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Lyric Poetry: The Possibility of Expressing Existentialism Thoughts through Words

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ABSTRACT

Music always ultimately confronts man with the meaning of human existence that cannot be expressed in ordinary words, but sung, also through words, albeit full words that 'revive' man from profound vital afflictions. Nothing could be more foreign to the traditional temporality of music than an aesthetic that attaches chief importance to the present moment, favors discontinuity, and denies the teleological view of music, thereby severing the moment perception from both its past and its future. The predominant philosophical mode of this time is acknowledged to be existentialism, a view of life that the present moment is the nodal point of existence. It is in the present that existence is actual, most vital. The way to sense one's existence is to charge each present moment with content and meaning.

Keywords: Literature, Lyric Poetry, Existential Music

I. INTRODUCTION

Consumer Literature is referred to as the entirety of written expression, with the restriction that not every written document can be categorized as literature in the more exact sense of the word. It introduces man to new worlds of experience. Man learns from books and literature; he enjoys the comedies and the tragedies of poems, stories, and plays; and even grows and evolves through his literary journey with books. Man can fully discover meaning in literature by looking at what the author says and how he/she says it. He may interpret the author's message through the use of literary theory, using a mythological, sociological, psychological, historical, or other approach. Literature is important to man because it speaks to him, it is universal, and it affects life of his no matter if he perceives a specific work as beautiful or not.

Man wishes to leave behind a trace of oneself through creative expression, which will exist as a work detached from the individual and, therefore, will outlast its creator. The earliest manifestations of this creative wish are prehistoric paintings in caves, which hold 'encoded' information in the form of visual signs. This visual component inevitably remains closely connected to literature throughout its various historical and social manifestations. Not only the

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visual, writing is always pictorial, but also the acoustic element, the spoken word, is an integral part of literature, for the alphabet translates spoken into signs. Before writing developed as a system of signs, whether pictographs or alphabets, 'texts' were passed on orally. This predecessor of literary expression called 'oral poetry,' consisted of texts stored in a bard's or minstrel's memory which could be recited upon demand. It is assumed that most of the early classical and Old English epics were produced in this tradition and only later preserved in written form. This oral component which runs counter to the modern way of thinking about texts, has been revived in our century through medium of radio and other sound carriers. Audio-literature and the lyrics of songs display the acoustic features of literary phenomena. The visual in literary texts, as well as the oral dimension, has been pushed into the background in the course of history. While in the Middle Ages the visual component of writing was highly privileged in such forms as richly decorated handwritten manuscripts, the arrival of modern age, along with the invention of the printing press, made the visual element disappear or reduced it to a few illustrations in the text. "Pure" writing became more and more stylized as an abstract medium devoid of traces of material or physical elements. The medieval union of word and picture, in which both components of the text formed a single, harmonious entity and even partly overlapped, slowly disappeared. This modern 'iconoclasm' not only restricts the visual dimension of text but also sees writing as a medium which can function with little connection to the acoustic element of language.

II. STUDIES IN EXISTENTIALISM

Foreign

Existentialism is a long-established tendency in human thought and the main branch of radical ethical thought throughout the period since the French revolution of 1789. Its immediate historical roots are found in the middle of the nineteenth century, when Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was writing in Denmark. Generally considered to be the 'father' of the movement, Kierkegaard presents the first consistent statement of the principles that are crystallized in the writings of the twentieth century. Although one often finds the name Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) mentioned in conjunction with that of Kierkegaard, it is Kierkegaard who has more direct influence on subsequent Existentialism. Popularly, however, Existentialism means something rather more localized; A Franco-German intellectual phenomenon which arose in the 1940s and 1950s influenced the literature and cinema and life-styles of the Western countries throughout the 1960s and gave way to new fashion of thought, for example, structuralism and neo-Marxism in the 1970s. It is true that the term Existentialism first came

into currency in the 1940s and it seems appropriate to look first at Existentialism as it was developed by a group of Parisian intellectuals- notably Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80), Simone de Beauvoir (1908-86), Albert Camus (1913-60) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-61) during the Second World War. Jean-Paul Sartre was involved with the French Resistance during this war and in 1940 was briefly imprisoned by the Germans. For him and Simone de Beauvoir, who shared his life from the 1930s until his death, the war meant the abandonment of relatively privileged positions in the bourgeois intelligentsia, and the experience of engagement in human affairs- specifically the attempt to forge a socialist future. The end of the war was looked forward to almost in the spirit which young people- and particularly the Romantic poets- felt in the decade of the French Revolution, as an opportunity for the total reconstruction of humanity and human society. In her autobiography *The Prime of Life* (1960) by Beauvoir reflects on the optimism and commitment she shared with Sartre, Camus, Merleau-Ponty and others at that time: although surrounded by competing systems and ideas ‘their defeat was imminent, and our task would be to shape the future (Guignon, 2010).

