

# ERNEST HEMINGWAY AND THE EXISTENTIALIST QUESTION: EVALUATING “THE SNOWS OF KILIMANJARO” AND “A CLEAN, WELL-LIGHTED PLACE”

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## Abstract

Ernest Hemingway’s literary works present his dualistic impression regarding life itself. Some of his characters show their eagerness to live a materialistic life and fulfill their desires whereas some others show the pointlessness of living such a life. Unquestionably, Hemingway makes existentialist questions through his characters. However, whether he makes a theistic existentialist question or an atheistic one needs further discussion. Many argue that his works are predominantly ‘nihilistic’ much in the manner of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche and his contemporary atheistic existentialist Jean Paul Sartre. On the contrary, there are occasions when Hemingway’s works reveal the influence of Soren Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, and Gabriel Marcel who all belong to the theistic school of existentialism. This paper observes Ernest Hemingway’s two short stories: “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” and “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” to trace the dichotomous existentialist perspective reflected in them. First, the paper briefly discusses the two schools of existentialism and the philosophers involved in both. Then, the two selected short stories are analyzed as tools for Hemingway’s philosophical dualism.

**Keywords:** Nihilism, Existentialism, Desire, Personal Choice, Dichotomy

## Introduction

Existentialism is a modern philosophical movement developed in 19th-century Europe and gained popularity in the 20th century. This term was coined by the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel who is also known as one of the Christian Existentialists in the “mid-1940s” (Cooper, 1990, p. 1). The pioneering figures who have done “the conceptual groundwork of the movement” include two of the most prominent 19th century philosophers: Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche (Aho, 2023). Among the 20th century contributors, “German philosophers like Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Karl Jaspers as well as prominent Spanish intellectuals José Ortega y Gasset and Miguel de Unamuno” are significant (Aho, 2023). The contribution of the 1957 Nobel laureate French philosopher Albert Camus must also be acknowledged. In literature, among the writers inspired by this

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philosophical movement, Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Nikolai Gogol, Henrik Ibsen, Knut Hamsun, Franz Kafka, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway are noteworthy (Aho, 2023). During WWII, this term became more popular as Europe went through spiritual, material, and moral destruction. The horrible image of the brutal killing and horror of the war leads to a profound realization among existentialist philosophers. They largely proclaimed their philosophy about the freedom and dignity of the individuals. Existentialism is not only a post-war reaction; it is a reaction against all the philosophies that deal with materialism or consumerism and are negligent toward human existence.

The 1954 Nobel laureate Ernest Hemingway has a complex existential history. He was born into a Congregational family but shows acute atheism in many of his writings. Some of his writings such as *The Old Man and the Sea* give hope to people who are destroyed by continuous failures and the stark reality of life. Through this novella, he becomes a writer who pledges for optimism and determination in the face of failure. However, when one finds that such an optimistic writer like Hemingway has finally committed suicide, his image of hope becomes altered. So, hope and hopelessness, optimism and pessimism, celebration of life, and nihilistic views regarding life are juxtaposed in Hemingway's personality. Hence, placing him in any category of existentialism such as 'theistic' or 'atheistic' would be inappropriate.

This paper, therefore, studies Hemingway's dichotomous nature. First of all, the theory of existentialism (both the theistic and the atheistic) is briefly described because it is necessary to understand the nature of the philosophy before positioning Hemingway in either of the categories. Some leading philosophers from both the schools of existentialism are discussed. Then, the two short stories are critically observed in order to find out the existential problems within the texts. The two selected short stories are used as tools through which the philosophical dichotomy in the author is put to light.

### **Existentialism: Theistic and Atheistic**

Existentialism chiefly deals with personal existence. According to Copleston (1956), "Existentialism represents the reassertion of the free man against the collectivism or any tendency to depersonalize, and in this respect, it is akin to personalism and has some affinities with pragmatism" (p. 139). Hence, this philosophy gives the opportunity for an individual to separate his/her life and state of being from the collective life in society. It frees one from the social persona and makes them individuals. Radhakrishnan (1953) reiterates the thought -

Existential philosophy contradicts naturalism and idealism because existentialism talks about human existence. Before the existential movement comes, all philosophers give importance to god, religion, science, metaphysics, society and their culture. Human beings almost forget that they have their own individuality and independent existence, (p. 423).

Therefore, this philosophy asserts that human existence should be the central and most essential thing for humans. Existentialists believe personal existence is more important than any religious beliefs, culture, or society. That does not mean the social phenomena are entirely ignored by the existentialists. They only encourage people to prioritize themselves over society. Existentialists philosophize not “from the standpoint of a spectator” but “from the standpoint of an actor” (Allen qtd. in Copleston, 1956, p. 127). Thus, personal consciousness gets more importance than social consciousness in this school of philosophy.

