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Existential Orwell

Capitalism, Religion, and Philosophy

Eliza Morgan

Orwell wrote in the same 1930s Europe as existentialist philosophers: most notably, Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. We know, through his critique of Sartre's "Portrait of an Antisemite" (Coombes 12), that Orwell was active in these circles—enough so to critically evaluate absurdist theories. Given his existential literacy, it is long overdue to discuss how the concepts of existentialism, especially those of his contemporaries, may have shaped Orwell's work. This analysis is centered in two of his novels, *The Clergyman's Daughter* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. The purpose of this paper is to argue that existentialism, specifically the ideas of bad faith and absurdism, plays a pivotal role in Orwell's work, especially in how his characters interact with the pressures of modern society—most notably those of capitalism and religion.

The Clergyman's Daughter: Overview

The Clergyman's Daughter follows Dorothy, the rector's daughter, as she navigates an amnesia that causes her to reevaluate her role in both the church and society. In the beginning of the novel, Dorothy is extremely pious, going so far as to

self-flagellate every time she believes she has violated the scriptures. However, Dorothy temporarily loses her memory, ends up in an area unfamiliar to her, starts work as a hops picker, and her faithfulness begins to wane. But even when Dorothy regains her memory, she finds that faith is no longer a central part of her life. Dorothy sends letters to her father asking for assistance, but he does not respond as he is under the belief she has run off to elope. Dorothy's job at the hops field ends, and out of desperation, she lives on the streets in London. Dorothy's father eventually learns the truth about his daughter, and Dorothy returns to her family, only to be sent to work as a teacher at a fourth-rate private school. When Dorothy starts teaching, she becomes impassioned with the desire to ensure that the students, who were previously taught nothing but handwriting lessons, arithmetic, and other things that impress the parents of the school, have an actual quality education. However, the parents of the school find out that their children are learning things less conventionally impressive, causing the head of the school to lecture Dorothy for not teaching what the parents think is most important for their children to learn. Eventually, she is fired and must return to the rectory. Her lack of job security is picked up on by Mr. Warburton, who asks her to marry him, saying that without his aid Dorothy will be stuck in the same never-ending lifestyle. Dorothy ultimately rejects his proposal and thus ends up exactly as she began: working at the rectory under the supervision of her father.

The Clergyman's Daughter: Existing Existentialist Criticism

Very few pieces of literary criticism about Orwell specifically mention and discuss existentialism; however, those which do not do so generally align or interact with the ideas of that philosophy. Paul Richard Dulley, in his thesis statement for Sussex University, is the only scholar I could locate who explicitly equates existentialism with Orwell's books. In regards to *The Clergyman's Daughter*, Dulley asserts that the book resonates most firmly with Sartre's existentialism, arguing that *The Clergyman's Daughter* typifies Sartre's concept of bad faith. Sartre argues that bad faith is characterized by individuals acting in a way that is ingenuine to their true self as a response

to the pressures of society, thereby limiting their freedom and ability to act upon their own values (Sartre 44). So, by a Sartrean framework, Dorothy is caught between the struggle of acting the role of the Clergyman's daughter—a role determined by her overbearing father and God—which she feels is her necessary duty in life, and finding that her values and faith do not actually conform with what is expected from this role.

Dorothy's self-punishments—she pricks herself with a needle or forces herself to take cold baths when she does something that violates her perceived role—are, to Dulley, proof that "it is only through mechanical acts of will that Dorothy is able to maintain her present mode of existence" (101). Dulley declares Dorothy's self-compulsion to engage in activities that, while not truly indicative of herself, allow her to inhabit a role where she is "absolv[ed] [from] thought and the necessity of utilising the freedom that she possesses as a human being" (106) analogous to bad faith. There is a significant lack of thinking in Dorothy's robotic actions, highlighted by Orwell in the beginning of the novel when Dorothy mindlessly and mechanically follows a morning routine focused entirely on the demands of her father. Dorothy's amnesia serves as a rebirth from her previous mode of life into the archetypal Sartrean freedom: a shift from Dorothy's desire to be a being-in-itself to her acting as a being-for-itself (Sartre 146). In simple terms, Sartre describes a being-in-itself as one who conforms to the specific stereotypes of their role: essentially, someone who acts as they think society deems they ought to. A being-for-itself is free of this and able to navigate their life without having to consider or bend to the societal expectations of someone in their place. Dorothy's attempted reduction of herself to the role of the clergyman's daughter is inherently impossible as her existence as a human being precipitates the inevitability of making choices, which the being-in-itself is free from. However, Dorothy's amnesia frees her from this constant and fruitless attempt and allows her to exist as a being-for-itself, in which she rejects bad faith and allows herself to make choices that define her as an individual separate from any perceived roles society thrusts upon her.

