon who performs the operation on Henry's leg.¹⁵

Finally, Baker concludes his defense against the criticism that Hemingway has somehow failed in the credible characterization of Catherine with a rather disappointing, abstract explanation. Baker observes a tendenz in the novel to move from concretion to abstraction. Because of this Catherine becomes more of an abstraction of love than a down-to-earth woman in love and in pain. She becomes more symbolic as the novel proceeds and her death completes

¹⁴Ibid., p. 114.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 115.

the symbolic structure of the edifice of tragedy so carefully erected.¹⁶

In regard to this latter point, Philip Young also points out that Catherine's death completes the symbolic structure. When the last farewell to arms is taken, the two stories of love and war are as one. Young's general opinion of Catherine is as follows:

Memorable too, in her devotion and her ordeal—though much less memorable, and much less real—is Henry's English mistress. Idealized past the fondest belief of most people, and even the more realistic wishes of some, compliant, and bearing unmistakable indication of the troubles to come when she will appear as mistress of heroes to come, Catherine Barkley has at least some character in her own right, and is both the first true "Hemingway heroine," and the most convincing one.¹⁷

With Mr. Young's qualified praise of Catherine as a convincing character in mind, we shall proceed to show that Catherine Barkley is one of the most realistic of Hemingway's characters.

When Catherine first meets Lt. Frederic Henry, she is in the process of recovering from the shock of her fiance's death in the war. She is nervous, and "a little bit crazy." She calls the beginning of their love affair a "rotten game," but, as their love for each other becomes more genuine, Catherine seems almost to lose her identity: "There isn't any me. I'm you. Don't make up a separate me." Her only desire in life is to do whatever Lt. Henry wants, "We have such a fine time" . . . "I don't take any interest in anything else any more."

Throughout the novel Catherine behaves in this same compliant, never-complaining manner. Without doing deeper into the character of

¹⁶Ibid., p. 116.

¹⁷Young, op. cit., pp. 62-63.

Catherine it can easily be seen why she seems an "abstraction of a lyric emotion." However, as soon as we look at the character of Catherine Barkley through the "lens" of existentialism, an amazingly realistic portrait emerges. Catherine's compliant manner derives from her "awakening" to the absurdity of human existence. The shock of her fiance's death has made her aware of the precariousness of her own existence. This realization of Sein-zum-Tode has been dramatically revealed to Catherine in the form of a premonition. In Frederic's room in the hospital in Milan, Frederic coaxes her to tell him why she is afraid of the rain that is falling outside:

"All right. I'm afraid of the rain because sometimes I see me dead in it."

"It's all nonsense. It's only nonsense. I'm not afraid of the rain. I'm not afraid of the rain. Oh, oh, God, I wish I wasn't."¹⁸

Lt. Henry comforts her and she stops crying. "But outside it kept on raining."

This mood of dread is not a rarity in Catherine's life. Several weeks later, in the same room, Henry and Catherine are talking about bravery and death. Lt. Henry says:

"Nothing ever happens to the brave."

"They die of course."

"But only once."

"I don't know. Who said that?"

"The coward dies a thousand deaths, the brave but one?"

"Of course. Who said it?"

"I don't know."

"He was probably a coward," she said. "He knew a great deal about cowards but nothing about the brave. The brave dies perhaps two thousand deaths if he is intelligent. He simply doesn't mention them."

¹⁸Hemingway, op. cit., p. 135.

"I don't know. It's hard to see inside the head of the brave."

"Yes. That's how they keep that way."

"You're an authority."

"You're right, darling. That was deserved."

"You're brave."

"No," she said. "But I would like to be."¹⁹

Here we see an extraordinary literary example of Schein-zustande and the dread that accompanies this awareness. It is quite clear that this dread (which is part of "authentic" existence) is part of Catherine's character. When the Dasein realizes itself as being-toward-death, it must also realize itself as being-in-the-world for this reason. That is, the Dasein realizes its aloneness in a mood of dread. Catherine's awareness of the aloneness of authentic existence is revealed in the use of "they" to refer to anyone else except herself and Frederic. Immediately preceding the passage just quoted, Catherine replied to Henry's statement, "We won't fight." as follows:

"We mustn't. Because there's only us two and in the world there's all the rest of them. If anything comes between us we're gone and then they have us."²⁰

While attending the races in Milan, Catherine wants to get away from the crowd. After they are seated at a small table, Catherine asks:

"Don't you like it better when we're alone?"

"Yes," I said.

"I felt very lonely when they were all there."²¹

The fact that Catherine has "awakened" to the absurdity of

¹⁹Ibid., p. 149.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., p. 141.

of human existence, that she has taken on the anguishing burden of dread which belongs to authentic existence, is revealed in the consequences of absurdity: revolt, freedom, and passion.