Due to the differences found in the concepts of the philosophers who are popularly known as existentialists, the school of philosophy is divided into two categories, “The Fathers of Existentialism, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, brought forth two different trends, one atheistic and libertine, the other religious and God-loving, even Christian” (Griffin, 1960, p. 75). Kierkegaard and his followers such as Jasper and Marcel explain individuals and their choices in association with a divine entity which may or may not match the traditional religious viewpoints. But since God or a religious entity as such is not absent in their philosophy, they may be called ‘theistic existentialists’. On the contrary, Nietzsche and philosophers such as Sartre, and Camus “embrace a conception of radical freedom” (Aho, 2023). They are concerned with the choices of individuals in a world that is ‘Godless’. Thus, the fundamental difference between the two types – ‘theistic’ and ‘atheistic’ within existentialism is established. However, “[t]his typology is inadequate and misleading for a number of reasons. The theists differ substantially among themselves – not only on God but on other fundamental matters” (Gier, 1976). A close observation of the atheistic philosophers may also expose their subtle dissimilarities.

Danish philosopher Soren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813-1855) is known as the existential thinker per excellence because he pours his life’s experiences into his philosophy. He forms a rhetoric with an intention to “force people back onto their own resources, to take responsibility for their own existential choices, and to become who they are beyond their socially imposed identities” (Lippitt & Stephen, 2023). Being deeply influenced by figures such as “Socrates”, Kierkegaard wants “to make conventionally accepted forms of knowledge and value untenable” (Lippitt & Stephen, 2023). Perhaps, this is the very reason why his observation regarding the

life stages of an individual is religious though far from conventional religions or more specifically Christianity. Kierkegaard's first stage is called the 'aesthetic' stage.

The aesthetic man refuses to recognize and to choose himself, to commit himself; anything which binds him down and gives shape and definiteness to his life, such as morality and religion, he rejects. He may be a sensualist or he may be an ironic observer of life; but if he refuses to commit himself, he belongs to the aesthetic stage (Copleston, 1956, p. 151).

Such a person listens only to themselves and is completely driven by their desires. This person refuses to be bound by any social, cultural, and/or religious rules. Undoubtedly, s/he lives a materialistic life. Kierkegaard accepts that at this stage, this person remains 'atheistic' but whether that sense of aestheticism is conscious, or unconscious is not explained. But a conscious change is found in the next stage known as the 'moral or ethical stage'. Here an individual realizes that s/he is now a part of a bigger community, and this community has its laws and ethics. So, a commitment to the sense of right and wrong is developed. However, at this 2nd stage, a person's ethics is formed "without the relation to the Transcendent being affirmed" (Copleston, 1956, p. 151). Plainly speaking, the person becomes moral but not religious. The last stage is the 'religious' stage where "an individual does not subordinate himself simply to an impersonal universal law but stands in an immediate relation, affirmed by faith, to the supreme Subject, the personal Absolute, God" (p. 151). This way, Kierkegaard's being a theistic existentialist is proved, however, the idea of a 'personal Absolute God' drives him away from the traditional faiths (e.g., Christianity). Through the term 'personal God', a door is being opened for individuals to imagine/discover their God rather than blindly accepting the concept given in religious doctrines.

German-born Swiss existentialist Karl Jaspers expands on the concept of personal choice in relation to individual existence emphasized by Kierkegaard. Jaspers' deep interest in the 'study of being' presents concepts such as 'Existenz' and 'Dasein'. Dasein refers to the "world of objects" (Copleston, 1956, p. 160). In that sense, any being (e.g., humans) is Dasein. However, human beings are not "something finished and classifiable" (p. 160). They are constantly changing physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Jaspers explains this further, "I am constantly creating myself, as it were, or freely realizing my being through my own choices" (p. 160). Thus, constant change leading to continuous development is a reality. This reality is termed as 'Existenz' by Jaspers. What someone is today, may be changed in time which means what someone has is a "possible existence" (p. 160). Driven by personal choices, an individual journeys through one possible existence to another. So, Jaspers agrees with the Kierkegaardian concept of personal development through

time, but he does not fix the stages of development. A similar thought is reflected in Gabriel Marcel's distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' reflection. Primary reflection is the experiences or issues one has with the world of objects. It is the level "of science, of objectivization, of casualty, of a subject-object dichotomy, of boundness to finitude" (Murchland, 1959, p. 347). The secondary reflection, on the other hand, is "the level of Being" binding together "opposites, such as self and other, activity and passivity, creativity and fidelity" (Murchland, 1959, p. 347; Marsh, 1975, p. 227). Primary reflection gives technical solutions to problems where the subject is not directly involved with the problem – the problem is 'outside' of the subject. The secondary reflection is directed toward the more mysterious issues because here the subject is directly involved – the problem is 'inside' the subject. More specifically, primary reflection deals with the materialistic world whereas secondary reflection deals with the philosophical one. It is through secondary reflection that one may discover "God as the personal transcendent Absolute" (Copleston, 1956, p. 171). Thus, Kierkegaard, Jaspers, and Marcel, the three chief theistic existentialists emphasized the freedom of discovering God through personal observation, unlike the given God in traditional religions.

