

CHUCK PALAHNIUK'S CHOKE AS AN EXISTENTIAL NOVEL

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Abstract

Existentialism is a theory or philosophical approach which gives important to the existence of an individual as a free and as a responsible person determining his own growth, development through the act of will. It is mainly associated with nineteenth century and twentieth century European philosophers and the term was coined by the French philosopher Gabriel Honore Marcel (Catholic) who is a playwright, leading Christian existentialist and music critic. There are some common themes in existentialism: the feeling of fear and anxiety, bad faith, otherness, meaninglessness, absurdity, alienation, atheism and the importance of an individual (personal relation) and choice.

Chuck Palahniuk's novel choke also contained these themes. Existentialism is a world view which is also expressed by Palahniuk in his novel Choke. This novel presents existential journey of the narrator which means an individual's journey of searching a meaningful life. The novel begins with the narrator's absurd life story. He is an unsuccessful and economically poor established youth. He spent his whole life for his mother especially for earning money. He felt very empty with this earning mechanical life. So he hated that jobs and he wandered for a better life.

"The miserable truth is, every night I still have to pick through the telephone directory and find a good place to almost die" (79). He has lived in a state of isolation and his works make him depressed. He suffered very much of having sexual addiction. He saved many lives by fucking them.

"My job is too hard to explain here. I just happen to be the backbone of early colonial America" (23). His ideas make other's irritating especially those who suffered for this type of addiction. Later he joined in a support group which is a big gathering was conducted in church and the members of the group were addicted to the sex. Victor also suffered by the same problem. The members of the support group were shared their bitter experience. He patiently listened to the stories. Through this talk, they were getting some relief from their chronic illness (sex related). He also worked as a tourist guide with his lovable friend Denny. These are the works done by him.

"Keeping my mom in St. Anthony's care center costs around three grand each month. These Good Samaritans keep me alive" (50). As an individual, he has entered the steps of awakening. His desire would be getting out from the current situation. He has admitted his mother in St. Anthony's care center. There he met so many people like his mother Ida Mancini.

"A squirrel is someone who chews her food and then forgets who to do next" (56). Squirrel is a patient who forgets to swallow the food. Instead of doing this, she spits her mouthful of food in her own shirt pocket or any other things. "At St. Anthony's, the first floor for people who forget names and run around naked and put chewed food in their pockets"(56). It shows the mindful of pain which she experienced in her past life. The reasons might be distress and depression but it raised the level of fear, pain and anxiety which showed the irrational behavior of squirrel in this rational universe.

Tall, glaring Mrs. Novak is an undresser. These are old people with limited range of motion, so an undresser, even what they call an aggressive undresser, is trapped three times over (56).

Novak is an undresser who roamed here and there without any intention. It symbolizes the haunted experiences in her life and the strong rejection of materialism. 'Nakedness' gives a picture of the life without any intention, lack of consciousness and chaos ensued (mental illness). 'Shedding clothes' depict a cleansing or a new beginning or a new birth or sloughing condi (he) tion of the present world.

In this novel, 'sex' describes as a sensation without any feeling. Palahniuk explains Victor's rebellious youth life as an indication of deep and unbridgeable crack between Mom and Son.

Palahniuk recognizes his ambiguous sexual life is a tool of surviving in this society. His growing character of self – hatredness explored that he is not at all confined to the pain of sex. He recreates the squirming soreness of a child who has the painful experience of past and the working nature of Victor and his friend Denny. He was affected by the parental abuse of a physical nature.

Denny's dream of raising wall compares with the attempt of postmodernism. It represents the absurdity in life which is caused by pop culture. After some days, he constructs a wall and the people of the surroundings also motivate him. So Denny feels very happy and attains a complete satisfaction.

Denny says, all the smiling people keep turning up with rocks. Beautiful rocks. Rocks like you won't believe quarried granite and ashlar basalt. Dressed blocks of sandstone and limestone. They come one by one, bringing mortar and shovels and trowels (289).

Basically, the wall is a manifestation of good faith which tends to be active, power and unity. According to the author, the wall is a sort of individual's self discovery. Denny discovered himself, but the narrator led his half of the life with bad faith in various levels. Victor's destructive opinions about his life become increased when he heard the truth from his Mother Ida Mancini.

