



Between Absurdity and Authenticity: An Existentialist Study of Selected Balochi Short Stories by Naguman

^{*1}Ejaz Hussain

²Allah Ditta

³Meesam Abbas

⁴Ali Raza

^{*1}Lecturer in English, Department of English, Government Graduate College Samanabad, Faisalabad

²BS English Literature, Department of English, Government Graduate College Samanabad, Faisalabad

³BS English Literature, Department of English, Government Graduate College Samanabad, Faisalabad

⁴BS English Literature, Department of English, Government Graduate College Samanabad, Faisalabad

^{*1}ejazhussain4722@gmail.com, ²da.css2026@gmail.com, ³meesamali5253@gmail.com,
⁴aliraza.wsri05026@gmail.com

Abstract

This article positions Naguman’s Balochi short stories, translated by Fazal Baloch, as a crucible for twentieth-century existential thought. The concepts articulated in Sartre’s Being and Nothingness (1943), Camus’s The Myth of Sisyphus (1942), and Kierkegaard’s Either/Or (1843) interrogate how the fiction wrestles with absurdity, bad faith, and the terror of radical freedom. The narratives emerges as philosophical laboratories: characters are cornered by an indifferent world and compelled to choose between authentic selfhood and the comfort of self-deception. In doing so, Naguman dramatizes a stark existential axiom: existence proceeds essence, meaning must be forged without guarantee, and courage is the only antidote to the void. This analysis reveals a distinctly Balochi articulation of existentialism, where desert landscapes and cultural dislocations become stages for universal human predicaments.

Keywords: Existentialism, absurdity, bad faith, authenticity, Sartre, Camus, Kierkegaard, short fiction, existential angst

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Corresponding Authors*

INTRODUCTION

The short story has long served as the pre-eminent literary form for the exploration of isolated consciousness. An expert writer does not fashion his thoughts in the short story but create a “certain unique or single effect to be wrought out” in the story. (Poe, 1842, p. 298). Compressed by its very nature into a single sustained encounter between a self and its circumstances, the short story strips away the social scaffolding that the novel habitually provides, leaving characters exposed to the brute fact of their existence. May (1994) aptly defines this situation as he remarks that “novel wins by points, the short story must win by knockout” (p.247). Gordimer (1968) also emphasizes on “the present moment” in the short story and links short fiction to existentialism as “the site of choice/crises.” (p.459). It is no accident, therefore, that existentialist themes find their most concentrated and urgent expression precisely in short fiction: the genre's formal economy mirrors existentialism's philosophical insistence that human beings are, at every moment, thrown into a situation they did not choose and must navigate without the consolation of pre-given purpose. The selected short story collection, *Why Does the Moon Look So Beautiful?* (2024), represents a sustained engagement with the dilemmas. It offers a gallery of characters who confront mortality, meaninglessness, the entrapment of social convention, and the perpetual recession of their desired destinations.

Existentialism, as a philosophical movement, emerged with particular force in the mid-twentieth century as a response to the perceived collapse of the metaphysical certainties that had underwritten Western civilization. In the aftermath of two devastating world wars, the traditional answers to the question of human meaning, whether theological, rationalist, or idealist, appeared inadequate in the face of massive, gratuitous suffering. Sartre, writing in occupied Paris in the early 1940s, formulated the axiom that would become existentialism's founding proposition: “existence precedes essence” (Sartre, 2007, p. x). Human beings, Sartre argued, are not born with a predetermined nature or purpose; they are first thrown into existence and only subsequently create themselves through their choices and actions. This reversal of the traditional philosophical order, in which essence was understood to precede and determine existence, carries profound and unsettling implications: if there is no pre-given human nature, no divine blueprint, no rational teleology guiding human conduct, then each individual bears the full and terrifying weight of responsibility for who they are and who they become.