The study entitled “Re-thinking Ethics in Existentialism” done by Andre Benoit of University of Ottawa in 2010 explores the thought of Heidegger and Sartre concerning whether existentialism is conducive to a certain ethics conceived of as a theory of moral conduct. In the *Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger stresses the importance of a return to the idea of “ethos” as a replacement for the metaphysically conceived “ethics.” Sartre, conversely, in his essay *Existentialism is Humanism* outlines an ethics that draws heavily from the philosophical tradition. The paper’s guiding question is whether the study of human existence, given the views of these thinkers, leads to a particular ethics, or whether it suggests something like Heidegger’s return to the ancient Greek notion of “ethos,” that is, morality conceived of as a manner of being. The study reveals that Sartre’s ethics, serves to disembody the individual from her world and its history, exposing her to the danger of alienation, or worldlessness. Since morality properly belongs to the manner in which one exists, and not to a transcendental realm of metaphysical truths, Sartre’s existentialism can only serve to alienate one from a moral manner of being. The study of human being, for Heidegger, remains a descriptive occupation. Human being discovers its truths, including its moral truths, in the world.. Therefore, Heidegger’s opposition to metaphysical systems of ethics does not “break a lance” for moral relativism. If anything, moral relativism arises out of a kind of covering over of what essentially shows itself in the world, a kind of in-authenticity. Thus we move towards something like Sartre’s notion of bad faith, but without the Cartesian subjectivity. The study concludes that while it may not be the case that the study of human being is conducive to a particular ethics,

it is possible that such study can help clarify the nature of morality so that we can better equip ourselves against becoming, as a people, a-moral.

A study by Utriainen (2005) entitled on “A Gestalt Music Analysis” at University of Jyväskylä College Humanities. The aim of this study is to develop a Gestalt Music Analysis (GMA) theory and method that belongs to the field of cognitive musicology, music philosophy, and aesthetics. The GMA consists of three parts: theoretical, methodological, and music analytical. I theorize analytic frames, and introduced a method by which the Gestalt of a composer’s music can be analyzed and interpreted in the context of a philosophy of (musical) mind. Another aim of the study is to investigate the claim that a musical Gestalt is a representation of the composer’s inner creative process, and that said process can be analyzed with the GMA. The results of the study revealed the composer’s inner creative Gestalt as a formulaic circular process, as emotional formulas of micro-structural findings, and as performance. The study also reveals the Gestalt quality of music as the “third dimension” of composition. The music is analyzed according to Gestalt philosophical theories, this is to say, theories of the conscious (musical) mind and phenomenology.

Local

A study entitled “Re-reading Emerita Quito’s Thoughts Concerning The Underdevelopment of Filipino Philosophy” done in 2000 by F. Demetrio III, at the University of the Philippines. The aim of the study is to address the absence of an authentic Filipino philosophy after almost two decades after Filipino philosopher Emerita Quito laid down the reasons for its non- emergence. The study involved the following procedures; 1) re-reading of Quito's thoughts concerning the underdevelopment of Filipino philosophy; 2) a subject critique of her thoughts ; 3) further investigation into the grounds that Quito failed to touch; and 4) proposal of a non-defeatist, realistic and concrete program of action that can hopefully catalyze the development of an authentic Filipino philosophy. The study revealed that Quito's investigation is limited, owing to her lack of more critical theories and concepts. It also concluded that Philosophy should not be afraid of borrowing theories and concepts from other nations, as long as such borrowings are done reflectively and as long as such borrowings are applied as paradigms and methodologies. Filipino philosophy must be a reflection and questioning on and of the Philippine reality creatively using any philosophical, cultural, or sociological paradigms; secondly it is a Filipino’s search for answers creatively using again any philosophical, cultural, or sociological paradigms. Third, whatever its output may be, it must go back to tradition that will supply the future philosophical endeavors with paradigms and methodologies.

A study entitled “Heidegger’s Philosophy of Authentic Existence and the Filipinos: Temporal and Historical Dimensions”_done by Dr Eddie R. Babor of Holy Name University in October 2007 aims to determine whether Heidegger’s existentialist views can be applied in Filipino culture. The study reveals that the Filipinos are deeply religious to believe that the world is Godless and that man is left alone in the world. That Filipinos cannot be the “authentic individual” that Heidegger describes because they put high value in social acceptance and therefore find it hard to exist as individuals. The study concludes that it is difficult for Filipinos to apply such Heideggerian views mainly because of their spiritually and high regard to existing social values which were mostly of foreign influence.