By placing her existence in the perspective of death, Catherine is indifferent to the future--she rarely, if ever, makes any plans or speaks of the future. Thus, she concentrates on the will to live. In the conversation where Catherine tells Henry about her pregnancy, Catherine remarks, "... life isn't hard to manage when you've nothing to lose." When Henry asks, "What do you mean?" Catherine replies, "Nothing. I was only thinking how small obstacles seemed that once were so big." With "nothing to lose" Catherine is free to choose anything; and she has chosen to love Lt. Henry. With no other aims to restrict this choice she experiences the passion of the present. That she does feel this passion for life is revealed during the stay in the mountain hut in Switzerland. Catherine remarks to Henry: "I'm just very, very, very happy." And, indeed, there is little evidence throughout the novel to prove that Catherine was not happy most of the time.

Now, one other consequence of absurdity needs to be described--and the most important--revolt. In this description it will be seen that Catherine Barkley is probably one of the most striking examples of the "absurd" heroine in modern literature. As a matter of fact, her behavior follows exactly the description of the "absurd" hero in Camus' The Myth of Sisyphus.

As we have seen, the absurd person decides to live without appeal to anything beyond human experience. Catherine fits this

description in the sense that she gives no indication of believing in God. While registering in the hospital to have the baby, Catherine "said she had no religion . . ." Even when she is in fierce pain and near death she never begs for God's help.

Catherine reveals another remarkable resemblance to Camus' hero. "The absurd man," says Camus, "feels innocent. To tell the truth that is all he feels--his irreparable innocence. This is what allows him everything."²² On the night before Lt. Henry's return to the front, while in a hotel room, Catherine remarks:

"I wish we could do something really sinful," . . .

"Everything we do seems so innocent and simple. I can't believe we do anything wrong."²³

This revolt, with the feeling of innocence that accompanies it, "restores greatness to life," says Camus, " . . . Nothing is equal to this spectacle of human pride reaffirming itself in defiance of the world. Man must die unreconciled to the world, even as he has lived in defiance."²⁴ Again, Catherine fits this description aptly. As a nurse she knew that she would have trouble giving birth; however, she defied this fact--and paid dearly for it. At the very end of her life she remains unreconciled to the absurdity of life (maintains both factors in the proposition) and dies, as she has lived, without appeal to anything outside of human experience. Immediately before the last "farewell to arms," Catherine says to Henry:

²² Camus, loc. cit.

²³ Hemingway, op. cit., p. 164.

²⁴ Anna, loc. cit.

"I'm going to die," she said; then waited and said, "I hate it."

.....
 "Do you want me to get a priest or any one to come and see you?"

"Just you," she said. Then a little later, "I'm not afraid. I just hate it."

.....
 "Don't worry, darling," Catherine said. "I'm not a bit afraid. It's just a dirty trick."²⁵

Catherine is a tragic figure in the absurd sense that there is no substitute for thirty years of life. Or, as Camus explains, "if I admit that my freedom has no meaning in relation to its limited fate, then I must say that what counts is not the best living but the most living."²⁶ But, "There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn."²⁷

As Lt. Henry is leaving the hospital room "Catherine winked" Like Oedipus, she might have said, "I conclude that all is well."

Having examined the character of Catherine Darkley through the "lens" of existentialism, we see that she is something more than the "erotic wish fulfillment" of a youthful author. Instead, we have seen that she is remarkably realistic in the existential sense of reality—which is probably the most valid description of reality in all of philosophy.

III. HEMINGWAY'S STYLE

It has been demonstrated, by means of our method of criticism,

²⁵Hemingway, op. cit., pp. 353-354.

²⁶Camus, loc. cit.

²⁷Ibid., p. 121.

that some of Hemingway's main characters are considerably more complex than at first appears. That Hemingway is aware of this complexity is revealed in the following statement made by him in a recent interview:

If a writer stops observing he is finished. But he does not have to observe consciously nor think how it will be useful. Perhaps that would be true at the beginning. But later everything he sees goes into the great reserve of things he knows or has seen. If it is any use to know it, I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it underwater for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn't show. If a writer omits something because he does not know it then there is a hole in the story.

In writing you are limited by what has already been done satisfactorily. So I have tried to learn to do something else. First I have tried to eliminate everything unnecessary to conveying experience to the reader so that after he or she has read something it will become a part of his or her experience and seem actually to have happened. This is very hard to do and I've worked at it very hard.²⁸

How did Hemingway learn to "eliminate everything unnecessary?" Part of the answer is provided by the following passage from Death in the Afternoon. Writing of his apprentice days in Paris, he states

I was trying to write then and I found the greatest difficulty, aside from knowing what you really felt, rather than what you were supposed to feel, and had been taught to feel, was put down what really happened in action: what the actual things were which produced the emotion that you experienced . . . the real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion . . . I was trying to learn to write, commencing with the simplest things.²⁹

Philip Young has observed that the above passage is similar to Eliot's theory of the "objective correlative," in which Eliot proposes that:

²⁸George Plimpton (Interviewer), "The Art of Fiction XII, Ernest Hemingway," The Paris Review, (Spring, 1958), p. 84.