Albert Camus approaches the same predicament from a different, more lyrical angle. He identifies the fundamental tension of human existence as the confrontation between humanity's insatiable demand for clarity and meaning and the universe's utter silence in response to that demand. The human struggle can totally change this situation with courage and more importantly by revolting as Camus states the situation of Sisyphus where “at each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks toward the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock” (Camus, 1991, p. 121). This irreconcilable clash, which Camus termed the absurd, does not resolve itself in any rational synthesis; it can only be lived with, acknowledged, and, crucially, defied. Camus's absurd hero does not seek escape through religious faith, philosophical system-building, or suicide; instead, he embraces the revolt that consists of continuing to live fully and passionately in full knowledge of life's ultimate meaninglessness. Camus asserts that “the struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.” (p. 123) The Sisyphean predicament, in which a condemned man pushes his boulder up a mountain only to watch it roll back down for eternity, becomes, in Camus's reading, not a figure of hopeless futility but a paradigm of human resilience.

The existentialist tradition, however, did not begin with Sartre and Camus. Its deepest roots lie in the thought of Søren Kierkegaard, the nineteenth-century Danish philosopher who first insisted on the irreducibility of the existing individual against the abstraction of Hegelian system philosophy. In *Either/Or* (1843), Kierkegaard dramatized the fundamental choice that defines human selfhood. For him, the life of any individual “seem wicked because it lack passion” and these individuals do not try to find the alternatives. (Kierkegaard, 1843, p. 31). The choice between the aesthetic stage of life, characterized by pleasure-seeking, immediacy, and the avoidance of commitment, and the ethical stage, characterized by responsibility, self-discipline, and the willingness to bind oneself to a course of action over time. Kierkegaard's central insight was that this choice cannot be made on the basis of external criteria or rational calculation; it must be “made as a leap, a willed act of self-constitution” in the face of “irreducible uncertainty” (p. 31). The despair that Kierkegaard diagnoses in those who refuse or fail to make this choice prefigures both Sartre's concept of *bad faith* and Camus's analysis of the *flight from the absurd*.

The stories under examination in this article engage these existentialist themes with remarkable directness and philosophical precision. *The Sticker* confronts mortality in its most immediate form: the death of a friend forces the protagonist into an encounter with the nothingness that circumscribes all human projects. *Why Does the Moon Look So Beautiful?* stages the Sisyphean recurrence of an unanswerable question across generations, transforming the title inquiry into a figure of perpetual existentialist interrogation. *The Empty Bottle* examines the bad faith that inheres in social institutions such as marriage, showing two young men attempting to philosophize their way to authenticity even as they remain ensnared in the very conventions they critique. *The Bird-Trap* offers the collection's most formally inventive engagement with existentialist themes, adopting the perspective of a trapped bird to explore consciousness imprisoned in a condition not of its choosing. The paired stories *The Destination* and *Destination beyond Destination* enact the Sartrean concept of the project, the human being as an entity perpetually oriented toward a future that perpetually recedes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Existentialism as a critical methodology proceeds from a set of interrelated philosophical premises concerning the nature of human existence, consciousness, freedom, and the production of meaning. To deploy this methodology with precision requires a clear grasp of its foundational concepts as articulated in the primary theoretical texts. This framework draws on three canonical works: Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), and Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* (1843), attending in particular to those passages in which the theoretical vocabulary most directly illuminates the literary material under analysis.

Sartre's existentialism is built on an ontological distinction between two modes of being: the being-in-itself (*en-soi*), which characterizes things, and the being-for-itself (*pour-soi*), which characterizes conscious human existence. Things are simply what they are; they have no interiority, no capacity for self-questioning, no gap between what they are and what they might become. Human consciousness, by contrast, is constitutively characterized by a relation to nothingness: it is, as Sartre (1943) famously argued, “a being such that in its being, its being is in question.” (p. 53). This radical openness of consciousness to its own possibilities is the source of both human freedom and human anguish. Sartre (1943) makes the ontological status of nothingness explicit: “Nothingness lies coiled in the heart of being like a worm” (p. 29). This is not a poetic flourish but a precise philosophical claim: nothingness is not an external absence but an internal negation that consciousness perpetually performs upon itself and upon the world, generating the space of possibility within which freedom operates. The

concept of bad faith (*mauvaise foi*) is Sartre's term for the characteristic human evasion of this freedom. In bad faith, the individual denies the openness of consciousness by pretending to be a thing, by adopting an identity as if it were a fixed nature rather than a chosen project. Sartre's celebrated example of the waiter in a cafe illustrates the mechanism with crystal-line clarity:

"Let us consider this waiter in the cafe. His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid... He is playing, he is amusing himself. But what is he playing? We need not watch long before we can explain it: he is playing at being a waiter in a cafe." (Sartre, 1943, p. 59)

The waiter's excessive, performative conformity to his social role reveals the bad faith at work: he is not simply doing his job but pretending that his role exhausts his being, that he has no choice, no freedom, and no capacity to be otherwise. Sartre's deeper analysis of the structure of bad faith makes the stakes clear: "The first act of bad faith is to flee what it cannot flee, to flee what it is" (p. 64). Bad faith is not merely dishonesty or self-deception in the ordinary psychological sense; it is a fundamental ontological orientation, a project of self-concealment in which the *pour-soi* attempts to deny its own nature as freedom. The counterpart of bad faith in Sartre's moral vocabulary is authenticity: the resolute acknowledgment of one's freedom and the willingness to bear the full weight of responsibility that this acknowledgment entails. Authentic existence does not eliminate anguish; on the contrary, it intensifies it, since the authentic individual cannot take refuge in the excuse that circumstances or nature determined their choices. The connection between freedom and anguish is structural: "In anguish, freedom is anguished before itself inasmuch as it is instigated and bound by nothing" (p. 35). The authentic response to this anguish is not escape but acceptance: the individual must choose, and must choose knowing that their choice constitutes them, with no guarantee of correctness and no appeal to any external standard.

Sartre's ontological account of freedom is supplemented and, in certain respects, radicalized by Camus's phenomenological account of the absurd. Where Sartre grounds his analysis in the structure of consciousness, Camus begins with the lived experience of disorientation, the moment when the world's familiar surfaces crack and reveal the void beneath. The absurd, for Camus, is not a property of the world alone, nor of the human mind alone, but of their confrontation:

"What is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world. For the moment it is all that links them together." (Camus, 1942, p. 21)

Camus's response to the absurd is the doctrine of revolt: not a political or revolutionary action, but a sustained existential refusal of resignation, hope, or the leap of faith that would dissolve the tension of the absurd by positing a transcendent resolution. From the confrontation with the absurd, Camus draws three consequences: "revolt, my freedom, and my passion. By the mere activity of consciousness I transform into a rule of life what was an invitation to death" (p. 64). The absurd hero, paradigmatically figured as Sisyphus, embodies this revolt in its purest form: knowing his labor is futile, he nevertheless performs it, and in that performance achieves a dignity that no theodicy could confer. "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (p. 123).

Kierkegaard's contribution to the existentialist framework employed here is his analysis of the stages of existence and the centrality of choice. The either/or of the title is not merely a logical disjunction but an existential imperative: "My either/or does not in the first instance denote the choice between good and evil; it denotes the choice whereby one chooses good and evil or excludes them" (Kierkegaard, 1843, p. 145). The act of choosing constitutes the self; the

refusal to choose, the perpetual deferral of commitment, leaves the individual in the despair of the aesthetic stage, which Kierkegaard diagnoses as a form of self-annihilation. The second part of *Either/Or*, written from the perspective of the ethical stage, teaches “despair as a thing one must will, and teaches one to choose oneself, the way to overcome melancholy and despair” (p. xiii). The injunction to choose oneself, to take responsibility for the totality of one's existence in a single act of self-constitution, anticipates both Sartre's concept of the fundamental project and Camus's doctrine of revolt.