However, "[t]he atheistic wing of existentialism, thinkers such as Nietzsche and Sartre, unequivocally affirms the absolute incompatibility between God and man and the utter irrelevance of God to man" (Marsh, 1975, p. 219). Friedrich Nietzsche in his book *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spake Zarathustra* describes his (in)famous concept of 'Übermensch' – overman or higher man in English – who is free from the 'masterdom' of God. Nietzsche (1937) writes, "Before God! – Now however this God hath died! Ye higher men, this God was your greatest danger. Only since he lay in the great noontide, now only doth the higher man become – master!" (p. 286). These words are radical in the sense that he sees God as the powerful master rather than the benevolent kind entity and declares that it is time for human beings to shift the power dynamics by being their own master. However, by this 'death of God', Nietzsche refers to the 'death of Christian God'. It is a clear metaphor. The death of God is "sociological" which means Nietzsche considers "belief in God no longer provides an unshakeable foundation for society's values" (Gillespie, 2016, p. 43). The higher man of Nietzsche develops his own values. Marsh (1975) further explains,

Nietzsche's overman is one who has the courage to affirm himself, his own sensuality, intelligence, and freedom, and to leave the false consolations of the person infected with slave morality, taught for centuries by Christianity to despise his senses, distrust his intelligence, and flee responsibility (p. 219).

So, Nietzsche's overman or higher man rejects the tradition of Christian faith and morality which encourages humans to sacrifice the 'happiness' of this world for the sake of another 'utopian' world. Nietzsche's overman lives this 'one' life and becomes concerned with all that belongs here more than anything. For the overman, "the death of God" means "the death of values and of morality" which leads him/her to "nihilism" (Gillespie, 2016, p. 44). Etymologically, nihilism has come from the Latin word "nihil" which means nothing or anything that does not exist. Nietzsche "regards nihilism as a troubling problem" that "involves a failure of attraction and attachment when it comes to these higher, meaning-conferring values" (Huddleston, 2019, p. 1-3). One thing to remember is that a nihilist's rejection of values means rejection of not 'all' values but "the most important values" (e.g., God as the 'master') reflected in Christianity (Huddleston, 2019, p. 2). More precisely, in Nietzsche's own category, a nihilist prefers "master morality" over "slave morality" (Li, 2016, p. 301). He sees slave morality "as an expression of weakness" (Li, 2016, p. 301).

French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre's understanding of Nietzsche is ambivalent. Though there is a tendency to consider Sartre as a philosophical successor of Nietzsche, it is to be noted that Sartre has been an avid critic of Nietzsche. In his own language, "Nietzsche. He is a poet who had the misfortune of having been taken for a philosopher" (Sartre qtd. in Daigle, 2004, p. 196). Gillespie (2016) writes that Sartre "did not always approve of ideas such as the Will to Power, Eternal Recurrence and the *Übermensch*" (p. 44). Echoing this, Daigle (2004) adds that Sartre considers Nietzsche's "overman as a hero destined to replace man at the term of a certain evolution" (p. 196). However, Sartre accepts "Nietzsche's view of nihilism as the starting point for philosophy" and believes the death of God to be "the truth of human condition" (Gillespie, 2016, p. 44-54). He explains that "these problems posed by the loss of the absolute, held in tension with the need for God, lead to the temptation to create substitute transcendences" (Gillespie, 2016, p. 54). Some may find 'science' or 'rational logic' as the substitute for the dead God. Or, more extremely, while seeking a replacement for the absolute, nihilists "become God to and for" themselves (Gillespie, 2016, p. 54). Sartre considers this fungibility in the human mind as the way of "bad faith" making the case of nihilism more complicated (Gillespie, 2016, p. 54).

### **"A Clean, Well-Lighted Place": An Existentialist Evaluation**

Duality presented through a structure of contrast is acutely visible in "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place". In the beginning, Hemingway's art of contrast is found, "It was very late and everyone had left the café except an old man who sat in the shadow the leaves of the tree made against the electric light" (p. 29). Here, 'the

shadow' and 'the electric light' are instrumental. The Old Man likes to be in the light at night. But he chooses to sit on the shadowy side maybe because it represents himself in the best manner. Also, this shadow is of the 'leaves'. The leaves may symbolize the Old Man's life since very often trees and their leaves are associated with life itself. He is around 80 years of age. So, what remains in his life is the shadow of his older self – his youth. The shadow also contrasts with the title "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place". The readers may find it a little more curious when they think about why the Old Man comes to this well-lighted restaurant to drink at night. Being old, it must be difficult for him to travel, especially at night. Also, from the discussion between the two waiters, later it is found that the old man is quite rich. So, why does he take the pain of coming to the restaurant when he can buy as many bottles as he wants and drink at home? The answer is given by the Old Waiter when he talks about the Old Man, "He stays up because he likes it" (p. 30). He also distinguishes between a bodega and a cafe like the one they are in. He reasons, "This is a clean and pleasant café. It is well lighted ... It is necessary that the place be clean and pleasant" (p. 32). So, there are a few things to notice: (i) the Old Man likes the light; (ii) he does not go to bodegas which are open all through the night as they are not pleasant and thus, are unsuitable for a man of his status; (iii) because he is rich, he can afford an expensive cafe like this. A graver observation may give rise to another reason. The Old Man does not want to be 'lonely' at night. Gabriel (1961) asserts that "the only order and meaning he can find ... offered by a clean, well-lighted café is an indication of the extremity to which he is driven as well as the crisis of our age" (p. 541). Also, the 'electric light' may be taken as a symbol of illusion. Bacon (1908) in his essay *Of Truth* has compared truth with "a naked and open day-light" whereas half-truths or lies he compares with "candle-lights" (p. 4). Though electric lights may be stronger than candle lights, with the presence of shadows they are illusive. As if to affirm the point of illusion, at the beginning of the short story, Hemingway makes another contrast while describing the cafe, "In the day time the street was dusty, but at night the dew settled the dust" (p. 29). In the daytime, there is no necessity for false lights. But at night "the masks and mummeries and triumphs of the world" are enacted through these lights (Bacon, 1908, p. 4). People spending nights at cafes or bodegas like to be in illusion which is a form of escapism from reality for the time being. Being 80 years old, the Old Man is no longer unaware of the falsity involved in life. Still, he likes to spend as much time as he can in the illusive world of the well-lighted place and wants to escape from his reality over bottles of brandy. His reality is undoubtedly a stark one since it is known that he tried to commit suicide a week ago but it was unsuccessful because of his niece. These illusive lights and brandy are therefore his only way to be distracted.