²⁹Quoted in Young, op. cit., pp. 151-152.

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding . . . a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts . . . are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.³⁰

Through the subject matter of violence, pain, death, and nothingness, the early Hemingway tried to evoke the emotions of fear, dread, anguish and their concomitants--the same emotions with which existentialism is most concerned. These emotions are the ones that the youthful Hemingway experienced and was concerned about, and are his subject matter. The search for a proper technique to present this subject matter eventually led to the famous Hemingway style.

This style, as Young explains, is for the most part a colloquial and, apparently, a nonliterary prose, characterized by a conscientious simplicity of diction and sentence structure. The words are chiefly short and common ones, and there is a severe and austere economy in their use. The rhythms are simple and direct, producing an effect of crispness, cleanness and clarity, and sometimes of monotony that the author does little to correct.³¹

It is a style which normally keeps out of sight the intelligence behind it. Events are described strictly in the sequence in which they occurred; no mind reorders or analyzes them. Perceptions come direct, without editorial comment. The resulting impression is an intense and disciplined objectivity, a matter-of-fact presentation of details to effect a response for which the author has provided

³⁰Ibid., p. 154. Quoted from the essay on "Hamlet" in The Sacred Wood.

³¹Ibid., p. 174.

only the stimulus. Since the subject matter is, most often, violence and pain, this tensely unemotional, "primitive" and "objective" presentation often results in the effect of irony and understatement.³²

Hemingway's dialogue is probably the most outstanding feature of his style. His sensitive ear picks up and records the accents and mannerisms of the characters that the speech is in the process of swiftly revealing. The conversation is as laconic and carefully controlled as the unspoken prose ("The next year there were many victories."). Since the speech itself is normally eloquent, verbs which explain the manner of speaking become unnecessary. And this speech is no simple reproduction of actual human talking. Hemingway builds a pattern of mannerisms and responses which give an illusion of reality that, in its completeness, reality itself does not give.³³

This style does have its limitations. Mark Schorer and others have observed:

... how the style breaks down when Hemingway moves into the less congenial subject matter of social affirmation; how the style breaks down, the effect of verbal economy as mute suffering is lost, the personality of the writer, no longer protected by objectification of an adequate technique, begins its offensive intrusion, and the entire structural integrity slackens.³⁴

The early Hemingway, however, does not stray far from the familiar ground of existential subject matter. The harmony that exists between Hemingway's subject matter and his style has been

³²Ibid., p. 175.

³³Ibid., p. 166.

³⁴Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery," in Forms of Modern Fiction, ed. William Van O'Connor. University of Minnesota Press, 1948.)

acknowledged by most literary critics. Mark Schorer summarizes the case in the following commentary:

Hemingway's early subject, the exhaustion of value, was perfectly investigated and invested by his bare style, and in story after story, no meaning at all is to be inferred from the fiction except as the style itself suggests that there is no meaning in life. This style, more than that, was the perfect technical substitute for the conventional commentator; . . . in the stories and the early novels, the technique was the perfect embodiment of the subject and it gave that subject its astonishing largeness of effect and of meaning.³⁵

In regard to "the perfect technical substitute for the conventional commentator," Sartre, speaking for French writers about Hemingway and other American writers, comments that "the influence of American novels has produced a technical revolution among us. They have placed in our hands new and simple instruments, which allow us to approach subjects which heretofore we had no means of treating; the unconscious; sociological events; the true relation of the individual to society, present or past."³⁶

In summarizing Hemingway's style in terms of existentialism, we have seen that Hemingway's subject matter--violence, pain, death, fear, dread, and nothingness--is remarkably similar to the main concerns of existentialism. In order to present this subject matter in an artistic form Hemingway developed his famous style. This style is characterized by simplicity, crispness and clarity, providing only the stimulus for which the reader must supply the response. It is a style that is the perfect embodiment of its subject matter. Since this subject matter is existential in nature, it

³⁵Ibid., pp. 26-27.

³⁶Sartre, op. cit., pp. 117-118.

is, therefore, a style that is exquisitely suitable for the literary presentation of the concerns of existentialist philosophy. That this is so is affirmed by the fact that one of the most astute students of this style, Albert Camus, was awarded the most coveted literary prize in the world.

CHAPTER V

THE STRANGER

The Stranger was first published in 1942, and since that time its author Albert Camus has become a world figure. The ultimate confirmation of his ability occurred in October, 1957, when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. The Swedish Academy congratulated him "for his important literary work The Stranger which illuminates, with penetrating purposiveness, the problems of the human conscience in the contemporary world."¹

The Stranger, which is founded on the philosophy of The Myth of Sisyphus, has been included here for purposes of comparison. It is hoped that a comparison of this novel with A Farewell to Arms will result in a heightened appreciation of both. Specifically, this comparison intends to demonstrate that Camus--consciously and unconsciously--learned a great deal from Hemingway. Most critics have noted the conscious borrowing of Hemingway's style by Camus; however, as it will be demonstrated, Camus borrowed more than style. It will be seen that Camus' hero reveals facets of behavior that are remarkably similar to those of Lt. Frederic Henry.

