

Existential Reflections on Life and Death in Mitch Albom's Novels

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Abstract—The fiction written by Mitch Albom has a special place in the modern literature, as it is concerned with both emotional narration and deep philosophical exploration. This research paper will analyze the existential aspects of *Tuesdays with Morrie* and *For One More Day* in light of how Albom approaches fundamental existential issues like death, meaninglessness, regrets, freedom as well as responsibility. With reference made to the philosophy of existentialism and especially, Soren Kierkegaard, Viktor Frankl, and Albert Camus, this paper presents the argument that Albom narratives serve as a reader-friendly philosophical work that enables readers to engage in meaning-making, which is possible through human relations. Although *Tuesdays with Morrie* focuses on accepting death and true life, *For One More Day* investigates the issues of regret, guilt, and reconciliation as existential crises. Combining the literary analysis with the philosophical theory, the paper proves that Albom is able to convert abstract existential thinking to the experience of a living human being, and philosophy becomes emotionally engaging and morally educative to modern reader.

Index Terms—Mitch Albom, Existentialism, Death, Meaning, Regret, Human Relationships

I. INTRODUCTION

As a philosophy, existentialism is the result of the human experience with death, misery, and the seeming lack of sense in the universe. Soren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Viktor Frankl claim that people have to develop the meaning by choice, responsibility, and true living. Existentialism has found a way out in contemporary literature but rather than using abstract discourse, it can present itself through stories that describe human hardship, defeat and change. Mitch Albom and his books *Tuesdays with Morrie* (1997) and *For One More Day* (2006) are the bright examples of this

literary interest in existential issues. Even though Albom is often deemed a sentimental or inspirational author, that would be a mistake because his works are philosophically deep. His stories are repeatedly challenged by what can be regarded as the most fundamental questions of the existential philosophy: What is the meaning of life in the face of death? What is the way to live an authentic life? Does love and forgiveness redeem a regretful burdened life? Albom makes existential philosophy appealing to the general audience by using the simple characters in extraordinary emotional situations. In this paper, it is stated that *Tuesdays with Morrie* and *For One More Day* are reflecting a very humanistic form of existentialism, the one that is not to lead to the states of despair but instead to acceptance, relational responsibility, and ethical development. Through these texts, the paper has shown that Albom reinvents philosophy as a lived wisdom in storytelling by considering them through existentialist perspectives.

II. EXISTENTIALISM: A THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Existentialism is about how every individual confronts life in a world without purpose in it. It burrows into individual lives of living. Philosophers such as Kierkegaard emphasize on subjective truth. He tells us of true life as a result of profound personal decision and inner reflectiveness (Kierkegaard 45). Individuals have to jump into engagements individually. This builds true existence. Faith was a leap to Kierkegaard and not an unthinking rule. His concepts challenge people to possess their way in the face of uncertainty.

Absurdity is emphasized later by existentialists such as Camus. Humans crave meaning. The world remains silent and cold. This conflict generates

serious tension (Camus 21). The life as Camus portrays it is a myth of Sisyphus. The man wheels a stone up a mountain. It falls back each time. But Camus calls to revolt with the delight in fighting. Such absurdity is a blow in everyday life, such as pursuing things that are slipping. Another perspective is given by Viktor Frankl. Even in pain his logotherapy lies concealed. Frankl survived Nazi camps. He came to know that humans live on mission (Frankl 121). Drive is provided by love, work or attitude towards suffering. This is pure survival by force. The people who have lost hope are assisted through logotherapy to seek light. The sentiments are reflected in the books of Mitch Albom. Pain shows up raw. It is transformed by love, close relations, and silent contemplation. Take *Tuesdays with Morrie*. Morrie faces death. Lessons out of conversations change sorrow to knowledge. Or *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*. Purpose can be seen through bonds across life. There are existential origins to the stories of Albom. They shift the tone. Forget loneliness or it is all worth nothing. Albom frames it as moral duty. Compassion links people. Accountability is constructive. Readers do not understand existence as an individual struggle. It is mutual development by nurturing. This brings people to his cordial narrations in the coldness of philosophy.

III. DEATH AND ACCEPTANCE IN TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE

The book *Tuesdays with Morrie* follows a collection of talks between Mitch Albom and his late professor, Morrie Schwartz who is dying of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). Death is not taken as an abstract idea but as something that is on the verge of happening and which determines all encounters. The realization about his mortality is more or less existentialistic in terms of the concept of being-towards-death by Heidegger, but Albom delivers it in a more humane message. Morrie believes that the only way one can live their life is by accepting death: once you know how to die, you know how to live (Albom, Tuesdays 82). This message reflects the emphasis of the existential philosophy that mortality adds a sense of urgency and reality to human existence. Morrie does not fear death, but he rather accepts it as a part of his vision in order to be able to appreciate love, friendship and compassion. The focus that

Kierkegaard gave on inwardness and authenticity is also present in the way Morrie did not embrace societal values like material success and competition. Morrie is also opposing the culture of modern day where people are obsessed with productivity that he believes fails to help people have meaningful relationships (Albom, Tuesdays 116). To him, emotional good faith, relationship richness are given more importance in his philosophy, in which he argued that the purpose should not be found in outward accomplishment but in true human connection.