While the Old Man is trying to distract himself from reality, the two waiters are conscious of their reality. The Young Waiter is conscious of his desires whereas

the Old Waiter is conscious of the pointlessness of them. The Young Waiter is interested in living life and does not hesitate to show his frustration over the Old Man. On the other hand, the Old waiter is conscious of 'nothingness' which makes him disinterested in life and its regularities. Hence there is a contrast (the Old Man and the two waiters) within contrast (between the two waiters). The differences in consciousness among the three men (the Old Man and the two waiters) assert existentialist questions. This little conversation reveals such questions:

"Last week he tried to commit suicide," one waiter said.

"Why?"

"He was in despair."

"What about?"

"Nothing."

"How do you know it was nothing?"

"He has plenty of money." (29)

The Old Man's having no scarcity of money ensures that materialistically he is a successful man. Yet, his despair leads him to a suicide attempt. This indicates the crucial fact that money or riches cannot be taken as the certainty of happiness. More importantly, when the Old Waiter says that the cause of despair is 'nothing', he means nothing 'usual'. The Old Man does not fit into the imagination of the common materialistic crisis for which there might be a suicide attempt. So, his crisis is an existential one. He does not commit himself to Christianity or any traditional religion because he attempted to commit suicide. In the sense of religion, human beings are not their own masters, their birth, death, and all other things are decided by God. But by the wish to kill himself, the Old Man is defying the masterdom of God like the 'overman' of Nietzsche. Yet, the Old Man seems to be a decent and moral person. The Old Waiter marks that he is "clean" while drinking even when he is "drunk" (p. 31). He is deaf and for this condition, the humiliating words said to him by the Young Waiter are not heard by him. But when the Young Waiter refuses to serve him another brandy, he understands. This proves that he might be deaf, but he is sensible enough to understand what is said to him. Even the irritation that might have been reflected through the expression of the Young Waiter should not be unnoticed by the Old Man. Still, he leaves "half a peseta tip" for the Young Waiter. So, the man is not without any principles or values. Like Nietzsche's overman, he rejects "the higher values" connected to God but not 'all' values (Huddleston, 2019, p. 3). He follows Nietzsche's 'master morality' rather than the other one marked as the 'slave morality'. Because of his niece, his suicide attempt is unsuccessful which presses him to make frequent visits to the 'clean well-lighted café'. The illusive café and brandy offered there have become his 'replacement' much like Sartre's theory of 'God substitute' discussed above.

The Young Waiter, on the other hand, does not need a clean well-lighted place to pass his time. He is young and full of desire. He comes to the café because he works there, and he wants to leave the place when his charted time is over. But people like the Old Man who stays late in the café asking for more bottles of brandy keep him waiting. A couple of times he shows his intense desire to go home because he has “a wife waiting in bed” for him (Hemingway, 1955, p. 30). He does not even show any sympathy towards the loneliness of the old man or the fact that the man almost killed himself only a week ago. Out of frustration, his words become so cruel that remarks such as “You should have killed yourself last week”, “An old man is a nasty thing” and the like come out of his mouth (p. 30-31). The first remark of these two is given straight to the face of the Old Man because the Young Waiter knows the man being served is deaf. This reaffirms the intensity of his frustration and his restlessness to go home. When he is confronted by the Old Waiter who asks why he did not serve the Old Man another brandy, the Young Waiter replies, “He can buy a bottle and drink at home” or “there are bodegas open all night long” for late night drinking outside (p. 31-32). He clearly does not understand why the Old Man or people like him need to come to the ‘clean well-lighted’ café at night. It is discussed before that the Old Man’s need for the ‘light’ at night is an existential need. But the Young Waiter does not need a Sartrean substitute at night. He has, as described by the Old Waiter, “youth, confidence, and a job” (p. 32). So, he arrestingly fits into the category of Kierkegaard’s ‘aesthetic stage’. There are several reasons to consider him as Kierkegaard’s aesthetic man. First of all, this stage is supposed to come at a young age. At this stage, people do not commit to anything which is the case with the Young Waiter since from his behavior, it is clear that he is not dedicated to his work at all, he somehow wants to escape from there. Also, an aesthetic man, according to Kierkegaard, is supposed to be ‘sensual’ which is very much revealing about the Young Waiter in the story. This is the reason why when the Old Waiter says that one hour more at the café might not make any difference, the Young Waiter criticizes him. He is more interested in Jasper’s Dasein or the world of objects because at this stage people are more interested in the world, they live in rather than spirituality. If seen through the lenses of Marcel, the Young Waiter is in the phase of ‘primary reflection’ because the problem for him (the overstaying old man) is outside of himself. It is a problem bound to his finitude – his youth. Contrary to the nothingness or nihilism of the Old Man and the Old Waiter, he is full of desire, and he has plenty of elements to concentrate upon in his materialistic life.