Dulley's last relevant piece of analysis is that of the ending: he argues that Dorothy returns to bad faith when she returns to the rectory as the Clergyman's daughter, confirming what he believes to be Orwell's thesis: Dorothy's creation of costumes for the church pageant and her use of the glue pot serve as a "metaphor [for] how ideals of authenticity become subservient to a sometimes necessary, and eventually anesthetizing, absorption in the world" (Dulley 122).

Dulley concludes, after his existentialist study, that *The Clergyman's Daughter* is a treatise on the exigency of succumbing to bad faith and therefore the inevitability of rejecting the archetypal Sartrean existential freedom.

Critics have also interpreted *The Clergyman's Daughter* through the lens of history (yet in a way that interacts with existentialism), most notably Richard Smyer, who states that Orwell belongs to a list of writers who "have had to recognize the problematic nature of man's relationship to history, to the often forbidding realm of political experience, with its social and spiritual dislocations, its absurdity and dehumanizing violence" (33). Smyer notes that, to Orwell, the industrial revolution is responsible for many of the problems man faces, with the emergence of late capitalism and the proffering of Christianity as a placation of the lower class serving to chip away at the soul of humanity. His analysis becomes useful for an existentialist critique when he claims, overlapping with Dulley, that "Dorothy's new-found enthusiasm for history, the conviction that her students' collective reconstruction of the past has, along with the teaching of other subjects, given to her own godless existence some meaning and significance" (Smyer 36). Here we see the concept of being-for-itself in that Dorothy breaks out of her societally constructed role and teaches the children, instead of handwriting, what she actually believes to be useful; the meaning and significance Smyer discusses here is wholly created by Dorothy's rejection of her role. Smyer further describes the environment made by Dorothy and her students as a "mini-Utopia" which "enhances [their] lives" (Smyer 36); Dorothy's pursuit of her own values and meaning, even when directly opposing her own role, leads to a much more effective learning environment, a sign of Orwell's agreement with Sartre.

The final piece of Smyer's relevant analysis is that of the opening scene, where Dorothy wakes up and goes through her morning routine. Whereas Dulley interprets this scene as Kafkaesque, a parallel to *The Metamorphosis*, Smyer argues that the toll of the alarm clock insinuates "that for Dorothy time past provides no comfort, nor does time present offer liberation from the burden of the past" (37). Therefore, time acts as a destructive force within the novel, confronting Dorothy with her own mortality, which then chips away at her faith. Time—specifically the limit of it—helps Dorothy's original role's desire to be-in-itself exist by ensuring she does not get ample time outside of that role's demands: a point that, while not explicitly made by Smyer, is supported in his analysis that "the daylight world of consciousness . . . holds

out little more than a life of constant rushing to meet deadlines, of continual commands to be punctual, of onerous parish duties to be fulfilled and expectations to be met" (37). Furthermore, Smyner uses the passive voice here, perhaps on purpose, to show the lack of agency with which Dorothy has control of her life. "The demands," "duties," and "expectations" are all things demanded of Dorothy in her role as the clergyman's daughter—this highlights the lack of control she possesses over her own life as a result of her conformation to the expectations of what others believe a clergyman's daughter should be. This overlaps again with the Sartrean analysis: Dorothy, subservient to societal expectations and therefore a being-in-itself, is unable to forge a life with meaning to her actual, real self; the meaning her life currently takes on is simply that of one serving a role.

