

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم



HOSSAM MAGHRABY



شبكة المعلومات الجامعية

التوثيق الالكتروني والميكروفيلم



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جامعة عين شمس

التوثيق الإلكتروني والميكروفيلم

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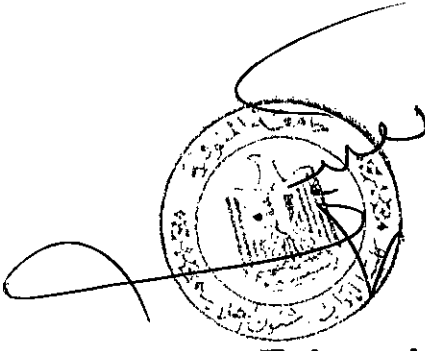


بالرسالة صفحات

لم ترد بالأصل



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**Existential Aspects
In the Poetry of Thom Gunn
(1954-1976)**

المظاهر الوجودية في شعر توم جن
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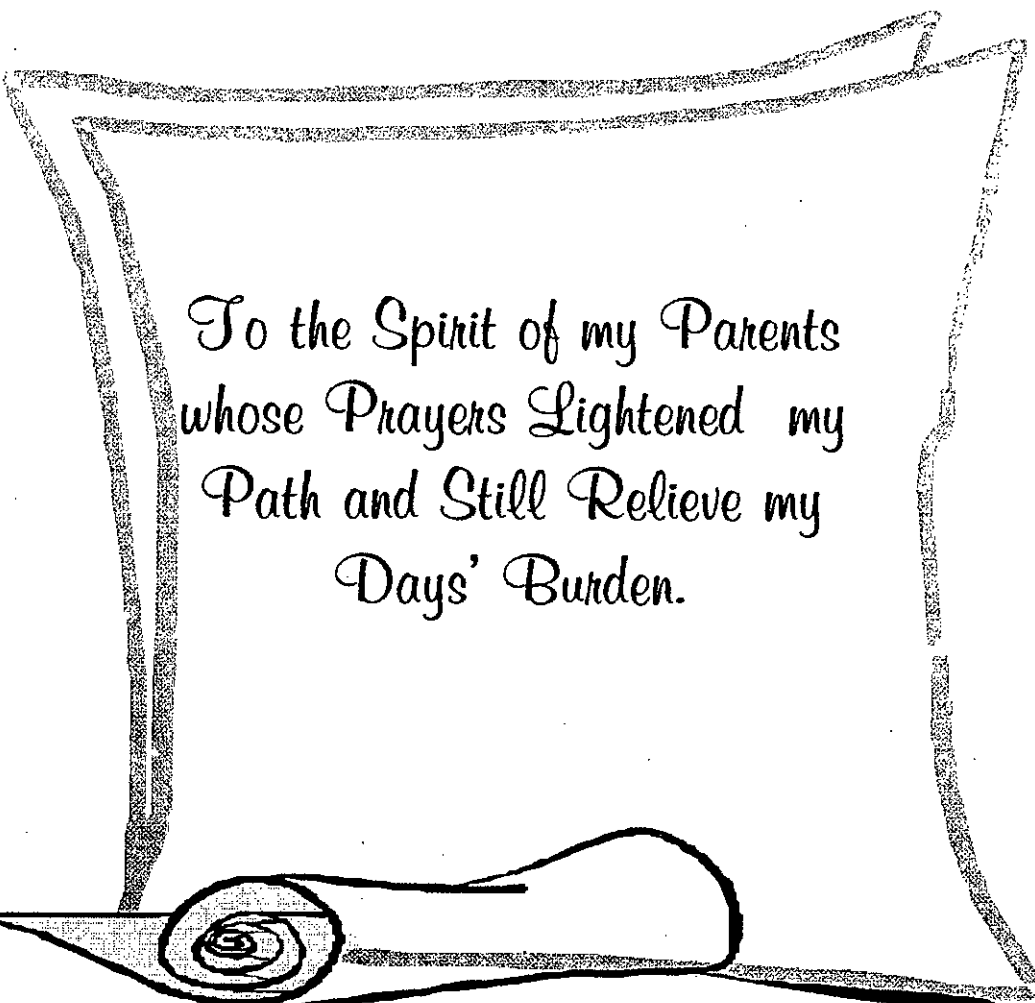
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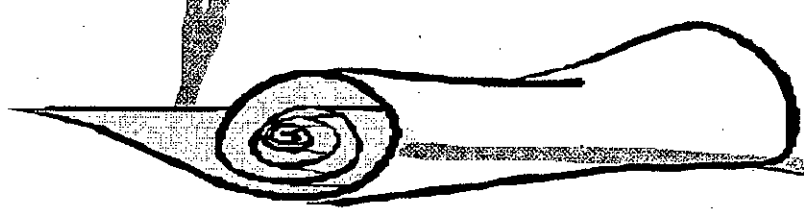
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To the Spirit of my Parents
whose Prayers Lightened my
Path and Still Relieve my
Days' Burden.



