

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Existentialism is a branch of philosophy that has a broad term. There are several scholars who have devised their own theory regarding it. Generally, existentialism believes that human being should make their own meaning in life. Existentialism tries to express the very act of existing, namely how an individual perceives the society he lives in and how freedom, decision and responsibility affect the outcome of an individual's thoughts about his life. An individual must then first exist before he can label himself as a being or, in other words, define himself (Macquarrie 3). One of the scholars who have devised a theory of existentialism is Jean-Paul Sartre; he believes that existence precedes essence.

Sartre's theory that existence precedes essence is essentially a concept proposing that a human being has no inherent identity or value that he can identify with and that he is responsible to search for and give himself an identity. A personality is built not by a previously designed model or a precise purpose. It is

human beings that surge up the world and then defines himself afterwards because he will be what he makes of himself (Macquarrie 3).

Besides his theory that existence precedes essence, Sartre has also devised a theory regarding the freedom of human being, which he calls bad faith. It is the habit that people have of deceiving themselves into thinking that they do not have the freedom to make choices for fear of the potential consequences of making choices (Burton). The bad faith then further reinforces the previous theory that men are to give their own meaning, or essence, to their existence.

There are several writers that have created works of literature dealing with existentialism. Two of them are Fyodor Dostoevsky and Jean-Paul Sartre himself. Dostoevsky is not contemporaneous with Sartre. Dostoevsky was a Russian who lived in the 1800s whilst Sartre was a French man who was born in early 1900s. They are almost a hundred years apart, but they are linked by the same concept. Dostoevsky has been regarded as the first writer to propose a significant existentialist theme in his novel, *Notes from Underground*, even far before Existentialism is widely accepted as a branch of philosophy in public. Whereas Sartre is the one who explicitly forms a theory regarding existentialism, which he has inserted in his novel (Radke). Both of them have contributed to the world of literature, through the form of novels that include existentialism as the main theme.

I am interested in analysing two novels using Sartre's theory of existentialism. One is written by Sartre, entitled *Nausea* and the other is by Dostoevsky, entitled *Notes from Underground*. Both of them have similar protagonists who are confused with the reason for their existence. The act of

confusion upon the choices and the consequences that one needs to bear after one has made one's choice are all found in both novels.

Existentialism focuses largely on how an individual acts in freedom. It is also concerned with how an individual's choices affect him at the time of his life. That is why I have chosen to analyse the portrayal of each of the protagonists of the two novels. Wiehardt states that a protagonist is “the main character of a story, novel, drama and other literary works, that the reader or audience empathizes with” (Wiehardt). Some protagonists also exhibit some flaws, which indicate that the protagonists are round characters (Wiehardt). Based on the definition provided by Wiehardt, I am of the opinion that the portrayal of a character can yield much more direct proofs and understanding towards the character's existence since the portrayal of a character generally involves many characteristics, especially because the character analysed is usually a round character.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There are three main problems that I will attempt to answer through my analysis. They are as follows:

1. How are the protagonists portrayed in the novels?
2. How are the portrayals of protagonists connected to existentialism?
3. What are the purposes of the authors in portraying the protagonists?

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purposes of the analysis are as follows:

1. to show how the protagonists are portrayed in the novel.
2. to show how the portrayals connect with existentialism.
3. to show the purposes of the authors in portraying the protagonists.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

In this thesis, I will use Existentialism to analyse Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* and Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea*. First, I read Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* and Sartre's *Nausea*. Second, I analysed the portrayal of the protagonists of each of the two novels, using Sartre's theory of existentialism. Finally, I draw the conclusion based on the analysis of the two novels.

ORGANIZATION OF THESIS

I will present my thesis in four chapters, preceded by Acknowledgements, Table of Contents, and Abstract. Chapter One is Introduction, which consists of Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two contains the analysis of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*. Chapter Three is the analysis of Sartre's *Nausea*. Chapter Four is Conclusion, followed by Bibliography and Appendices.