Dorothy and Bad Faith

After examining current criticisms, there seem to be two main areas for further existentialist development, which I will discuss here: one, Dorothy's relationship with bad faith, and two, Dorothy's interaction with an absurd world. In starting with bad faith, we must interact with Dulley. While Dulley's analysis is well-written, well-researched, and expertly argued, I cannot help but disagree with his final conclusion that Dorothy returns to a state of bad faith. When Sartre discusses bad faith, he famously gives the example of a waiter who acts in an overly stereotypical manner, conforming himself to the desire to be-in-itself (Sartre 59). However, Sartre stops short—and for good reason—of condemning anyone who works as a waiter to be guilty of bad faith; there is a difference between inhabiting a job and conforming to the stereotypes society believes true for those holding the job. A prime example of this is Dorothy's existence as a teacher, previously discussed through Smyer: Dorothy acts in bad faith when she turns into the type of teacher that the headmistress and parents expect her to be; however, when she chooses based on her values and experiences what to teach the children, she does not act in bad faith. I argue that Orwell actually shows Dorothy to firmly reject bad faith through her rejection of Mr. Warburton's proposal and her subsequent choice to rejoin the rectory.

Warburton presents his marriage proposal to Dorothy as a bargain: Dorothy "needs a home and a livelihood," and Warburton needs "a wife

to keep him in order” and “to look after the children; the bastards” (Orwell 191). When Dorothy is not immediately enthusiastic, Warburton attempts to scare her into the marriage by telling her that “women who don’t marry wither up—they wither up like aspidistras in back-parlour windows; and the devilish thing is that they don’t even know they’re withering” (Orwell 192). Warburton is espousing bad faith in two separate ways here: firstly, by presenting the marriage as a bargain, he is outlining expectations for Dorothy, making her acceptance contingent upon conforming herself to the traditional expectations of a housewife, similar to Sartre’s waiter; secondly, his attempt to incentivize Dorothy by painting a bleak picture of her future as a spinster should she not accept his proposal attempts to force upon her an inevitability of becoming a terrible creature—which would precipitate bad faith as Dorothy would have to conform herself to this future and apparently predictable role in order to agree with this inevitability.

Dorothy rejects Mr. Warbuton’s proposal and, with it, bad faith when she “perceive[s] that all he had said had been no more than a trick” (Orwell 194), giving herself a new existential awareness of the disparity between how society views her roles as and how she, as an individual, can have the freedom to live independent of those views. Although Dorothy returns to the rectory, she notes that “there *would* be changes in her habits; but most of them would be secret ones” (Orwell 195) (such as no longer self-flagellating). The changes in her habits are reflective of her new existential awareness and dismissal of bad faith: she is choosing to work in the rectory, but not trying to internally and privately force herself to conform to the stereotypes of the role, such as absolute religious conviction. I argue that this is the same distinction that Sartre makes between the waiter who acts in bad faith and the one who does not, and that therefore Dulley is incorrect in his assertion that the novel is a testament to the inability of humanity to succumb to bad faith.

Both critics mention the opening of the novel in their analyses: Dulley to compare to Kafka and Smyer to emphasize time. While both are valid, I am more tempted to conclude that it strikes a similar philosophical chord to Camusian existentialism. In his famous essay “Myth of Sisyphus,” Camus writes that living life having perceived the absurd is quite similar to the mythical king who was ordered to roll a boulder up a hill, only to have it tumble down just as reached the top. The absurd as broken down by Camus is essentially the realization that confronting the world as a human being is absurd: there is no hidden or ultimate meaning, and any meaning apparently

perceived in the world exists only insofar as one gives it and is noninherent. Camus states that since life has no meaning, we must either kill ourselves or find some way to live in a meaningless world. Famously, Camus concludes that “one must imagine Sisyphus happy” (24); if Sisyphus can accept that there is nothing more to life than his eternal, hopeless task, then he can find joy and contentment within it. The very act of living is fulfilling enough to Camus. Dorothy undergoes a similar thought process to Camus’ beliefs when she recognizes that life is meaningless and that she will never again find comfort in faith, so the only way to reach resolution is to go through the routines of life. Orwell acknowledges this when he states that “the solution to her difficulty lay in accepting the fact that there was no solution; that if one gets on with the job that lies to hand, the ultimate purpose of the job fades into insignificance” (201). Dorothy is no longer able to take comfort in her faith to provide unwavering purpose for her tasks; she, much like Sisyphus, must recognize that “the struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart” (Camus 24).