Like Hemingway, Camus uses the device of the hero-narrator which "subtly compels the reader into the position of a detached observer." The story the narrator relates is simple. The setting is

¹Charles Rolo, "Albert Camus, a Good Man," Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 201 (May, 1958), p. 33.

Algiers. Mersault, as he is called, is a humble clerk. He has just learned that his mother has died in the Home for the Aged where he had been obliged to place her three years previously. The day after the funeral, he goes swimming, meets Marie Cordona, a girl he had once slightly known, goes with her to a Fernandel movie, and then takes her home with him for the night. The next day, Sunday, is passed in boredom.

Mersault continues to see Marie. Marie asks him if he loves her and Mersault replies that the phrase means nothing to him and that he felt he did not. Then she asks him if he would marry her, he replies, "We'll get married whenever you like." Then his employer asks if he would like a position that is open in Paris, he replies in the same indifferent manner.

Mersault meets a fellow lodger by the name of Raymond. Mersault agrees to write a note to Raymond's former mistress, an Arab girl, so that Raymond can carry out a plan of revenge. Raymond fulfills his plan, but there are consequences.

Mersault and Marie are invited by friends of Raymond to spend the day at the beach. While Mersault, Raymond and the host are walking on the beach, the brother of Raymond's mistress and some Arab friends seek revenge. There is a fight. Later, Raymond, carrying a pistol, goes back to the spot. He gives the gun to Mersault while he attempts to begin another fight. But they return without incident. Mersault does not wish to go into the beach house so takes a walk down the beach. The merciless heat and light compel Mersault toward a cool spot where a little spring from the rocks pours into the sea. The Arab is also there. As Mersault roves

toward the coolness of the rock, the Arab draws a knife which catches the reflection of the sun. "A shaft of light shot upward from the steel, and I felt as if a long, thin blade transfixes my forehead." Blinded by the light and sweat, Mersault fires the revolver; the Arab falls, then Mersault fires four more shots into the inert body.

Mersault is arrested, arraigned for murder, and his trial comes after a year in prison. During the trial the prosecutor describes him as a hardened, unfeeling criminal. Witnesses testify that he had not wanted to look at his dead mother, that he had smoked, slept, and drunk cafe au lait during the funeral vigil; and, the next day had been swimming with a girl, went to a comic movie, and, that the girl had slept with him that night.

After remaining silent during most of the trial, Mersault tries to explain that it was "because of the sun" that he shot the Arab. Mersault can not get across his point and hears "people tittering" in the courtroom. The indictment emphasizes that "when he buried his mother he was already a criminal at heart." Mersault is found guilty and sentenced to be decapitated "in the name of the French people."

In the analysis of Frederic Henry and Catherine Barkley it was demonstrated that many aspects of their behavior are similar to those of Camus' "absurd" hero in The Myth of Sisyphus. Since The Stranger is founded on this philosophical essay, it follows that the hero and heroine of Camus resembles the hero and heroine of A Farewell to Arms.

Although The Stranger is founded on The Myth of Sisyphus, it is not a literary presentation of this philosophical essay.

"The novel explains nothing, proves nothing; it is not a novel with a thesis to expound."² Rather, Camus' purpose is to present the feeling of the absurd. It is through Meursault, the hero, that this feeling is presented; but, without displaying any of the consequences of the absurd--until the last few pages. It is only at the very end that the "awakening" occurs. Thus, we see a considerable similarity with Lt. Henry, who also presents the remarkable situation of a person who acts according to the absurd orthodoxy, but without being conscious of the consequences. With both "the absurd is like a congenital infirmity." Like Lt. Henry, Meursault reveals the absurd, not by the vigilance of his mind (Lt. Henry does not like to think), but through his abandonment to physical sensation (Lt. Henry's desire for sex, liquor). Meursault lives in the present moment and seems incapable of expressing feeling (Lt. Henry rarely thinks of the past or future and the only outstanding feeling he displays is his love for Catherine). Thus, the constant, "It's all the same to me" of Meursault and the frequent, "All right" of Lt. Henry become more understandable. As Maquet points out: "In order to express a judgment of value, it is necessary to base oneself on memory or have an imagination as to the future. In the flow of the present, all hierarchy is void of meaning."³

²Albert Maquet, Albert Camus: The Inevitable Summer (New York: George Braziller, 1958), p. 53.

³Ibid.