III. SYNTHESIS OF RELATED STUDIES

The studies that were gathered to collaborate with the present study has shown comparative similarities and differences to the present study.

The local studies have some similarity to the present study in that Dr. Babor (2008) postulate on Heidegger’s philosophy of authentic existence and the Filipinos is parallel to that which was explored in this study only its medium is based on history and not literature. Demetrio III (2000) addresses the absence of an authentic Filipino philosophy after almost two decades after Filipino philosopher Emerita Quito laid down the reasons for its non- emergence which can be viewed as indirectly similar in that philosophy is tackled but not specific again to existentialism.

The present study differs from those mentioned in the related studies in that its treatment is more comprehensive and has more depth in its approach. The primary discussion on existentialism as against different proponents of this school of thought and amidst the principles of existentialism is already wide in scope. The discussion on this is laid to form the foundation of the analysis that will ensue later on. It also differs in that the approach is limited to the lyrical word component of the songs that is treated like literature or specifically poetry and again is discussed from the percept of linguistic devices used to flesh out the thoughts that the artist wants to convey. Philosophy embedded in the lyrics of the songs is the focus of discussion in this study and though bares similarities to some of those previously written remains quite different in the vastness of its approach.

Literature Classification

Literature is generally classified by genre, which is a subdivision of literature according to purpose, or technique. Literary genres are ever-changing. The number and scope of genres cannot be broken down simply or easily, even the most popular and well-known genres may

be combined together, broken apart, or expanded to create fresh new ones. This reflects the malleable nature of literature; it demonstrates the sharing of ideas and the innovation that makes literature worthwhile age after age.

Literature is divided into three basic kinds, the classic genres of Ancient Greece, novel, drama and poetry. A novel, the most common type of fiction, is a long imaginary story in prose. A fictitious narrative, representing human beings and their actions, adventures and passions and displaying varieties of human characters in relation to life. Drama, on the other hand, is a serious play, the form of writing which is intended to be performed in a theater by actors before an audience. It is a story told completely in the words of the characters of the play. A play is different from a novel because in a play the characters speak their own words, in fact, all explanations of place, time and action must either appear in the dialogues of the actors and actresses, or as stage directions. While the story in a novel is told by the writer as if/he/she had been present and seen it; or the whole thing is told in the first person by one of the characters. There are various kinds of plays, tragedy is a very serious play, ending with either the death, intense suffering or failure of a important character or several characters; and comedies which are pleasant plays whose purpose is to amuse, ending with the success or achievement of the main character. The last genre is poetry which is an expression in musical words, of thoughts designed to stimulate high and noble emotions, or their opposites. ‘Musical words’ mean the arrangement of words in formal meters, or in a rhythm marked by some unity, in contrast to variety of prose. Therefore, poetry is often referred to as music-drama. The special value of poetry is its condensation of man’s thought on important themes, in words usually easier to remember than prose. The enjoyment of poetry lies not only in what is said but also how it is said. A type of poetry that truly expresses what the individual feels is lyric poetry. This is a type of poetry that can be put into music, it is a brief subjective poem, strongly marked by imagination, melody and emotion and creating a single unified impression, a genre that does not tell a story. Rather than depicting characters and actions, it portrays the poet’s own feelings, states of mind, and perceptions. Though lyric poetry has long celebrated love, many poets also wrote lyric poems about war and peace, nature and nostalgia. Its content is that within man, the ideal world, the contemplative or emotional life of soul, which instead of following up actions, remains at home with itself in its own ideal realm, and, consequently, is able to accept self-expression as its unique and indeed final end.

IV. THE TRAITS OF LYRIC POETRY

Lyric poetry is more individualistic. The poet’s individual self-expression sets the tone for all

literature. The individual soul withdraws within itself from an objective world of institutions, and from the dramatic confrontation of social life. It unburdens itself of inner feelings, and the poets turn 'within' to explore subjective responses to the world. Lyric poetry is created to discharge an emotion which is both released and represented in words, that is why the individual can relate to it in every way possible. It is an avenue for contemplation. It can help man dominate his blind passion for others, or bring him the awareness of his lack of it. He can either agree or resent it, but the statement remains, that being a subjective individual; he can grasp the feelings expressed by the poet. More so, the emotions are presented without restraint, hence, one can see the actual truth and reality of the individual's experience in it. It can be a means to realize what he has to nourish or what he needs to take hold of (Jefferson, 2001).