The dullness and normalcy of the routine Dorothy endures makes one monotonously plod through the beginning of Orwell’s book; yet, by the end of the novel, Dorothy is able to wholeheartedly set her mind towards working in a way that makes discussion of her routine much more palatable, which Orwell’s stylistic choices contribute to. In the beginning of the novel, there is little to no rumination by Dorothy: she simply numbly accepts, in the wee hours of the morning, that she must do her tasks, and we see very little into her mind:

“Come on Dorothy! Up you get! No snoozing, please . . . then she remembered if the noise went on any longer it would wake her father, and, with a hurried movement she bounded out of bed, seized the clock from the chest of drawers, and turned off the alarm. It was kept on the chest of drawers precisely in order that she should have to get out of bed to silence it . . .” (Orwell 3).

This dreary monotony goes on for several pages. Additionally, over half a page is taken up by a checklist which we know nothing about: items such as “7 oc. H.C.,” “Flowers for church NB. 1 tin Brasso,” “NB. to fork between peas bindweed awful” (Orwell 4), and so on and so forth, and the meaning of these items is never revealed. Their only logical purpose seems to be to dull the reader and bore them of Dorothy’s routine.

However, compare this to the end of the book, and there are marked changes. Dorothy's inner monologue is much more robust, and Orwell focuses more on her inner thoughts than the plainness of the actions (reversed in the beginning of the novel). When she is gluing costumes for the church, rather than tediously devote herself to the activity, she is immersed and active within it: "It really wasn't half bad! One more coating of paper and it would be almost like real armour. We *must* make that pageant a success! she thought. What a pity we can't borrow a horse from somebody and have Boadicea in her chariot!" (Orwell 202). The excitement Dorothy musters up for her simple task makes it worth doing, exactly how Camus believes that if Sisyphus accepts that there is nothing more to life than his task, he will find enjoyment. Furthermore, the checklist is replaced by another inner monologue of Dorothy's, where we contextually learn the significance and background of each task, for instance, when she decides that since "tomorrow was the day of the Mothers' Union tea, and they had finished the novel that Miss Foote had been reading to them . . . what to get for them next?" (Orwell 202). Compare that with "NB. to fork between peas bindweed awful" and the reader is much more invested in learning about each of Dorothy's tasks than they were at the beginning of the novel: a purposeful shift by Orwell to show us how Dorothy's acceptance of the absurd makes her daily routine far more palatable, worthwhile, and intriguing.

Keep the Aspidistra Flying: Overview

Keep The Aspidistra Flying follows copywriter-turned-poet Gordon Comstock through his journey to reject the material suburbia created by capitalism. After leaving copywriting due to this desire, he works at a bookstore but still considers himself a poet. Gordon spends most of his time lamenting the "money-god," which he equates to capitalism, and the way that all relationships seem to depend on one's status with the money-god. He cites his relationship with his girlfriend, Rosemary, who he believes refuses to marry or have sex with him because of his lack of financial stability, and his friendship with the wealthier Ravelston, whom he believes he cannot spend time with due to the large financial differences between them that make it impossible to settle on activities that do not make either of them

feel out of place. Rosemary asks Gordon to take her out to the countryside, which he interprets as her finally agreeing to be his mistress. However, once they reach the countryside, the trip is a disaster: they are forced to eat a ridiculously expensive lunch, and they are muddy and tired. Gordon attempts to have sex with Rosemary without a condom, and when Rosemary pushes him away, he blames the money-god, saying that if he had enough money to support them and a baby, she would gladly have sex with him. Gordon returns to London dejected, only to learn that one of his poems has been accepted for publication by a journal in America, and they send him ten pounds. He wastes it all in one morally questionable night, ending up in a jail for public drunkenness. He loses his job as a result and must work at another bookstore for an even lower rate. Gordon allows himself to decay in an apartment he rents, deciding to reject anything having to do with ambition and to fall into a downward spiral. Rosemary comes to visit, has sex with him (once, and out of pity) and finds herself pregnant. She begs Gordon to return to his job as a copywriter, and he acquiesces, once again living a life of suburbia. He throws himself into this lifestyle, even begging Rosemary to get the symbol of the suburban middle class, an aspidistra.