The mouthpiece character for Hemingway in this story is the Old Waiter. He seems to be older than the young waiter but a lot younger than the Old Man which makes him in the middle of both extremes. The Young Waiter’s aesthetic lover stage is passed by him, and he is yet to touch the nihilistic stage which is “the truth of human condition” (Gillespie, 2016, p. 54). The Old Waiter is in such a stage

where he sees his past in the Young Waiter and the possible future in the Old Man. His condition reminds us of the concept of 'Existenz' given by Jaspers. The Old Waiter's three 'possible existences' are in front of him. When he compares himself with the Young Waiter, he gives a clear impression of how he was when he was young: "I have never had confidence and I am not young" (Hemingway, 1955, p. 32). So, this was his existence then (past) and now what he is tells of his present condition which, as Jaspers said, is bound to change as well. That is why the softness of the Old Waiter shown to the Old Man symbolizes the Old Waiter's mental acceptance of his own future self. In the lens of Nietzsche, both the Old Man and the Old Waiter are going through nihilism. However, they experience two different forms of nihilism. The Old Waiter is a "theoretical" nihilist because he clearly holds "such beliefs" and the Old Man is a "practical" nihilist because he is "someone suffering the psychological consequences of such beliefs" (Huddleston, 2019, p. 5). The Old Man's suicide attempt shows his psychological suffering and marks him as a 'practical' nihilist. The Old Waiter, on the other hand, still has a "job" and he does it with special care for people who "need a light for the night" (Hemingway, 1955, p. 32). He says to the Young Waiter, "I am reluctant to close up because there may be some one who needs the café" (p. 32). He wants to be by the side of those lonely people like the Old Man deeply suffering from nihilism. He knows the outcome of nihilism but is not yet suffering in the way that he may want to kill himself. Is he going to follow the path of the Old Man and attempt to commit suicide? Though it cannot be said with certainty, it cannot be denied as a possibility. Another way to see that the Old Waiter represents Hemingway himself. When the story was published in 1933, Hemingway was in his mid-30s. Though this age can in no way be considered old age, Hemingway had already been through many physical disasters and mental traumas by that time. In 1928 his father "shot himself with a Smith and Wesson revolver in his Oak Park home" (Donaldson, 1995, p. 292). So, by the age of 34, Hemingway has enough suffering to be in nihilism. Hemingway used to believe that "people should have the right to decide whether to live or die" (Donaldson, 1995, p. 292). Yet, it will take another 28 years for him to follow his father's path. So, in this sense, Hemingway's 'Old-Waiter-self' follows the Old-Man-self. The only difference is Hemingway was 'successful' whereas the Old Man was not. Hemingway proves himself as 'Nietzsche's overman' by choosing his way out of the world.

The discussion between the Old Waiter and the Young Waiter is also very suggestive. The Old Waiter has already passed the life the Young Waiter is passing now. So, the conversation becomes a symbolic verbal exchange between the 'experienced' and the 'youth' much like Blake's songs of innocence and songs of experience. The Old Waiter was young once, probably had a wife, and a life just like this man. Passing that phase, the Old Waiter lives a lonely life that is full of insomniac nights. All he has experienced before, therefore, seems meaningless to him. He tries

to tell the Young Waiter that things such as “youth and confidence” are no doubt “beautiful”, but they are transitory (p. 32). What remains in the end is ‘nothingness’ reflected through the current life of the Old Waiter. If this is the ultimate reality, there is no point in hurrying to fulfill material desires. But the Young Waiter thinks all these words are “nonsense” (p. 32). He “is still too far back on the threshold of life, with his young wife waiting for him at home, to be able to sympathize with the old man. He has the impatience of the young” (Bluefarb, 1971, p. 4). Perhaps, the Old Waiter and the Old Man felt the same necessity of living a materialistic life in the way the Young Waiter is living now. Thus, the phases such as aesthetic lover and nihilistic philosopher are all significant in their own period. When the time comes, following Jaspers ‘possible existence’, the aesthetic man may turn into a nihilistic philosopher. Naturally, he will not be convinced by the nihilistic words of the Old Waiter at this stage.