Together, these three frameworks provide the conceptual vocabulary for the literary analysis that follows. The stories are read as dramatizations of the existentialist predicament: the confrontation with nothingness, the temptation of bad faith, the demand for authenticity, the absurd recurrence of unanswerable questions, and the perpetual deferral of arrival. The methodology is one of close textual reading informed by philosophical precision, attending to the formal dimensions of the stories, point of view, narrative voice, structure, and imagery, as well as their thematic content.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The application of existentialist philosophical categories to literary texts has a long and productive critical history, beginning in the same mid-century moment that produced the philosophy itself. Sartre was himself a major literary artist, and his plays, novels, and short stories were understood from their first publication as fictional laboratories for the philosophical ideas. Camus's novels were similarly received as literary embodiments of the absurdist doctrine. The critical tradition that developed around these double careers established a precedent for reading fiction through the lens of existentialist concepts, a precedent that subsequent scholars have extended to a wide range of literary traditions and national literatures.

The foundational critical accounts of existentialism as a literary mode were established by scholars such as Walter Kaufmann, whose anthology *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (1956) mapped the philosophical movement's literary antecedents and established its canonical texts. Kaufmann's collection demonstrated that the existentialist sensibility, characterized by its focus on individual consciousness, anxiety, freedom, and the confrontation with meaninglessness, was not confined to French philosophy but had deep roots in European literary and philosophical traditions extending from Dostoevsky through Kafka. This genealogical argument has important implications for the reading of non-Western literatures: it suggests that existentialist themes are not the exclusive property of a particular cultural moment but recur wherever literature engages seriously with the human condition in its most fundamental dimensions.

More recent scholarship has focused on the specific mechanisms by which existentialist philosophy is translated into narrative form. Hazel Barnes, whose work as both translator of *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and independent scholar established her as the foremost English-language interpreter of Sartrean existentialism, argued in *Humanistic Existentialism: The Literature of Possibility* (1959) that existentialist fiction is distinguished by its characteristic use of extreme or limit situations, moments in which the characters' ordinary defenses against existential confrontation are stripped away and the individual must respond with their full being. Barnes's (1959) analysis of the limit situation as a narrative device is directly relevant to the stories under examination here, several of which, most notably *The Sticker* and *The Bird-Trap*, place their protagonists or narrative focalizers in precisely such situations.

The concept of bad faith has attracted particular critical attention as a tool for literary analysis, since it provides a remarkably precise instrument for diagnosing the forms of self-deception that characters employ to evade the demands of authentic existence. Ronald Hayman, in his biographical and critical study *Sartre: A Life* (1987), traced the development of the bad faith concept from Sartre's earliest philosophical writings through its literary manifestations in the plays and novels, arguing that Sartre's most memorable characters are those who demonstrate the greatest ingenuity in constructing their self-deceptions. This critical tradition suggests that bad faith operates as a kind of dramatic engine in existentialist fiction: the gap between the character's self-presentation and the freedom they are denying generates the narrative tension that drives the story forward.

The Camusian dimension of the literary texts has similarly generated a substantial critical literature. Matthew Sharpe and Ronald Reiner, in Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus: A Reader's Guide* (2015), provide a systematic analysis of the philosophical argument of the myth and its implications for the reading of Camus's fiction. Their account of the absurd as a relational concept, arising in the confrontation between human demand and world silence, is particularly useful for analyzing texts in which unanswerable questions recur across narrative time, as in *Why Does the Moon Look So Beautiful?* (2024) where the title question echoes through generations without resolution. Sharpe and Reiner also develop Camus's concept of Sisyphean revolt as a model of narrative form: the story that returns, without progress, to its point of departure enacts the very structure of the absurd.

Kierkegaard's influence on literary criticism has been explored most systematically in the work of scholars concerned with the intersection of aesthetics and ethics. Mark C. Taylor, in *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and the Self* (1975), examined the way in which Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms in works such as *Either/Or* enacts the existential categories the text discusses: the aesthetic pseudonym represents the aesthetic stage, the ethical pseudonym the ethical stage, and the movement between them dramatizes the choice Kierkegaard is urging upon the reader. This formal dimension of Kierkegaard's thought, the idea that the form of the text embodies its philosophical content, has important implications for the reading of short fiction, where formal choices of point of view, voice, and structure are never merely technical but carry existential weight.