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Introduction

Existentialism is a controversial movement in contemporary philosophy. Its most constant characteristic is its concern about human existence, especially the affirmation of freedom and the refusal to subordinate personal self-awareness to abstract concepts or dehumanizing structures. Although it is not the product of the modern age, it has been specifically well-formulated and popularized in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Central to all the definitions of existentialism is the assertion that man is a maker of his own destiny. Once one grapples with his existence, he seeks to capture his own forged essence; therefore, the starting point of Existentialism is that "existence precedes essence,"⁽¹⁾ that is to say, man exists first and then defines himself in the course of his experience of life. Man, existentialists believe, should strive through concrete experience to arrive at a personal evaluation of both the world and himself.

In fact, Existentialism came as a reaction to the 19th century matérialism when the free and peaceful future, which once seemed guaranteed by the achievements of science, technology and invention, had been fragmented. Existentialism is the expression of a world which is out of joint. Hence, existentialists in the modern age have sought to draw attention away from "the dehumanizing values of a positivist and mechanistic society towards the human individual and his distinctive way of being,"⁽²⁾ in a way similar to that of Socrates who shifted the focus of speculation in ancient Greece from nature to man.

Against the traditional view that moral choice involves an objective judgment of right and wrong, existentialists have argued that no objective, rational basis can be found for moral decisions. For the existentialists the meaning of man can be understood from his actions, rather than a preconceived notion of human nature. In other words, the existentialists reject deterministic systems and any sort of explanation to human behavior whether

religious, biological or environmental. Putting existence before essence means that there is no objective truth in the world i.e., everything is subjective. In this respect it is important to stress that the existentialists depend on the source of knowledge that is based on their own individual conceptualization of reality disregarding any conceptual system and set of accepted truths.

Truth as seen by the existentialist is not an objective, detached value but rather a sense which the individual captures. Hence, truth is a changeable state of being that works in accordance with the individual's experience of his own existence. In this sense existentialism represents rebellion against established ideas and institutions that may stand in the way of gaining freedom or that would destroy responsibility.

Truth for the existentialist is inseparable from concrete experience. Subjectivity of truth requires the individual to trust nothing but his own experience. Existential thought depends on the subjectivity of human experience. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. Robert Olson points out that

Existential values have a common source, a common function and a common identifying characteristic. Their common source is an acute awareness of the tragedy inherent in the human condition. Their common function is to liberate us from the fears and frustrations of everyday life or the tedium of philosophical daydreaming. Their common identifying characteristic is intensity. ⁽³⁾

The existentialist's sense of tragedy arises in great part out of their conviction that happiness is a purely abstract i.e., concretely unrealizable value.

Because of the diversity of positions associated with existentialism, a precise definition is impossible. However, Existentialists agree among themselves on some major themes: first, existence precedes essence i.e., man is a conscious subject rather than a thing to be predicted; second, a stress on individual freedom, and choice; third, anxiety or a sense of anguish and fear which are not directed to any specific object. Anguish is a generalized

uneasiness that "one experiences at the thought that nothing and nobody might ever have come into existence or that everything and everybody might go out of existence in an instant"⁽⁴⁾ Yet, each existentialist philosopher has his own view of individual existence.

The roots of existentialism date back to Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) who is often called the father of existentialism. Before anyone else, he exposed the routine ways of life that troubled his contemporaries. Instead of remaining a well-adjusted conformist, man can purify his heart by willing One Thing. One may never accomplish what he thinks the most worthy of his deepest efforts, but he is the only responsible for making his efforts clearly focused around what seems to him to be the Good.