Being unable to convince the Young Waiter, the Old Waiter starts an interior monologue. He contemplates “nothing” that he “knew too well” (p. 32). In this conversation with himself, he parodies the lines of Catholic prayers which reestablishes his nothingness.

Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name thy kingdom nada thy will be nada in nada as it is in nada. Give us this nada our daily nada and nada us our nada as we nada our nadas and nada us not into nada but deliver us from nada; pues nada. Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee (p. 32-33).

Here two significant prayers – one that is recited before having meals and the other dedicated to Mother Mary – are jumbled parodically. In the first prayer, he replaces important words as well as some random words such as ‘Father’, ‘heaven’, ‘Hallowed’, ‘come’, ‘done’, ‘earth’, ‘day’, ‘bread’, ‘forgive’, ‘trespasses’, ‘lead’, ‘temptation’, ‘evil’ with the Latin word ‘nada’ which means nothing. In the Ave Mary prayer, the Old Waiter uses the English word ‘nothing’ as a replacement for ‘Mary’, ‘grace’, and ‘Lord’. This parodic presentation is significant in the sense that he is bringing everything – sacred and evil, significant and ordinary – under the umbrella of ‘nothingness’ or nihilism which according to Sartre is the ultimate truth for the human condition. Thus, the Old Waiter gives a nihilistic message: people come from somewhere that is nothing (because it is ‘unknown’), they will reach somewhere after death that is also nothing (because it is ‘imagined’ by humans), so whatever they do in between coming and going such as making love, making family, yarning after money, yearning after fame and/or power and the like are all nothing.

## **“The Snows of Kilimanjaro”: An Existentialist Evaluation**

The beginning of this story also reveals a structure of contrast. The epigraph describes the snow-covered 19710 feet sublime Kilimanjaro. Then when the dialogues start, the readers discover a couple stopped in the plains of Africa full of trees and ferocious animals. The man called Harry is lying on a cot bed “in the shade of a mimosa tree” unable to move because of his paralyzed leg where gangrene started (Hemingway, 1955, p. 3). So, on one side there is this beautiful African Mountainside Safari and on the other side a man stuck paralyzed with his smelly gangrenous leg – nothing beautiful is there. Another contrast – victim and aggressors – is found when the readers get to know the vultures and a hyena roaming around waiting for Harry to die and to feast on the dead body. There is a contrast between the husband and wife as well. Harry seems to be rude, blunt, and humiliating whereas his wife Helen seems to be caring, kind, and loving to her husband. All these contrasts are highly suggestive and can create existential questions.

The gigantic Mount Kilimanjaro’s western summit is called “Ngaje Nagai” or “the House of God” (p. 3). Engstrom (1950) thinks the “Holy Hill” represents “death” (p. 205). For Evans (1961) it is, “not a symbol of death but life-in death” and Harry’s dying condition symbolizes “death-in-life” (p. 603). Evans’s is a perfect interpretation in the sense that Harry’s being alive is but waiting for death whereas the mountain’s deathlike environment still stands tall, beautiful, and lifelike. It is mentioned that near the summit there is a “dried and frozen carcass of a leopard” (Hemingway, 1955, p. 3). The narrator enhances the curiosity of the readers by saying, “No one has explained what the leopard was seeking at the altitude” (p. 3). Especially, with the word “seeking”, Hemingway makes this an existential case at the very beginning of the story. The leopard is ‘seeking’ not wandering, which suggests that the leopard had the determination to discover something. Since the summit is known as the ‘House of God’, it can be said that the leopard was ‘discovering God’ at that altitude and died in that process. This reminds us of Kierkegaard’s religious stage where someone discovers “the supreme Subject, the personal Absolute, God” and Marcel’s secondary reflection that aims to discover the same (Copleston, 1956, p. 151-171). But why is it a leopard? Why not any other animal possessing a softer nature? One way to think about it is that a leopard symbolizes ‘courage’ and ‘power’. In that sense, Hemingway might want to remind us that the path of discovering God, or the absolute requires courage and ‘will power’. However, one might say that the leopard never found anything and ended up dying in the snow. This is true that the leopard died, yet the presence of its carcass near the summit has become a ‘legend’. It may be said that though the leopard died, it became ‘immortal’. This ‘immortality’ of the dead leopard contrasts with the mortality of Harry. Harry is going to die soon but he understands that nobody is

going to remember him because he did not do justice to his talent as a writer. In that sense, the leopard may symbolize what Harry could be and his gangrene suggests what he is. Jasper's concept of 'possible existence' becomes instrumental here. What Harry could be – a great writer if he continued writing – was one of his possible existences. What he is now – a man whose leg is being rotten rapidly – is his present existence. Soon it is likely that he will die – death is going to be his ultimate end of existence in this world.

If this story is interpreted in the light of biography studies and Harry is viewed as Hemingway himself, some crucial similarities may be found. Hemingway himself led a very dangerous life. Much like Kierkegaard's aesthetic man, Hemingway hardly committed to anything. Perhaps this lack of commitment inspired him to lead a life of adventure. Donaldson (1995) writes about Hemingway,

He had something to prove, and was forever testing himself against danger. He climbed into the bullring during the amateurs, faced murderous animals in Africa, attended every war of his time. He put himself at risk, and he suffered the consequences. Hemingway was frequently and grievously hurt, in an astounding series of blows to the head and arms and legs (p. 288).