The intersection of existentialism with post-colonial and world literary studies has generated an important body of scholarship concerned with the universality or cultural specificity of existentialist categories. Scholars such as Lewis Gordon, in *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism* (1995), have extended Sartrean bad faith analysis to the structures of colonial and racialized oppression, arguing that the same mechanism of self-deception that operates at the individual level in Sartre's analysis also operates at the structural level of racist social formations. Gordon's work broadens the applicability of existentialist categories beyond their original European context and provides a model for applying them to literary traditions arising from different cultural and historical situations.

The specific texts under examination in this article, the short stories from *Why Does the Moon Look So Beautiful?*, have not yet received the sustained philosophical analysis their existentialist content demands. The existing scholarly attention to this collection has focused primarily on questions of cultural context and narrative technique rather than on the philosophical dimensions that the stories foreground. This article seeks to fill that gap, bringing the resources of the existentialist critical tradition to bear on texts that reward such an approach with particular richness. The argument that follows engages with the theoretical

and secondary literature surveyed above while remaining grounded in close reading of the primary fictional texts.

ANALYSIS

Mortality, Nothingness, and the Sticker's Revolt

Of all the stories in the collection, *The Sticker* offers the most explicitly existentialist engagement, and it does so through a deceptively simple narrative conceit. The story's protagonist, a student who has been living in what might be described as Kierkegaard's aesthetic stage, driven by pleasure, immediacy, and the avoidance of serious commitment, is abruptly confronted with the death of a close friend who "met with a tragic end in a road accident" and he was "consumed with frustration" (Naguman, 2024, p. 16). This confrontation with mortality functions as what Barnes would call a limit situation: a moment in which the ordinary psychological defenses against existential awareness are overwhelmed and the individual is forced to encounter the nothingness that circumscribes all human projects. The friend's death is not presented as a distant or abstract event but as an immediate, visceral rupture in the fabric of the protagonist's world, demanding a response that goes beyond grief into philosophical reckoning. The protagonist also raises certain questions about existence and asks about the "essence of life" and questions "why does death always lurk around?" (p. 16).

The protagonist's response enacts two of Sartre's central existentialist categories in immediate sequence. The first response is a form of bad faith: he retreats into the routines of his studies, attempting to fill the void opened by his friend's death with the busy-ness of academic obligation. This retreat exemplifies Sartre's account of how bad faith functions as a flight from freedom: "The first act of bad faith is to flee what it cannot flee, to flee what it is" (Sartre, 1943, p. 64). The studies represent the social role, the identity as student, which the protagonist uses to deny the radical openness of his situation. But the bad faith cannot hold. The yellow sticker with its provocative motto, "Don't take life too seriously; it isn't permanent," functions as what Sartre would call a nausea-like disruption, a moment in which the sedimented routines of everyday existence suddenly appear arbitrary and groundless. (Naguman, 2024, p.16).

The sticker's motto is a precise literary articulation of Camus's absurdist philosophy. The injunction not to take life too seriously is not a counsel of nihilism or indifference but a formulation of the absurd insight that life's impermanence is not a reason for despair but for a kind of liberated engagement. When Camus describes the absurd man as one who "catches sight of a burning and frigid, transparent and limited universe in which nothing is possible but everything is given" (Camus, 1942, p. 60), he is describing precisely the epistemological position that the sticker's motto makes available to the protagonist. The recognition that life is not permanent does not annihilate value but intensifies it: if nothing lasts, then every moment of genuine engagement acquires an urgency and preciousness that the assumption of permanence would dissolve.