Most philosophers since ancient Greek thinker Plato have held that the highest ethical good is universal. Ethics is the same for everyone; insofar as one approaches moral perfection, one resembles other morally perfect individuals. Soren Kierkegaard reacted against this tradition, insisting that the individual's highest good is to find his or her own unique vocation. Hence, Kierkegaard stresses the idea of the subjectivity of truth.

Kierkegaard's central concern is passion. "The conclusions of passion are the only reliable ones (and) what our age lacks is not reflection but passion."⁽⁵⁾ Kierkegaard rejected a total rational understanding of humanity and history, stressing the ambiguity and absurdity of the human situation. In fact, he contests the dualistic legacy of Plato and the popular conception of the soul or self as substance, comparable to the body.

All existentialists have followed Kierkegaard in stressing the importance of passionate individual action in deciding questions of both morality and truth. They have insisted, accordingly, that personal experience and acting on one's own convictions are essential in arriving at truth. Thus, the understanding of a situation by someone involved in the situation is superior to that of a detached, objective observer; existentialists are suspicious

of systematic reasoning.

Kierkegaard and other existentialist writers have been deliberately unsystematic in the exposition of their philosophies, preferring to express themselves in aphorisms, dialogues, parables, and other literary forms. Despite their anti-rationalist position, however, most existentialists have held that rational clarity is desirable wherever possible, but that the most important questions in life are not accessible to reason or science. Hence, they are not irrationalists in the sense of denying all validity to rational thought.

Existentialist writers have echoed Kierkegaard's belief that one must choose his own way without the aid of universal, objective standards. In fact, all existentialists have followed Kierkegaard's conviction of the subjectivity of truth. In terms of moral choice, existentialists have argued that there is no objective, rational basis for decisions; they stress the importance of individualism in deciding questions of morality and truth. Freedom of choice, through which each human being creates his own nature, is a primary theme. Existentialists argue that individuals are free to choose their own path; therefore, they must accept the risk and responsibility of their actions. Each individual has to commit himself to a personally valid way of apprehending life. There are no objective moral laws or standards which humans must observe, except those of their own choosing.

Twentieth-century French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) first gave the term existentialism general currency by using it for his own philosophy. Sartre is not a simple thinker: it is not easy to find a way through the immense bulk of his writing and to interpret it adequately without resorting to vast oversimplifications. The complexity of the work itself is paralleled by the bulk of commentary it has inspired.

Sartre has always been preoccupied with the question of understanding 'man.' He argues for achieving a total objective view of all the elements that enter into the making of an individual. Sartre conceives of all

human behaviour in terms of a single basic drive: the urge to become completely self-sufficient, autonomous, independent of anything external. Sartre's philosophy declared that human life requires a rational basis but the attempt is a 'futile passion.' Nevertheless, he insisted that his view is a form of humanism, emphasizing freedom and responsibility. Therefore, Sartre points out in "Existentialism Is a Humanism" that "man is nothing else but what he makes of himself...there is nothing in heaven; man will be what he will have planned to be. Not what he will want to be."⁽⁶⁾

Therefore, Germaine Bree appreciates Sartre for "playing God to his own life, and forcing it into the models he shaped."⁽⁷⁾ Sartre's manifested intent has been to release individuals from their bondage to various forms of conformism. To be a human, for Sartre, is to make one's own essence through freedom and to assume responsibility for what man creates of himself. Simone de Beauvoir echoes that "by turning toward this freedom we are going to discover a principle of action whose range will be universal. The characteristic feature of all ethics is to consider human life as a game that can be won or lost and to teach man the means of winning."⁽⁸⁾ In the light of this remark, it is preferable to say that Sartre offers an ethical style not an ethical content that allows man to be value constituting.

Sartre succeeds as early as 1946 in defending Existentialism against the charges raised against it. Explicitly atheistic and ostensibly pessimistic is commonly the public view of existentialism. However, as far as theism is concerned, there are atheistic and theistic existentialism. Sartre argues that

far from being gloomy, Existentialism is an optimistic philosophy, since it inspires people to action by showing them the extent of their freedom to action; and it also shows them that they are responsible not only for their own destinies but for other people's as well. For whatever a man chooses, he chooses for everyone and not only for himself; for the notion of choice entails the notion of a thing's being good, and 'good' means 'good for everyone.' Thus if a man chooses freedom for himself, he is thereby committed to choosing freedom for everyone.⁽⁹⁾