She says, I stole you out of a stroller in Waterloo, Iowa, I wanted to save you from the kind of life you'd get.

She says, "I kidnapped you" (269).

Mancini believed that the human should attain their own meaningful life and she tried to lead rational life in an irrational universe. So she stole victor from his own parents. At last he came to the conclusion that the human are special entity and gift. The last part of the novel gives clear sketch of the narrator's plan of what to do next.

"Somebody shouts, where is Victor?"

And someone else shouts, "Give us Victor Mancini"

And for sure, I deserve this, A firing squad.

My whole over extended family (289).

Victor invents something new which is better than past life. He wants to establish a world without rocks and chaos. Three of them dig under the edge of the rock. The power of unity is really strong and chill and they need it forever. "Where we're standing right now, in the ruins in the dark, what we build could be anything" (293). They don't have any idea of what to do next and they don't know what they are constructing. But they believe that this power of unity will ruin the darkness and it will give spark to the society and for them too.

"It's creepy, but here we are, the pilgrims, the crackpots of our time, trying to establish our own alternate reality" (292). The theme of nothingness occupied their mind. Victor's life is full of misery which is surrounded by emptiness. He identified himself as a creepy figure and a crackpot. He wanted to escape from the loneliness. So he has attended support groups as well he was taking care of his mother. When he was attending the support groups, he observed that the other members of the support group were mentally poor than him. He was not affected by any specific disease. But he had a disease (dis-ease: a disorder) of alienation. It is the most important point in existentialism crisis which was experienced by Victor. As an individual, the narrator has two phases in his life. First is the process of recovering from the alienation disorder. Next, as a sufferer, he should face the risk of attempting suicide. He was literally killing himself every night in order to pay his mother's hospital debt. So everyday he was dying and rejuvenating in his life.

Here at St. Anthony's, they show the movie *The Pajama Game* every Friday night and every Friday all the same patients crowd into see it for the first time (57).

These lines explained the actual condition of abnormal people. From these lines, the reader could understand the concept of absurdity which is highlighted by Palahniuk. It is the main principle in existentialism. It represents the quest of human identity. For an example, every Friday they used to show the same movie *The Pajama Game*. But the patients of St. Anthony's hospital were watching the same movie again and again like a first time. Their lives were chaotic and irrational. But they have started to accept this purposeless and meaningless life and started to live with it. They could

attain freedom by accepting this life. They felt independent by watching the same movie again and again. Some of them roamed nakedly without any intention. Even they didn't know their own names.

"Tall glaring Mrs. Novak is an undresser" (56). Human's body is very private and intimate. A very common opinion about nudity is something odd, rebellious and unacceptable concept. But these above characters are pushed against the limitation and boundaries of conventions. They are practicing the ultimate form of freedom, but they are irrational.

Grisping isn't the same as creating something, my mom's voice over says, "Rebelling isn't rebuilding. Ridiculing isn't replacing..." and the voice in the speaker fades out (111).

After attending support group, Victor harassed by the feeling of sickening, despair and anguish. He has started questioning himself about the basic needs. "The old rule about how a thing of beauty is a joy forever, in my experience, even the most beautiful, thing is only a joy for about three hours, tops" (161). This desperate led him as a self-destructive person and he was hiding his own reality and disguised himself in every phase of his life. His life never allowed living him as Victor Mancini. He continued, "The only person we'll have more than each other is ourselves" (20). "These are the only few minutes I can be a human" "just for these minutes, I don't feel lonely" (10). There are different phases of existentialism presented by the author. As an individual, Victor has undergone his existential journey.

Existentialism is a world view which is accepted by all social classes who are lived in America. Palahniuk talks about the working ambiance with drama club people and the folks of community theatre as puritan hypocrites.

Here, he's the law, watching whoever gets bent over, yanking his dog with the white gloved hand. For sure, they don't teach you this is history class but in colonial times, the person who got left in the stocks overnight was nothing less than fair game for everybody to nail (32).

Palahniuk's *Choke* is the best example for social structure which is followed by US. It also explains the political and economical condition of American people. As an individual, every person should raise questions against discrimination. Otherwise the problem of prejudice will be continued forever and ever.

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