Now, what happens to a person who behaves in the above absurd manner? In the case of Lt. Henry, he was not considered "odd" by his friends; as a matter of fact, he was rather well-liked by his associates, and, furthermore, was quite happy. Meursault also gets along well with everyone he meets, and his behavior is not considered unusual--until Meursault performs an act which is to force a clear and absolute judgment on his life. Caught in the legal machinery, Meursault continues to behave in the way he always has--indifferently. Heretofore, Meursault had not been seen as strange; now he becomes so.

At this point an observation can be made on Camus' craftsmanship. Albert Maquet has perceived that the novel is constructed in two parts of equal importance. In the first part we live beside Meursault for a few days, up to the time of the murder. In the second part we relive these same days; but obliquely, through the proceedings of the law court--testimony of witnesses, indictment by the Prosecuting Attorney--and outside Meursault. On the one hand, we see the insignificant life as it has been lived by the hero, a life without continuity, comprised of juxtaposed instants; on the other hand, we see the reconstruction of this life, gathered together and organized by the working of reason and the power of words. Then, Maquet goes on to point out the author's intent:

We see to what account the author expects to turn this confrontation: to bring to light the absurd in a display of the betrayals to which the mind yields in trying to apprehend the facts with the aid of concepts and language. The discord between the objective reality and the subjective image which pretends to reproduce it is calculated to penetrate us with the futility of human justice. How honestly support a verdict when its very

object escapes all exact definition?⁴

Meursault, in the prisoner's box, listens to what is being said about him as though it concerned someone else: "It is always interesting, when in the prisoner's dock, to hear oneself being talked about." As the trial goes on, Meursault, in listening to the prosecutor's remarks and in watching the faces of those in the courtroom, finally realizes that he is a "stranger" to this world of absolute moral values:

His tone and the look of triumph on his face, as he glanced at me, were so marked that I felt as I hadn't felt for ages. I had a foolish desire to burst into tears. For the first time I'd realized how all these people loathed me . . .⁵ and for the first time I understood that I was guilty.

Meursault understands that he is guilty, but he does not feel guilty. Although he came under the description of a criminal, still "it was an idea to which I could never get reconciled." Here Meursault reveals the feeling of innocence which is an outstanding characteristic of the absurd man. (Although Lt. Henry never says that he feels this innocence, still, neither does he say that he feels any sense of guilt or sin.)

As the trial continues, the reader realizes to his horror that a man is not being tried for a crime, but, the way he acted at his mother's funeral—his way of life is being judged. Now, as Hanna sharply observes:

. . . we come to see that the absurdity which is pictured to us is not that of a man before a senseless and fragmentary nature which is foreign to him as a human being; the absurdity is in the attempt of society to justly apply absolute moral

⁵Albert Camus, The Stranger (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 112.

standards to the uncertain and chartless course of human life. It is not an absurd universe which destroys Meursault; it is a moral legalism which has injected fixed values into a sphere which has no fixed moral values; i.e., human life.⁶

This passage reveals Hanna's claim that Camus' concept of absurdity in The Stranger (which was published before The Myth) was not yet clearly formulated: "The fact that Meursault lives with the indifference of any absurd hero but lacks the consciousness and revolt of the absurd hero, shows us that the philosophical clarity of The Myth is not yet here present."⁷ This, in turn, lends support to the claim here that Meursault's general attitude toward life is remarkably similar to Lt. Henry's. That is, it is axiomatic in psychology that, in the absence of a clearly formulated idea, the mind (consciously or unconsciously) will utilize related material to effect a "closure." In the light of this principle, it is interesting to note that Camus' hero exhibits all of the characteristics of both Lt. Henry and Catherine Barkley. Of course it is always difficult to trace the influences which have shaped the writer, but it seems quite likely that some of the content of Hemingway stuck to his style when it was utilized by Camus.

Returning to Meursault's predicament, we see that:

Camus has brought about the perfect absurd situation where Meursault (or anyone) is seen to have lived a life which proves that he is guilty. It is not the murder which proves his guilt; it is his life which proves his guilt. This is to say any life, placed under the judgment of absolute moral standards

⁶Thomas Hanna, The Thought and Art of Albert Camus, (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1958), p. 42.

⁷Ibid., p. 39.

is guilty and monstrous.⁸

It should be noted that, even after committing murder, Meursault still retains the innocence which has characterized him from the beginning, and which is in keeping with all the other actions that indifferently issued from him.

Why did Meursault murder a man he did not even know? The answer is that it was "because of the sun," but there is no way to justify this in a legal proceeding, where all acts are explained by willful intentionality. One thing is certain: that Meursault's eyes are extremely sensitive to bright light. This is indicated to the reader at least fourteen times previous to the murder. Added to this is Meursault's state of mind at the time of the murder. During lunch he had drunk too much wine and was "slightly muzzy." Then Meursault tries to explain that it all happened "because of the sun," the people in the courtroom "tittered."