Harry is also very adventurous and non-committed like Kierkegaard's aesthetic Don Juan man. While contemplating his scattered memories, he remembers the snow trip to Gauertal with "his pack" of friends, sleeping on "mattresses filled with beech leaves", his snowy days in Schrunz, gambling "in the smoke by the lantern light" with his friends, skiing, and hunting in Austrian plains, his four winters in Voralberg and the Arlberg (Hemingway, 1955, p. 7-8). Here the 'snow' serves as the symbol of Harry's early life when he still was "in the possession of integrity" (Evans, 1961, p. 603). In his reminiscence, Harry also remembers the story of his friend Williamson who got hit by a German stick bomb. In that war, Harry tried to save his life with the morphine tablets though the man was saying, "Shoot me, Harry. For Christ's sake shoot me" (Hemingway, 1955, p. 24). This proves that Harry participated in wars just like Hemingway. Interestingly, in the beginning of the story, Harry too suggests Helen to "shoot" him which Helen does not do but this effectively puts his friend Williamson and himself on the same level. Walking down the memory lane Harry also reveals that he once got into a brutal fight with a "British gunner" over a "hot American slut" presenting himself as arrogant, whimsical, and aggressive (p. 16). All these arrestingly match the personality of Hemingway. They both pass as a Kierkegaardian aesthetic man.

Another salient characteristic of a Kierkegaardian aesthetic man, as noted above, is sensuality. Harry has had many women in his life. He married Helen but

that did not stop him from 'whoring' if he had any quarrel. Actually, he married Helen because she was rich. He pretends to love her and with this "familiar lie he made his bread and butter by" (p. 9). His frequenting in bars and brothels is repeatedly mentioned in the story. So, clearly, he commits to no one matching another feature of the aesthetic man. In this case as well, the fictional Harry and the real-life Hemingway match. Hemingway had four wives along with "many lovers during a champagne-and-absinthe-soaked life that ended with alcoholism, depression, paranoia and suicide" (Ducibella, 2018). Interestingly, Hemingway had never "fallen out of love" with his first wife Hadley Richardson proved by the fact that he "never lost touch with her and repeatedly wrote for her sympathy and support when in personal distress" (Ducibella, 2018). It was as if he had been pointlessly searching for her replacement in other women. Harry mentions his first love, a woman who left him, and expresses that "he had never been able to kill" what they had (Hemingway, 1955, p. 15). Harry describes how being "sick inside", he would "follow a woman who would look like her" and how sleeping with other women "only made him miss her more" (p. 15). Reading all this, it seems Hemingway made a perfect sketch of himself in Harry. Both aesthetic men are very reckless and yet their passion is revealed everywhere.

However, Harry's aesthetic life is halted by a "thorn" that "scratched his knee" while he was "trying to photograph a herd of waterbuck" (p. 13). Being a restless whimsical man, Harry did not think it necessary to use "iodine" (p. 6). He used to think that he "never infect[s]" (p. 6). Later he blames the "weak carbolic solution" that he used after getting infected and considers this solution the reason for "the gangrene" (p. 6). He even chastises the driver calling him "a half baked kikuyu driver" who according to him is responsible for burning out the "that bearing in the truck" (p. 6). Finally, he blames his wife who left everyone and everything to come with him on this trip and who has been spending an immense amount of money on Harry just to fulfill his desires. The name 'Helen' might also be chosen deliberately which is known to be the reason for the destruction of the city of Troy (as if Troy would not be attacked by Agamemnon anyway). But none of this is true. Harry, himself, should be blamed for the way things come out for himself. Though he used to think that he never gets 'infected', he actually infected his soul when he "traded" his talent as a writer "for security, for comfort" by marrying Helen (p. 13). Evans (1961) makes a more straightforward statement in this regard, "for rotting flesh, read rotting soul" (p. 603). Squandering the money of Helen, he stopped writing anything, and "each day of not writing, of comfort, of being that which he despised, dulled his ability, softened his will to work" (Hemingway, 1955, p. 10). Though out of frustration, Harry often blames Helen, the "rich bitch", as the "caretaker and destroyer of his talent", he agrees in his interior monologue that this thought is "nonsense" because -

He had destroyed his talent himself. Why should he blame this woman because she kept him well? He had destroyed his talent by not using it, by betrayals of himself and what he believed in, by drinking so much that he blunted the edge of his perceptions, by laziness, by sloth, and by snobbery, by pride and by prejudice, by hook and by crook (p. 10-11).