Keep the *Aspidistra* Flying: Existing Literary Criticism

An argument about existentialism in *Keep The Aspidistra Flying* is best formulated by looking critically at the works of three scholars—Nicholas Guild, Rita Felski, and the aforementioned Paul Dulley—and whether they view the development of Gordon’s character arc in a positive or negative manner. In his essay “In Dubious Battle: George Orwell and the Victory of the Money God,” Nicholas Guild, challenges the common assumption that the ending of the novel is negative and instead offers an alternative viewpoint as to why Gordon’s choice to assimilate into capitalist society is ultimately positive. He introduces the theme of “spiritual death” in reference to the forced isolation that poverty brings with it, saying that “poverty is revealed as a kind of spiritual death, a squalid, nasty business that isolates a man from normal human contacts” (Guild 53). Interestingly, he claims

that “Gordon’s salvation is assured from the first chapter” (Guild 54) because Gordon has already realized that his wish to destroy capitalism comes from his unfulfilled desire to succeed within it. Therefore, Guild argues, Gordon’s ultimate choice was never between assimilating into society or resisting it, but rather between that assimilation or spiritual death, and Orwell’s ultimate message is that “the price of purity is simply too high” (56).

Although this essay doesn’t explicitly reference existentialism, the concept of spiritual death does to some extent exist within that sphere. Spiritual death to Guild is similar to the Camusian concept of philosophical suicide in that they both purport to isolate man from his inherent self. Philosophical suicide occurs when one performs a “leap of faith,” which is to believe in or rely on something that is not based in rationality; it commonly refers to those who take refuge in religion, especially as a way to attempt to gain meaning for their lives (Camus 10). In Gordon’s case, his philosophical suicide is that of blaming his hardships, such as his failure to get Rosemary to sleep with him, on the money-god—he absolves himself of agency by using his poverty as an unfulfilled prerequisite. Conversely, Guild’s concept of spiritual death infers the opposite: as a byproduct of consciously resisting the money-god, Gordon isolates himself and therefore loses his innate sense of self. Guild seems to predicate Gordon’s true self on his ability to maintain relationships with others, whereas Camus would argue that Gordon’s true self should be derived from his ability to look rationally at the world around him.

Guild’s point that the ending is positive is echoed by Rita Felski in her article “Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame, and the Lower Middle Class,” in which she refers to the ending as “a final epiphany . . . Gordon Comstock comes to realize the vitality, honor, and decency that dwells in suburban souls” (36). Felski translates this ending into a critique of how the lower class lives, arguing that the identity of the lower class is determined by society and isolated from “spontaneity, sensuality, or pleasure,” claiming that the class has “completely internalized the strictures of authority; it is the ultimate example of psychic self-regulation” (36). Paul Dulley, whose work on *The Clergyman’s Daughter* was examined prior in this paper, views *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* as a testimony to Gordon’s inability to truly escape from capitalism: the very act of Gordon’s attempt to reject material society “affirms [its] hegemony over his existence” (125).

Gordon and Existential Rebellion

Within the three critiques of Guild, Felski, and Dulley, there seem to be two areas on which a large portion of the validity of the interpretation hinges: one, to what extent Gordon's rebellion is effective, and two, whether the ending is good or bad, both of which must be firmly settled before an existential analysis can be performed. Guild offers an interesting analysis of why Gordon's assimilation into suburbia is beneficial, but Guild's argument ultimately falls flat because of his failure to include analysis regarding the lack of effectiveness with which Gordon rebels, most likely because this would contradict Guild's thesis. Felski gets closer with her statement that Gordon's dislike of capitalism stems from an internalized hierarchy that causes him to deprive himself of pleasure that he then recognizes when he returns to suburbia; however, the statement fails to provide any analysis or insight as to how Gordon truly breaks free of this hierarchy for the reason that this breaking free does not actually occur. Dulley, in my opinion, is the closest when he states that Gordon is unable to break free from society because, in the act of rejecting everything to do with it, he still lets it dictate his existence.

Dulley's view is the most accurate because it is the only one that does not take for granted the effectiveness of Gordon's rebellion. From a Nietzschean perspective, Gordon's rebellion is sorely lacking in true awareness, so it makes no sense to judge the novel as the story of an ultimate failure to escape capitalism if the failure resides in Gordon himself. Although a full Nietzschean reading is somewhat beyond the scope of this paper, it provides the most helpful philosophical framework through which to analyze the success of Gordon's rebellion. In Nietzsche's work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he describes the stages of self-actualization, which can be equated to Gordon's rebellion against capitalism, since his rebellion stems from his want to escape the predetermined rules of society. The first stage is the camel, in which the individual recognizes that the materially constructed lenses through which they view the world are not absolute truths, and attempts to ask questions and learn to find meaning (Nietzsche 16). Gordon does this when he starts questioning the order of things in his days as a schoolboy (Orwell 43–44). The second stage is that of the lion, which Nietzsche claims must fight the thou-shalt