The protagonist's decision to "farewell to this world of books and medicines and seek solace in the wilderness" and sitting under the trees and enjoying "the gentle breeze" represents an authentic existentialist response to his confrontation with nothingness (Naguman, 2024, p.16). The choice is not determined by any external standard, any parental expectation, social norm, or rational calculation about career prospects; it is a Sartrean fundamental project, a self-constituting choice that creates the protagonist as a particular kind of being. The wilderness here functions not merely as a geographical destination but as an existentialist symbol: the space without social script, where the individual cannot take refuge in a predefined role and must encounter themselves in their radical freedom. Sartre's

connection between freedom and anguish is directly relevant: “In anguish, freedom is anguished before itself inasmuch as it is instigated and bound by nothing” (Sartre, 1943, p. 35). The protagonist’s willingness to undergo this anguish, rather than retreating into the bad faith of his social role, constitutes the story’s claim on the reader’s philosophical attention.

The Sisyphean Question: “Why Does the Moon Look So Beautiful?”

The title story of the collection enacts the Camusian predicament with formal precision. The question that provides the title is first asked by the father to his own mother, receiving no satisfying answer; it is then asked again, a generation later, to his own son, with the same result. This generational repetition without resolution is the literary embodiment of what Camus calls the Sisyphean predicament: the question rolls back down the mountain as surely as the boulder, demanding to be asked again without any promise of eventual resolution. The very structure of the story, its recursive form, its refusal of narrative closure, is itself a philosophical statement about the nature of the absurd.

The question itself, “why does the moon look so beautiful?,” is a paradigmatic existentialist interrogation because it asks for a reason where none can be given (Naguman, 2024, p.12). The moon’s beauty is not beautiful for any purpose but it serves no biological function, advances no social agenda, and contributes to no teleological project. It simply is, and it moves human beings to wonder, to desire, to reach toward some understanding that perpetually eludes them. This is precisely the structure of what Camus identifies as the absurd: “what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart” (Camus, 1942, p. 21). The father’s question is his form of the longing for clarity; the world’s silence in response to it is the irrational. The absurd depends, as Camus insists, on both terms: neither the beauty nor the longing alone is absurd, but their confrontation is.

What distinguishes the story’s treatment of the Camusian predicament from mere philosophical illustration is its attention to the human dimension of the question’s repetition. The father does not ask the question in a spirit of abstract philosophical inquiry but out of what Camus would call passion, a passionate engagement with the world that refuses to be satisfied by the answer that beauty is meaningless. This refusal is itself the Camusian revolt: the father continues to ask the question, generation after generation, not because he expects an answer but because the asking is itself an affirmation, a refusal to accept the world’s silence as the final word. “The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy” (p. 123). One must, in parallel, imagine the father fulfilled, not in the sense of having received an answer, but in the sense of having maintained the questioning that is the human response to an indifferent universe.

Bad Faith and the Social Institution: *The Empty Bottle*

The Empty Bottle represents the collection’s most sustained examination of bad faith as a social phenomenon. The two young men, Sabzal and Aslam, engage in what presents itself as a philosophical critique of marriage: they argue that the institution channels desire into socially acceptable but personally stifling forms, that it substitutes external convention for authentic self-determination. Their nihilistic drinking and philosophizing appear, on the surface, to be a rebellion against bad faith, an assertion of the Sartrean principle that existence precedes essence, that they need not be what society demands they be. Aslam remarks that “those who are alive commit suicide. We’re already dead.” (Naguman, 2024, p.85).

However, the story’s deeper irony lies in its revelation that the rebellion itself is a form of bad faith. Sartre’s waiter in the cafe plays at being a waiter; Sabzal and Aslam play at being bohemian philosophers. Their performance of non-conformity is as scripted as any social role,

as much a flight from genuine freedom as the conventional marriages they critique. Sartre's account of bad faith captures this precisely: bad faith is not confined to those who embrace social roles but extends to those who define themselves by their rejection of such roles, since both the conformist and the rebel are using an identity, however different in content, to avoid the confrontation with radical freedom. As Sartre writes that bad faith involves "a being such that in its being, its being is in question" (Sartre, 1943, p. xvii); the genuine existentialist response is not to replace one fixed identity with another but to acknowledge the perpetual openness of one's being.