Existentialism and Literature

Existentialism as a philosophical school of thought, is a rejection of all purely abstract thinking; of purely logical or scientific philosophy; a rejection of the absoluteness of reason. It is a philosophy connected with the individual's own life and experience, with the historical situation in which he finds himself, and that it should be, not interesting abstract speculation, but a way of life. It is a philosophy capable of being lived. All this is summed up in what the existentialist's calls 'existence'. It focuses on everything about the individual. It speaks of finding man's essence in the middle of a meaningless world. The randomness of the world creates a blank wall that makes man question further why things happen the way they are not expected to. During the course of his struggle, man is confronted by human situations that enable him to seek awareness of his own being (Reynolds, 2006).

Existentialism's basic concern is man's existence, about his uniqueness compared with other beings. For the existentialist, man is more than what he is, he chooses what he'll be and how he'll relate to the world; it speaks of his freedom to be in a world that he has no full control of. The human situation is best analyzed in terms of answering existential questions. Whenever man has looked at his world, he has found himself in it as a part of it. And he also realized that he is a stranger in the world of objects, unable to penetrate it beyond a certain level of analysis. And then he has become aware of the fact that he himself is the door to the deeper levels of reality, that in his own existence he has only possible approach to existence itself. Whoever has penetrated into the nature of his own finitude can find the traces of finitude in everything that exists. And he can ask the question implied in his finitude as the question implied in finitude universally. In doing so, he does not formulate a doctrine of man, he expresses a doctrine existence as experiences in him as man. The analysis of human situation employs materials made available by man's creative self-interpretation, in all realms of culture.

Existentialism is a literature in which the author attempts to explore the possibilities for creative responses to situations, sometimes extreme situations. Much literature that is regarded as Existential in orientation has at its center the struggle of the self, and the various ways in which this is manifested has led into an interesting array of narratives. Absurd writers portray humans as alienated and divorced from life. In this situation human actions become senseless and futile. They ignore structural conventions, reject realistic settings and logical reasoning, and often contain no consistently evolving plot. There is no question that today's individual is striving for self-consciousness of the self. The continual round of wars, the succession of group in the fields of economics and politics, and the bloody intermittent racial conflicts, together with other group struggles, have driven the individual to desperate straits. He will deny all certitude outside himself on the grounds that he can do no worse for himself than is done by society, or he will adopt a view of life that will accept agony, despair, alienation, and isolation that will come from creating a position that can yield only a consciousness of the single existing individual. The existentialist asserts that to be free is to choose one's own living and dying. This is reality and a portrayal of man in his true element. Solving the absurdity of life is a perpetual process, just like literature never ceases to explore the mystery of man's existence. An eternal bond now exists between existentialism and literature as one continues to exist because of the other (Webber, 2009).

Certain events in an individual's life transpire to form subjective ideas, and these conceptions of freedom and value arise from the view of the individual. The Existentialist philosophers give emphasis on the individual and how one relates to the world. They are interested in the subjective and intersubjective experience of being human. Subjectivity is found in the depths of the human experience, and is formed outside objectivity and reason. It is deeply reflected in emotions that have challenged man's power of reasoning and comprehension, like Faith and Death. These experiences give man a deeper perspective of life, makes him reflect the meaning of his existence. It gives him Maturation through the valuable lessons that he gets from his experience (Reynolds, 2006).

Man is what he wills to be. His existence is characterized by freedom. And since man acts constitutes his existence, he is therefore responsible for it. Man is a free and rational being and this enables him to determine his own essence through the choices he makes. He has freedom, but with it comes the responsibility for his actions and choices; he has the commitment to uplift the dignity of man through these choices and actions. It is choosing that confers upon actions and it is impossible to choose the worse because these choices are not only a commitment to oneself but for others as well (Gravil, 2002).

Life is lived in a world of Absurdity, where nothing is concrete, planned or pre-determined. Man is said to have no definite understanding of what the world is and he continues to provide his own explanation on why things occur beyond his control and understanding. Man faces uncertainty of the future because of the absurd nature of the world and this makes him experience dread and anxiety. It is a reference point for the individual's confrontation with the impossibility of finding meaning in a meaningless universe and of finding rational justification for subjective choices about irrational issues. However, dread pushes man to search for projects to alleviate temporarily the intolerable feeling that it brings. He plays a role that will define his aspirations, or what he wants to do in order to define his essence. This is a continuous process and every step, every project, equates to transcendence of being. In his journey, the individual is expected to be a man for himself and a man for others. This poses a hurdle in establishing his unique vocation in life because living in a society brings in the possibility alienation from society and the self. Man is a part of a society but the society is not his own system. He can still be an independent, free-willed individual even if he is a part of a whole. Alienation speaks of losing one's identity by giving in to the pressure of what society dictates. And once alienated, he loses his authenticity and therefore becomes a minute part of the society. Being objectified by others forces one to live an inauthentic life and therefore deprives man his right to transcend and establish his true essence (Tanzer, 2008).