While in prison, Meursault, still unchanged, entertains a vague hope of a retrial. In the early days of his imprisonment he is irked by his "habit of thinking like a free man." But he soon realizes that one can habituate himself to anything. He still lives and thinks in the present moment, but now a new element is introduced into his thinking: the inescapability of his death. Meursault tries to console himself with the thought that in thirty years he would be faced with the same fate, but it is precisely those thirty years that are precious and irreplaceable. Meursault is attempting

⁸Ibid., p. 43.

to accord his thoughts with his fate, and, in so doing, is laying the groundwork for his awakening and revolt.⁹

It is the prison chaplain who brings about Meursault's revolt. After having been refused several times, the chaplain finally presents himself to Meursault. He asks Meursault why he has not let him come to see him. Meursault explains that he doesn't believe in God. The chaplain replies, "Are you really so sure of that?" The chaplain drones on and eventually bores Meursault who hopes that he will leave. Confronted with this attitude the chaplain becomes genuinely distressed. He feels Meursault must be absolved of his sin. Meursault replies that he "wasn't conscious of any 'sin';" he is only aware that he'd "been guilty of a criminal offense."

The conversation continues and the chaplain becomes more irksome to Meursault. Finally, Meursault can stand it no longer:

Then, I don't know how it was, but something seemed to break inside me, and I started yelling at the top of my voice. I hurled insults at him, I told him not to waste his rotten prayers on me; it was better to burn than to disappear. I'd taken him by the neckband of his cassock, and, in a sort of ecstasy of joy and rage, I poured out on him all the thoughts that had been simmering in my brain. He seemed so cocksure, you see. And yet none of his certainties was worth one strand of a woman's hair. Living as he did, like a corpse, he couldn't even be sure of being alive. It might look as if my hands were empty. Actually, I was sure of myself, sure about everything, far surer than he; sure of my present life and of the death that was coming. That, no doubt, was all I had; but at least that certainty was something I could get my teeth into--just as it had got its teeth into me. I'd been right, I was still right, I was always right. I'd passed my life in a certain way, and I might have passed it in a different way, if I'd felt like it. I'd acted thus, and I hadn't acted otherwise; I hadn't done x, whereas I had done y or z. And what did that mean? That,

⁹Ibid., p. 45.

all the time, I'd been waiting for this present moment, for that dawn, tomorrow's or another day's, which was to justify me. Nothing, nothing had the least importance, and I knew quite well why. He, too, knew why. From the dark horizon of my future a sort of slow, persistent breeze had been blowing toward me, all my life long, from the years that were to come.¹⁰

This "slow, persistent breeze" is death; death for every one. It is the death which equalizes all. No matter what way one decides to live, this is all equalized in the end by the fate which "chooses" all men, saints and murderers, whether they wish it or not. Not only Mersault but all alike would be condemned to die. If we must die, then what does it matter what we do in life? Can't the chaplain realize that "as a condemned man himself, couldn't he grasp what I meant by that dark wind blowing from my future?"

Mersault at last brings to light the secret of the indifference which characterizes his life even in the face of death. It is because death is the foundation of this indifference. The "dark wind" in the future of all lives gives us an absolute freedom; a freedom that does not license anarchy but which means that no matter what we do it has no final importance, whether crime or sanctity.

In existential language we see here the situation of a man who has been unconsciously aware of his life as Sein-zum-Tode. However, circumstances have forced a conscious awakening to the facts of "pure" existence. With this awakesness to the facts of the human condition, an awareness without appeal (Mersault does

¹⁰ Camus, op. cit., pp. 151-152.

not believe in God), comes the consequences: Meursault revolts against the illusion of moral absolutism, he reaffirms his passion for the present moment, and he becomes conscious of the boundless freedom that death grants to the living.

With the chaplain gone, Meursault is calm but exhausted. He sleeps, and when he awakes:

. . . the stars were shining down on my face. Sounds of the countryside came faintly in, and the cool night air, veined with smells of earth and salt, fanned my cheeks. The marvelous peace of the sleepbound summer night flooded through me like a tide.¹¹

Then, for the first time in many months, Meursault thinks about his mother. Now he seems to understand why, near her life's end, she had taken on a "fiancee" and why she had played at making a fresh start "in the Home where lives were flickering out, (and) the dusk came as a mournful solace. With death so near, Mother must have felt like someone on the brink of freedom, ready to start life all over again." Meursault, too, feels:

. . . ready to start life all over again. It was as if that great rush of anger had washed me clean, emptied me of hope, and, gazing up at the dark sky strangled with its signs and stars, for the first time, the first, I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe. To feel it so like myself, indeed, so brotherly, made me realize that I'd been happy, and that I was happy still. For all to be accomplished, for me to feel less lonely, all that remained to hope was that on the day of my execution there should be a huge crowd of spectators and that they should greet me with howls of execration.¹²

Turning once again to a comparison of Meursault and *It*, Henry, one finds a number of similarities. Meursault "awakens" to "being in reality" through the approaching fact of his death;

¹¹Ibid., p. 153.

