

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Existentialism is a philosophical theory or an approach which emphasizes on human existence. It also explains how a person defines the meaning of their life by making rational decisions in their life. The term existentialism was popular during the World War II in France and continental Europe. Many people lost their hope during Nazi's occupation at that time and people pointed out their helplessness and their pointless existence in the world. Existentialism proposes that "man is full of anxiety and despair with no meaning in his life, just simply existing, until he has made decisive choice about his own future" (Lourembam). One of the most famous existentialists is Friedrich Nietzsche. According to Nietzsche, "God was dead and life was meaningless so people can freely act the way they want or choose whatever values to their interest" ("Friedrich Nietzsche"). As people are given the freedom to do anything they want, they can do anything in order to find their meaning of life. Thus people should live their life to the fullest.

Existentialism is also often present in literary works; Albert Camus' *The Stranger* and Franz Kafka's *The Trial* are two literary works that in many way reflect

the idea of existentialism. Albert Camus and Franz Kafka are both influential writers in 20th century. Albert Camus was known for his absurdist and existentialist works. Camus was awarded The Nobel Prize in Literature in 1957.

Franz Kafka is considered a writer influential for creating enigmatic stories that often present a grotesque vision of the world. The term “Kafkaesque” which is defined as “a nightmarishly complex, bizarre, or illogical quality” (Kafkaesque, def. 1”) was created to explain a condition often depicted in his works. Franz Kafka Museum was built in 2005 to be dedicated to his works and his personal life. The museum was built in Prague, the place where Kafka was born (“Franz Kafka Museum”).

The Stranger and *The Trial* are very well-known novels. Both of them are the best known works of the authors; these works have received good responses from the readers. *The Stranger* was published in 1942 in French and was known for its absurd and existential elements. It was also the most widely read book in French. The book received a positive impression due to Camus’ capability in projecting a remarkable philosophy through an unremarkable protagonist. Camus’ simplistic narrative style, influenced by the journalistic tradition of Hemingway and his own experience as a reporter, helps to convey the sense of immediacy that lies at the foundation of his philosophy (Moser).

The Trial was published in 1925 in German and the novel presents the Kafkaesque elements in its content. This novel also presents a nightmarish vision of a world in which rational explanation is absent (Wyllie). Kafka’s personal problems gave a big impact to this novel, which is often linked to his diaries and his suicide attempt. This novel is also considered by Herbert Deinert to be a masterpiece as it concentrates the story to the shorter version rather than pursuing the same problem through endless futile efforts (Deinert).

I specifically choose these two novels because I am personally interested in existentialism. Both the novels also give me a new perspective in life. *The Stranger* shows that a person can still find their meaning of life even though they reject to follow or to meet the expectations of the society and *The Trial* shows that sometimes life is unfair and no matter how hard people are looking for any reason for their unfair life, there is just no reason behind it.

After reading the two novels, I notice that the portrayal of the protagonists in them is the most important aspect. Portrayal is defined as “a description of someone or something in a particular way” (“Portrayal, def. 1.1”). Protagonist is defined as “the main character in a story, novel, drama or other literary works, who is sometimes called the hero or heroine. The protagonist is the character that the reader or audience empathizes with and it typically makes the key decisions and experiences the consequences of those decisions” (Wiehardt). I believe that the portrayal of the protagonist holds the key to the purpose of the author in portraying such a protagonist in relation to existentialism because there are various absurd events and existentialist thoughts portrayed in both protagonists in the novels. Thus, the portrayal of the protagonist in a novel is the most suitable to be analyzed.

Statement of the Problem

1. How is the protagonist portrayed in each of the novels?
2. What are the purpose of both authors in portraying such protagonists?

Purpose of the Study

The study is carried out in order to show the following:

1. How the protagonist is portrayed in each of the novels
2. The purposes of the authors in portraying such protagonists

Method of Research

The method of research used in the study is library research. I begin the study by reading the primary text, Albert Camus' *The Stranger* and Franz Kafka's *The Trial*; secondly, I find some additional information from the references in the library and the Internet. The information that has been gathered is then used to analyze the text and finally, I draw some conclusions from the research.

Organization of the Thesis

To make the process of writing easier, the thesis will be presented 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 presents the analysis of the portrayal of the protagonist in Albert Camus' *The Stranger*. Chapter Three contains the analysis of the portrayal of the protagonist in Franz Kafka's *The Trial*. Chapter Four, which is the conclusion, has sum up the analysis. The thesis ends with Bibliography and Appendices, which present the synopses of the novels and the biographies of the authors.