The empty bottle of the title functions as a richly overdetermined symbol. On one level, it is simply the physical evidence of the evening's drinking, the material residue of the rebellion. On a deeper level, it figures the emptiness of their philosophical posturing: the arguments, like the bottle, have been drained of content, consumed in the service of a performance rather than a genuine confrontation with freedom. The remark "an empty bottle can serve many purposes. We can fill it with water: the essence of life" is connected to the philosophy of existence at the deepest level, the empty bottle is a figure for what Kierkegaard diagnoses as the condition of the aesthetic stage: a self that has been used up in the pursuit of immediate gratification without having achieved the self-constitution that comes from genuine choice (Naguman, 2024, p.85). Kierkegaard's insight that "to choose oneself is only another expression for the Socratic injunction to know oneself" points toward what Sabzal and Aslam lack: not more elaborate philosophical arguments but the willingness to make the fundamental choice that would constitute them as genuinely free beings. (Kierkegaard, 1843, p. xiii).

Consciousness Trapped: The Existential Metaphysics of *The Bird-Trap*

The Bird-Trap represents the collection's most formally radical engagement with existentialist themes. By adopting the first-person perspective of a bird caught in a trap on a Kahur tree, the story forces a confrontation with the existentialist condition in its most naked form: consciousness imprisoned in a situation not of its choosing, unable to escape, unable to die quickly, and acutely aware of its predicament as it questions "Why do I remain suspended here in this awkward position?" (Naguman, 2024, p. 35). This formal choice is itself philosophically significant: by literalizing the metaphor of entrapment that existentialism uses to describe the human condition, the story strips away the social and psychological elaborations that ordinarily make the existentialist predicament bearable and presents it in its pure, elemental form.

The bird's situation maps onto several of the central Sartrean categories with remarkable precision. The bird is in a situation it did not choose, thrown into a condition of radical constraint by forces entirely external to its will: this corresponds to Sartre's concept of facticity, the brute givenness of the situation into which consciousness finds itself thrown. But the birds are conscious of its predicament as when Badal approaches them "they flew away and sat on a small kahur tree" and this consciousness is itself a form of freedom: even within the trap, the birds can attend to its situation, evaluate it, and respond to it in ways that are not simply mechanical reactions. (p. 36). It is the Sartrean for-itself within the in-itself: consciousness perpetually transcending, even if it cannot escape, the factual situation in which it finds itself.

When the bird trap finally succeeds in catching a bird as it states that "I snapped, trapping his neck instantly" describes the bird's deteriorating condition, caught between the inability to escape and the inability to die quickly, corresponds to what Sartre identifies as the fundamental structure of human existence: the for-itself is condemned to freedom, which

means it cannot simply become a thing, cannot simply cease to be conscious and responsible, even in conditions of extreme constraint. (p. 38). The birds cannot stop being a bird, cannot stop perceiving and suffering, even as its situation becomes increasingly hopeless. This is the existentialist equivalent of what Sartre calls the nausea of pure existence, the unavoidable awareness of one's own being that cannot be dissolved into unconsciousness. The bird's awareness of its own deterioration is not a pathology but the condition of any consciousness that has not deceived itself into forgetting its situation.

The story's refusal of resolution is its most important formal decision. The bird does not escape, does not die, and does not achieve any form of transcendence. It remains trapped, conscious, and deteriorating. This formal stasis corresponds to Camus's insistence that the absurd cannot be resolved, only lived with. The bird's maintenance of consciousness under conditions of irreducible constraint is its version of Sisyphean revolt: it continues to be a witness to its own situation, to attend to the texture of its experience, to record the precise qualities of its suffering and its environment. This attentiveness is, in the Camusian sense, a form of revolt against the universe's indifference: "Thus I draw from the absurd three consequences, which are my revolt, my freedom, and my passion" (Camus, 1942, p. 64). The bird's freedom is minimal, its passion confined to the intensity of its awareness, but its revolt is real: it continues to exist as a consciousness, refusing the anesthesia of unconsciousness that would be the equivalent of philosophical suicide.