dragon, representative of the values of society throughout time. On each scale is a glistening thou-shalt, and the lion must slay the dragon by rejecting every single commandment (Nietzsche 16–17). The lion is embodied by Gordon when he critiques his lower-middle class relatives for “accept[ing] the money-code . . . never hav[ing] the sense to lash out and just live, money or no money” (Orwell 44). Gordon’s awareness of the “money-code,” or the socially constructed way to behave, and his desire to reject it in favor of simply “liv[ing]” is the start of the journey of the lion. Once the lion has slayed the thou-shalt dragon, it is free to enter the third stage, the child. The child is characterized by the individual who interacts with the world without the weight of the thou-shalts, and is therefore free to gaze with wonder and discover for themselves the meaning of things (Nietzsche 17).

Gordon’s rebellion ultimately fails because he is stuck at the stage of the lion. He eventually becomes so aggressive in his desire to evade capitalism that he ends up viewing even ambition as sinful due to its close ties with capital gain, and resigns himself to giving up his creativity and desire to write because “after all, was that not too a species of ambition?” (Orwell 219). His failed attempt to reject everything with a value he believes to stem from capitalism leads to him rejecting relationships, creativity, and even ambition. Instead of just killing the dragon, he kills parts of himself as well.

The reason Gordon does not progress past the lion stage is because of bad faith. When Gordon attempts to inhabit the role of the lion (starting as a schoolboy beginning to blame capitalism for all his problems) he becomes a being-in-itself in trying to exhibit stereotypical tendencies. Gordon embraces poverty to the extent that he faults it, through the money-god, for everything; he even states, with regard to his relationship with Rosemary, that “it’s the women who really believe in the money-code . . . [Rosemary] won’t sleep with me, simply and solely because I’ve got no money” (Orwell 114). Gordon gets stuck in the bad faith of attempting to inhabit the role of tortured rebel, which builds his entire lifestyle around saying no to the dragon. As a byproduct of his new role, he is blaming everything on poverty, and as long as he blames everything on poverty, he is not actually able to forge new values. He acts out the lion role by shooting down the conventional values of capitalism, and in this he is correct, but he lacks the fortitude to shoot the dragon down as a being-*for*-himself; he instead is so stuck in the mindset of denying the dragon within the role of a tortured rebel that he ends up giving it power. By repeatedly

denying capitalism and therefore refusing to engage with capitalism on a critical level, he is still bound to capitalism—he is just bound to rejecting it. Gordon believes his relationship ultimately fails because Rosemary is trapped in the confines of the money-god, and because he is impoverished; this bad faith prevents him from doing any critical thinking whatsoever and stagnates him, making it impossible for him to ever progress to the child phase.

This is the reason why the ending of the book is not positive: not only does Gordon abandon his progress of rebellion by embracing capitalist society, but he does not even abandon bad faith. Gordon trades the stereotypical role of disillusioned rebel for the stereotypical role of suburban family man; he makes absolutely no progress as a character. Gordon immediately, upon moving in with Rosemary, caricatures himself again, arguing that they simply *must* have an aspidistra in their front window because “it’s the proper thing to have. It’s the first thing one buys after one’s married” (Orwell 246). The only thing that changes is that the values of the role Gordon inhabits are more conventionally attractive, leading the casual reader to believe that Gordon has progressed as a character when in fact he has simply entered a parallel shift with no actual existential or character development.

The Clergyman’s Daughter and Keep the Aspidistra Flying: Juxtaposition

The Clergyman’s Daughter and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* are two halves of the same whole: the novels both follow a lower-middle class person in London trying to find their place in life and society and both critique establishments like the church or capitalism. So, this begs the question, why is Dorothy successful in finding some sort of inherent meaning to life but Gordon is not? Why can Dorothy reject her bad faith but Gordon is unable to recognize the inherent absurdity of life?