¹²Ibid., p. 154.

the realization of his existence as Sein-Im-Tode reveals the source of his indifference: throughout most of his life he has unconsciously been aware that, because of death, "nothing had the least importance."

Now, as has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, Lt. Henry "awakens" to "being in reality" through the stillbirth of his child and the approaching death of Catherine: "That was what you did. You died." Then, in the next passage, the source of Lt. Henry's indifference is revealed: "Once in camp I put a log on top of the fire and it was full of ants . . . most of them went toward the fire and then back toward the end and swarmed on the cool end and finally fell off into the fire. I remember thinking at the time that it was the end of the world. . . ." Lt. Henry's thought "that it was the end of the world" is the source of the vague awareness of the "slow, persistent breeze" blowing from the years to come. We have seen that, although Lt. Henry has "awakened" to the absurdity of the world, he does not reveal any of the consequences of absurdity. However, we saw that the plot of the novel was such that it was nearly impossible to do so and not weaken the unity of the novel. That Hemingway's intuitive genius could have done so, we are fairly certain from our analysis of Catherine Barkley.

Koursault does not believe in God; yet, in the very last paragraph Koursault reveals to the startled reader, and himself "that I'd been happy, and that I was happy still." Again we find a considerable similarity with Lt. Henry (and Catherine Barkley,) who does not believe in God, and also remarks, "I'm happy. I've always been happy." Although this remark is made in the early part

of the novel, Lt. Henry does not give any evidence to the contrary throughout the rest of the book. The above similarity, it seems to this writer, reveals a fundamental assumption of character that Camus absorbed from his reading of Hemingway.

From the similarities that have been demonstrated in the above, we must conclude that Camus, deliberately or otherwise, utilized aspects of Lt. Henry's personality (and, as we have seen, Catherine Barkley's) in the construction of the character of Meursault. And, once again we can remark that it is surprising that none of the critics have noted these similarities. We have seen that both Lt. Henry and Meursault present the paradoxical picture of men who act like heroes of absurdity, yet are not conscious of any of the consequences--in both the absurd seems to be a "congenital infirmity." We have seen that both reveal this absurdity through their indifference toward everything: neither of them likes to think, and both live in the physical abandonment of the present moment. Meursault feels the innocence of the absurd man, and we have no evidence to suppose that Lt. Henry did not feel this innocence also. Meursault, who does not believe in God, startles us at the very end by revealing that he'd always been happy; Lt. Henry, who--we are fairly certain--does not believe in God, also has "always been happy." Meursault reveals that the source of his indifference is the "slow, persistent breeze" of death that he has always vaguely been aware of; Lt. Henry also reveals that the source of his indifference began some time in his past when while watching the ants burn, he thought "that it was the end of the world." Finally, we have seen that Meursault "awakens" to

the meaning of "pure" existence through a realization of himself as Sein-zum-Tode, and then experiences the consequences of this awakening: revolt, freedom, and a reaffirmation of his passion for life. Lt. Henry also "awakens" to the meaning of being in reality through a realization of himself as Sein-zum-Tode, but, we saw that the construction of the plot is such that Lt. Henry does not have an opportunity to reveal any of the consequences of his awakening.

Now, as has been stated previously, Camus' utilization of the early Hemingway style has been noted by most critics. Albert Maquet observes that "the conscious conformity of technique with subject matter, so effective in application, is very like the prior achievement in certain of Hemingway's works, and leads to the supposition that Camus is responsible only for choosing to use it: he borrowed deliberately."¹³

Charles Rolo, in a recent article, also states that "this short novel is written in a style which owes something to the early Hemingway."¹⁴

Sartre, who had been a good friend of Camus' states: "Albert Camus, a young writer who was the director of the clandestine newspaper, Combat, deliberately borrowed the technique of The Sun Also Rises." Further, in the same article, Sartre writes: "When Hemingway writes his short, disjointed sentences, he is obeying his temperament. He writes what he sees. But when Camus uses Hemingway's technique, he is conscious and deliberate, be-

¹³Maquet, op. cit., p. 60.

¹⁴Rolo, op. cit., p. 30.

cause it seems to him upon reflection the best way to express his philosophical experience of the absurdity of the world."¹⁵

As we have been, Camus' purpose in The Stranger was to convey the feeling of absurdity. It remains to ask why Camus chose the style he did. Albert Maquet provides a good part of the answer in the following:

Mursault . . . lives only in detached moments, a succession of present instants independent of each other and cast back into oblivion once they have been consumed. This discontinuity of time is marked in the narrative by the discontinuity of the style.

Each sentence, like each instant, forms a whole, a small, homogenous and enclosed universe, attached by nothing to what precedes, and drawing nothing in its wake . . . No consciousness interposes to organize this sensitive material . . . The narrator remains passive, his presence becomes transparent. . .