The Perpetually Receding Project: *The Destination* and *Destination beyond Destination*

The paired stories *The Destination* and *Destination beyond Destination* enact the Sartrean concept of the project with a formal ingenuity that doubles their philosophical impact. Reading in sequence, the titles alone constitute a philosophical argument: the destination that is reached turns out to generate a destination beyond itself, ad infinitum, so that arrival is never final but always productive of further departure. This structure corresponds precisely to Sartre's analysis of human existence as a being always oriented toward a future that perpetually recedes: the for-itself is defined not by what it is but by what it lacks and strives toward, its being is always ahead of itself, in the form of a project that has not yet been realized.

Sartre's account of the project is directly relevant here: "Freedom is existence, and in it existence precedes essence. The upsurge of freedom is immediate and concrete and is not to be distinguished from its choice" (Sartre, 1943, p. 568). The journey toward a destination is not merely a metaphor for the pursuit of a goal but a concrete instantiation of what Sartre means by the project: the for-itself constitutes itself by choosing a particular orientation toward the future, a particular destination, and this choice is both its freedom and its identity at that moment. But because freedom is inexhaustible, because the *for-itself* cannot be fixed in any final identity, the destination, once reached, reveals a further destination, and the project continues.

The existential angst that attends this structure is the angst of the realization that there is no final destination, no point at which the project will be complete and the individual will have finally become what they were striving to be. This is not, in the Sartrean account, a cause for despair but a condition of authentic existence: to accept the perpetual incompleteness of one's being, to embrace the project as project rather than mourning its failure to deliver a final product, is the existentialist version of maturity. Kierkegaard's injunction to choose oneself is relevant here: the authentic individual does not choose in order to arrive at a fixed identity but chooses in the full knowledge that the choice opens new choices, that the self that is constituted by this choice will immediately face further existential demands.

The formal relationship between the two stories reinforces this philosophical argument. Reading alone, *The Destination* might appear to end in arrival, in the achievement of a goal as the both lovers “piled up on the earth” and “they had already left for their destination” (Naguman, 2024, p.20). But *Destination beyond Destination* undermines this reading retroactively, revealing that the destination was always already a threshold rather than a terminus. This retroactive revision of meaning corresponds to Sartre’s account of how the for-itself relates to its own past: the past is not fixed but is constantly reinterpreted from the perspective of the current project. The meaning of having arrived at the destination depends entirely on what project the individual now undertakes from that arrival point; if the project demands a further destination, then the first destination was never a true arrival but always already a departure and chanting the hymn “destination beyond destination, down to His sacred place” (p.50). The stories together embody what Camus identifies as the human condition: “convinced of the wholly human origin of all that is human, a blind man eager to see who knows that the night has no end, he is still on the go. The rock is still rolling” (Camus, 1942, p. 123).

CONCLUSION

The analysis has constituted a coherent and philosophically sophisticated engagement with the central categories of existentialist thought. The study has explored the full range of existentialist experience: the confrontation with mortality and nothingness in *The Sticker*, the Sisyphean recurrence of unanswerable questions in the title story, *Why Does the Moon Look so Beautiful?*, the self-deceptions of bad faith in *The Empty Bottle*, the entrapment of consciousness in conditions not of its choosing in *The Bird-Trap*, and the perpetual deferral of existential arrival in the paired destination stories. The theoretical frameworks of Sartre, Camus, and Kierkegaard are not simply applied to these texts as external templates but are found to illuminate dimensions of the fiction that other critical approaches would leave in shadow. The existentialist lens has revealed the philosophical precision. The argument is not pessimistic, despite its sustained engagement with mortality, entrapment, and meaninglessness. Like Camus’s Sisyphus, the characters who achieve authentic existence in these stories do so through revolt rather than resolution, through the courageous maintenance of consciousness and passion in the face of an indifferent universe. The existentialist categories developed by Sartre, Camus, and Kierkegaard in response to the crises of the twentieth century continue to illuminate the most fundamental dimensions of human experience as they are explored in fiction across cultural and historical contexts.

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