Dorothy and Gordon both have, essentially, the same choice: continuing to exist in their current isolated states, or conforming to conventional values. Rosemary is to Gordon what Warburton is to Dorothy. Both characters struggle

with their choice: Dorothy's struggle can be found earlier in the paper, and Gordon wrangles with his struggle, thinking that he "want[ed] to sink down, down into the muck where money does not rule. But this baby-business had upset everything" (Orwell 231). The difference between the two characters is that Dorothy is able to make the choice to reject pleasant, bad-faithed suburbia whereas Gordon is not. This begs the question: why? What sets Dorothy apart from Gordon that makes her successful?

An answer to this question can be found earlier in the paper when discussing the Nietzschean framework by which Gordon fails to rebel. If we apply the same framework to Dorothy, we find that Dorothy's amnesia actually serves as a catapult into the final, successful stage of the child: Dorothy is simply unable to feel confined by religion because she does not know she has any "obligation" to it. As such, she has the unique experience of being an adult without any instilled devotion to social roles resulting from the powers of religion or capitalism, both of which Orwell views as oppressive. She is able to navigate society not as someone who forms their identity around a reaction to these forces (as Gordon does, which is why he is stuck at the stage of the lion) or roles determined by these forces—therefore, she is unbound to bad faith, which precipitates her existential journey.

This point is supported by looking at the dichotomy of the ways in which Gordon and Dorothy are able to critique and interact with a religious and capitalist society. The dichotomy: Dorothy spends her time within society mostly as an observer, whereas Gordon spends his time mostly critiquing it. Dorothy's previous disillusionment as a schoolteacher, in which she realizes the inherently mercenary nature of education, turns her off from society at large; conversely Gordon, by positioning himself as a stereotypical bad faith outsider and simply blaming the "money-god" for his troubles, is not able to truly identify non-abstract issues with society. Dorothy's observation of society is independent from an attempt to interpret events according to an instilled, role-induced value system that would cause her to "rationalize" them in a way that fits with a value system; Gordon's was not. Gordon reasons that all his troubles stem from the lack of money coupled with the dependence of others upon money. He views events from the stubborn perspective that capitalism was to blame for all evils; therefore, he is unable to progress in observation and rationalization. It is Gordon's misguided belief that since the evils he sees in capitalism that affected his own life and lack of

meaningful relationships are simply because other people depended on the “money-god,” then by possessing money everything would be fixed. This belief most likely leads him to blindly re-enter suburbia. Remember, Dorothy returns to the church and does not absolutely condemn it; she finds a way to interact within it and retain a successful existentialist framework that is true to her own self. This awareness allows Dorothy to see bad faith for what it is and reject it, where Gordon, having been constrained by bad faith all his adult life, never truly places himself, by virtue of a blind condemnation of capitalism, in a position where he is able to observe apart from bad faith the world as it is.

Having now performed an existential analysis of two of Orwell’s contemporary novels, we can now begin to tackle the question of what Orwell believes will lead to success within this philosophical framework. Firstly, Orwell suggests that we need to be more critical of the world around us, not in a judgmental way, but an observational one. Then, this observation needs to be clear of any values that might have arisen as a result of bad faith instead of the true self—values we believe we should have because they are expected of the role we inhabit and are thus the result of a being-in-itself. Only when we start observing, analyzing, and acting as a result of our own inherent self, independent of any sort of societally constructed framework, can we truly reach freedom in the existential sense because then the decisions we make are truly ours. Take Gordon—his rebellion is composed of reactions to the socially determined value he inhabits that the role of being a rebel ought to consist of rejecting everything that one is rebelling against. That is what he has been exposed to, and so it is what he does. In that sense he prevents himself from actualizing both meaningful rebellion, one of his goals, and (perhaps more importantly) a true understanding of himself as he exists without the pressures of society.

Of course, it is easier said than done: the need for Dorothy to develop amnesia in order to reach an existential truth underscores this. But by looking at Dorothy’s amnesia in a less literal sense, we can develop some more analysis on how Orwell thinks we can be successful. I argue that Dorothy’s amnesia puts her in a situation similar to that of a traveler: not understanding the norms and roles, free from conforming themselves to the norms and roles, but able to observe and analyze the way the society works and, if they so choose, able to eventually carve a place within it. The idea of critical observation in the above paragraph is parallel to the observation

done by the traveler here. And so maybe this is what we can take away: that we might benefit from acting like a traveler. The act of stepping away from our social selves and acting simply as an observer independent of the social dynamic is the first—and most important—step to Orwell to develop a successful existential journey.

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