Jean Paul Sartre, a pioneer of Existentialism, emphasized in his works, the moral and political dimensions of individual freedom and responsibility. He became preoccupied with the responsibility of the writer to effect social change by moving the reader to reflect on society and to assert his freedom. He claimed that the existentialist writer must not portray the individual as determined by a character rooted in hereditary or the environment because such approaches exhibit little respect for human freedom.

V. MUSIC AS AN EXPRESSING TOOL

Music is a fundamental, all encompassing human event involving the complete range of experiences that deepen the challenge of soul. Music is a sensory and perceptual experience. It is an event steep of deep emotions of joy and pleasure, grief and pain and of numinous transcendence. A good song is like a poem and the songwriter is a poet. Songs can only be written by true poets. Songs relate to man the experience and hoarded learning of his feelings and experiences. This is the result of the wisdom which the heart keeps by remaining young, and the other that which it gains by growing old.

Music, like any literature work, is also man's avenue for his thoughts and feelings. According

to Arthur Schopenhauer “Music is the answer to the mystery of life. The most profound of all the arts, it expresses the deepest thoughts of life. Like any philosophy, it presupposes knowledge of its area of study. However, unlike the philosophy of science, the philosophy of an “artistic” practice such as music is one that most people have a significant background in, merely as a result of being members of a musical culture. Music, based on the very rhythmic foundation of the body, is an aesthetic liberation which, due to the promise and hope it transmits to man, relieves him from his intrinsic existential pain, through the intensity, apprehension and emotion arising from the beautiful experience of words and sound, which have offered man the possibility of a world that makes complete sense. It is a common experience that when listening to music, one has the persistent sensation that one is living in ‘another’ world. Everything seems more intense, even apprehension which one transforms into ‘joyful pain’. From the aesthetic perspective, music provokes a true ‘resurrection of the dead’ that transforms all the existential pain of man (Webber, 2009).

The Music Industry has produced geniuses who express themselves in accordance with how they feel and how they perceive themselves in relation to the world. For example, the great British singer Sting is among those musicians who transcend boundaries in creating his music and refuse to give in to the pressures, trends and politics that thrives in the business .

Sting has been described as an existentialist by scholars analyzing the kinds of themes his music has expressed through the years and has been quoted to this effect in the following: *“I am a gambler and I think I've always been rewarded for my risk-taking. My ambition is to be allowed to do anything that I want to do again, and to reach a standard where people will at least say: 'That was OK.' I think the whole idea of being 'successful' in music is to have a unique signature or sonic fingerprint, and - no matter what context you sing in - people recognize it as you. Whether they like it is another matter.”* As well as *“There's this whole universe of music that is simply limitless. I'm on this lifelong journey, when you think you know everything about music, you'll discover you can't get to the end.”*-Sting (Gable, 2009).

VI. CONCLUSION

Music, in all cases, is a creative or poetic power which relieves man from apprehensive fears. Musical experience is a cry; an aesthetic rebellion against the threat that one is meaningless. Music always ultimately confronts man with the meaning of human existence that cannot be expressed in ordinary words, but sung, also through words, albeit full words that ‘revive’ man from profound vital afflictions. Nothing could be more foreign to the traditional temporality of music than an aesthetic that attaches chief importance to the present moment, favors

discontinuity, and denies the teleological view of music, thereby severing the moment perception from both its past and its future. The predominant philosophical mode of this time is acknowledged to be existentialism, a view of life that the present moment is the nodal point of existence. It is in the present that existence is actual, most vital. The way to sense one's existence is to charge each present moment with content and meaning. The present is reality. It is not at all strange therefore, that composers of chance music, to imply their attitude towards music an existential tendency; that is to see music as the occurrence of unpredictable events, each moment of sound or silence freed of formal connection with the moment before or after, audible only as present sensation. In this form of existential music, the present erases the past by allowing no recall or return; and promises no future since the present happening is sufficient to itself. All the listener can hope to do is grasps at each occurrence, just as he grasps at life's formless succession of events, hoping to derive some meaningful order (Crowe, 2004).

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