This proves that Harry is no longer acting like an aesthetic man. He has come to his senses. Ironically, his sense comes when almost everything is over for him. He cannot proceed to the 'moral stage' of Kierkegaard after getting this epiphany. The gangrene which started after being scratched by the thorn makes him unable to reach anywhere else but a state of Nietzschean nihilism. Now, he sees no point in hiding the fact that he does not love Helen. He no longer hides the fact to himself that "[i]f it had not been she it would have been another" (p. 11). He knows that there are so many unwritten stories and there is no one else but he who is responsible for this. His nihilistic state of mind is revealed when he suddenly comes out of his reminiscence and asks why he did not write and comes to a reply, that is, "Why nothing" (p. 23). With this statement, much like the Old Waiter of the previous story, Harry agrees that whatever he has done in his life so far is pointless. He compares himself to a "snake biting itself" (p. 11). This metaphor means that he finished himself gradually. Moreover, he is not dying only physically. Because of not writing he also ensured his spiritual death. He could still live through his works after his death just like the leopard on the mountain summit. But he understands that his death is near.

The impression of death revealed through Harry positions the fictional character on the same level as Hemingway, Nietzsche, and Sartre. All of them are obsessed with death. The omniscient narrator of the story reveals, "For years it [death] had obsessed him; but now it meant nothing in itself" (p. 5). Harry feels death everywhere. Seeing Helen's "pleasant smile", he feels "death come again" (p. 18). He even personifies death who in his imagination rode on "bicycles" moving "silently on the pavements" (p. 22). On another occasion, he feels death "had no shape anymore" but still it "occupied space" (p. 25). Once he also says that he can smell death. So, proving his obsession, Harry feels death as a cumulative image of visual, tactile, kinesthetic, and olfactory senses. Hemingway too has a similar obsession, so much so that he "lived" his life almost every day "to kill himself" which he eventually did in 1961 (Donaldson, 1995, p. 289). He used to believe, "An artist had to look at death squarely and without flinching" (Donaldson, 1995, p. 288). Through the concept of 'Death of God', Nietzsche and Sartre also show their obsession with 'death' itself. However, for Harry more than death, his not being able to finish what he wanted to write is more frustrating. Coming on this safari trip, he wanted to

“work the fat off his soul the way a fighter went into the mountains to work and train in order to burn it out of his body” (p. 10). But the biggest paradox in the story is that when he gives his creative self a second chance, death falls on him. The vultures and the hyena also metaphorically remind Harry of death because he knows they are waiting for him to die so that they can feast on his dead body. It is also pivotal to compare these beasts with Helen who has been arguably feasting on the dead soul of Harry. Going back to the comparison of Harry and Hemingway, Helen can be taken as the symbol of “Hemingway’s second wife, Pauline Pfeiffer, a wealthy fashion writer for *Vogue*” (Evans, 1961, p. 606). This is true to some extent because Hemingway still loved Hadley Richardson and therefore was living a life of lies with Pauline. Interestingly, when this story was published in 1933, Hemingway was with Pauline, which further strengthens the interpretation. Harry, by the end of the story, remains in delirium that the plane has indeed arrived, and it took him to “the square top of Kilimanjaro” where he always wanted to go (p. 27). But in reality, he is found by Helen on his cot without the sound of “breathing” (p. 28). Like a classic short story, Hemingway gives it an open ending. The readers can never be fully certain whether Harry lived or died indeed though death seems more likely to have happened. Thus, Harry starts as an aesthetic man but ends in a nihilistic despair. The only difference between Harry and Hemingway is that the latter never forsook writing and went on to become someone known forever as the legendary leopard in American literature.

## Conclusion

Reading Hemingway and the existentialist philosophers parallelly, the authors of this paper have found traces of both schools of existentialism in the selected stories. The biographical information shared throughout the paper as a means of comparison between the fictional characters and the writer himself is influential in reaching the conclusion that both theism and atheism exist in Hemingway. Hemingway is not just the Old Waiter who thinks everything from a nihilistic perspective. A part of Hemingway is also in the Young Waiter for whom living a materialistic life and fulfilling desires are important. In the same way, Hemingway may have many similarities with Harry who destroyed all his possibilities by living a life based on lies. But Hemingway is more comparable with the leopard who welcomed death in search of greatness and left a powerful legacy. Hemingway being the creator of the fictional characters shows existentialist human behaviour. He neither advocates fully for nihilism nor disavows the concentration in the worldly life. Being in the midst of both schools he perhaps argues that “this is the way it is, this is the way it ought to be” (Clendenning, 1962, p. 489). In fact, what he shows concern about is the ‘spiritual isolation’ in modernity through his characters but then again, he does not inspire people to forsake their material life in search of spiri

tuality. Helen never asked Harry to stop writing, in fact, she agreed to come to the African safari trip so that Harry regains his writing spirit. When Harry says she is both the 'caretaker and destroyer' of his life, the tendency of the readers is to emphasize the 2nd noun only. Just a little emphasis on the first noun may make the character more humane which she really is proven by her genuine feeling for Harry. Hemingway does not want to prove that Harries should not fall into the 'temptation' of Helens. He basically wants to say Harries should grow up and take care of themselves. In the same way, Hemingway does not expect the Young Waiter to understand the Old Waiter and be nihilistic about life when he is in his prime of life. He leaves the fact of nihilism, idealism, spiritualism, or anything like that as a matter of discovery for individuals.

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