By imposing upon us an analytical vision of things, that is to say, by keeping them on a level lower than their significance, by preserving this same vision from the shortsightedness of habits and the deformations of subjectivity, the discontinuity and the transparency of The Stranger puts us in contact with "pure" reality in the crude state, where lurks the absurd, to contaminate us. The awakening of the consciousness will inevitably follow, and thus the objective of the author will be achieved.¹⁶

Of course, when Camus borrowed Hemingway's style he blended it with his own literary technique. In citing the reasons for his being selected for the Nobel Prize, Charles Rolo points out what has been observed by most critics of Camus:

. . . one of the things that is great about him is his handling of the French language. With its combinations of lucidity and lyricism, its controlled passion, its flashing turn of phrase, and its arresting aphorisms, Camus' prose presents almost as many difficulties to the translator as poetry.¹⁷

¹⁵Sartre, op. cit., p. 113.

¹⁶Maquet, op. cit., pp. 58-60.

Surprisingly enough, a certain moral lesson evolves out of the above examination of the style that Camus chose to use. In his acceptance speech upon being awarded the Nobel Prize, Camus stated about artists: "They force themselves to understand instead of judging." This echoes the goal of the existentialist philosophers, most of whom are primarily concerned with describing us to ourselves. Fortunately the fruits of their labors have been tasted by many through the medium of the philosopher-artists, e.g., Sartre, Camus, and Malraux, who have borrowed techniques from artists, such as Hemingway and Faulkner. All of the above modern novelists differ in many respects, but all of them are in accord on one goal: to describe the human condition. To describe without judging, without trying to fit a human existent into a "self-sealing" system of values based on dogmas not founded in reality. To describe the human condition is to dissolve or render transparent the intricate exoskeletal¹³ covering which frustrates all attempts to reveal ourselves to each other.

¹⁷ Ibid., op. cit., p. 23.

¹³ This word is a favorite with Unamuno.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this thesis it was stated that the purpose was to apply a proposed method of criticism based on existentialist philosophy; that an examination of literature through the "lens" of this method would produce a heightened sense of appreciation. This method of criticism was then applied to some works of Hemingway and one work of Camus. Now, it remains to ask the question: To what extent has this method aided in the appreciation of the literary works that have been examined?

First of all, it has been shown that existentialist philosophy enables us to describe us to ourselves; that this self-description is difficult because of the commonsense attitude toward human existence. We have seen that this attitude is composed of "chatter," "curiosity," and "ambiguity"; and by these means seeks to avoid the dreadful facts of "authentic" existence. "Authentic" existence has been shown to mean that one is aware of the strangeness and absurdity of oneself in relation to the world. We have noted that this, in turn, brings about the comprehension that one has been "thrown" (Geworfen) into this world; and, that this sense of "thrownness" is part of the sense of "aloneness." It has been shown that, sooner or later, one realizes that one has been cast into the world in order to die there; that this realization of Sein-zum-Tode, as well as the sense of aloneness, emerges in a mood of dread and anguish; and, that the function of dread is to tear the person away from "unauthentic"

existence. Finally, we saw that an "awakening" to the facts of "pure" existence led to certain possibilities: suicide, or the "leap" of faith: or, on the other hand, one could live without appeal to anything outside of human experience--which leads to the consequences of revolt, freedom, and passion.

We have seen that, once a person understands and feels what has been described above, the dreadful, startling fact emerges that this is the human condition. It is surprising because our present western culture is based on systems of thought that have failed to include the facts of "pure" existence.

Now, if it is true that existentialist philosophy describes the very foundation of our existence, then it is also true that this same philosophy can help to describe artistic representations of human existence; especially in the most suitable of the arts for this task--the art of literature. In applying our method of criticism based on this philosophy, we have seen that it is extremely helpful in appreciating the intuitive genius of Hemingway. That is, we have seen that apparently meaningless and shallow stories and characters were considered so because they were extremely existentialist in nature. They have not been understood because the facts of the human condition have not been understood. Then, in applying the "lens" of existentialism it has been revealed that Hemingway is a sharp observer of the human condition; that, in attempting to present the facts of this condition honestly, he developed his famous style. Finally, we have observed that the reason Hemingway's heroes and heroines are emulated is that they are

existentially real; that the reason they are readily absorbed by the reader's personality is that they are presented in a truly artistic manner.

If the existential method of criticism is helpful in enhancing the appreciation of the literary works of intuitive artists such as Hemingway, then it follows that this method is almost indispensable in the appreciation of novelists who are both literary artists and philosophers, such as Camus and Sartre. We have noted that such was the case in our analysis of The Stranger. Then, in comparing this work with Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms, we have observed that Camus' philosophico-literary work helped considerably in appreciating the intuitive genius of Hemingway.

Finally, from the evidence herein, we can predict that the examination of literature through the "lens" of the existential method of criticism will be of considerable value in revealing much that has been heretofore unobserved.

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