IV. MEANING THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS

The development of relationships that bring meaning in life is one of the major themes of Tuesdays with Morrie. The book is a story of Mitch Albom following him to his old professor Morrie Schwartz who is in his end-of-life years with ALS. Morrie also teaches that receiving and giving love is the real purpose. This is comparable to the ideas of Viktor Frankl in *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl enumerates love as one of the best ways of discovering a meaning in life (Frankl 134). He used his experience at the Nazi camps where love is what kept hope going. Morrie puts it plain. Even after death, love helps you to survive. According to him, death does not kill a relationship, this is a fact (Albom, Tuesdays 133). This transforms death anxiety which is what thinkers refer to as existential anxiety into permanence. The anxiety is a hit when life is empty or death is imminent. Morrie changes it to the bonds that continue with other people.

Take Mitch as proof. He begins chained in the cold indoors confused with his professional writing career a hectic sports reporter. Work rules his world. Talks with Morrie make him confront the gap in his heart. Morrie asks hard questions. Why chase fame over family? Mitch softens week by week. He cries during lessons. He appeals to his forgotten brother. He quits the rat race grind. This transformation reflects the opinion of Jean-Paul Sartre. According to Sartre, individuals define themselves by making a decision. No set path exists first. But Albom puts it in the context of what is right and what is wrong, not mad freedom. Morrie emphasizes moral choices such as loving and not loving self-interest. The book establishes relationships as the remedy to the

loneliness in the world. Existential isolation implies profound loneliness due to lack of definite purpose. Morrie fights it head-on. He is the one who has living funerals just to embrace friends before they die. He eats together, laughs, listens. This is the information that Mitch finds is drawing him out of the dark. Alбом omits gloomy musings of being shunned or forgotten. He underlines connections between individuals. These bonds are the cures of the meaninglessness. Love connects us. It outlasts the body. The readers witness the spread of the teachings of Morrie. Mitch composes the book in order to bequeathed to them. Relationships create an everlasting life.

V. REGRET AND GUILT IN FOR ONE MORE DAY

Tuesdays with Morrie is about embracing death, *For One More Day* is about regrets and incomplete emotional trauma. The novel is based on the life of Charley Benetto or Chick who is a seriously troubled man and is provided with an opportunity to have a day with his dead mother. The problem being experienced by Chick during the existential crisis is a result of his inability to comprehend and return the love of his mother as long as she is alive. Guilt, abandonment as well as emotional repression characterize the life of Chick. His attempt at suicide, which is at the first page of the novel, is an allusion to existential despair: the stage when life seems to be meaningless and unbearable. According to Camus, suicide is the basic philosophical question, the one that appeared as a result of the experience of absurdity (Camus 3). Alбом connects with this concept but ends up opposing suicide as a way to be redeemed, instead providing reconciliation and understanding as alternative ways.

VI. FORGIVENESS AS EXISTENTIAL RESOLUTION

A very important existential response in *For One More Day* is the theme of forgiveness. The fact that Chick cannot forgive himself does reflect in his failure to live his life with authenticity. The unconditional love of his mother helps to overcome his self-hate and allows him to change his morals. Such a process is consistent with the fact that

attitudinal change can help to find meaning even in cases where the circumstances are not changeable (Frankl 150). According to the novel, existential healing does not happen by intellectual realization but by emotional reconciliation. The redemption of Chick does not cancel his past wrongs but puts them in a new context of love and realization. Alбом therefore suggests forgiveness as the way of breaking through existential paralysis. In contrast to other existential literature, which usually focuses on isolation, Alбом places the existential resolution into familial and emotional relationships. The mother-son relationship is a place of philosophical understanding to support the idea of Alбом that meaning is not solitary but relational.

VII. ALBOM'S HUMANISTIC EXISTENTIALISM

Alбом plays the existential themes in a very different way than with the pessimistic theme that many existentialist books might have. At the same time that Camus is open to rebel against the meaninglessness without providing transcendence, Alбом brings in hope in human connection. His philosophy is much more in line with the Frankl logotherapy that can say that suffering can be given meaning when it is suffered with purpose (Frankl 136). Characters in both novels face existential crises, death in *Tuesdays with Morrie* or regret in *For One More Day* but come out more ethically aware. Alбом does not repudiate pain or the mortality, rather he incorporates them into the moral vision, which is empathetic, responsible, and loving. This method represents one of the most modern changes of existentialism, which does not ignore the emotional demands of the contemporary readers but still maintains the philosophical intensity. Alбом turns existentialism into the philosophy of angst and makes it a philosophy of care.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Tuesdays with Morrie and *For One More Day* prove that existential philosophy does not have to be restricted to the discursive level. Mitch Alбом takes sophisticated philosophical issues and renders them into a human compassion narrative through the use of emotionally appealing narratives. The way he has discovered the themes of death, regrets, and meaning is fundamental to the existentialist thought, yet it is

reconstituted by the concept of compassion and relational ethics. Albom is able to provide an existentialism that is transformative and access-friendly through the focus on acceptance, forgiveness, and love. According to his works, meaning does not emerge in abstraction but it is constructed through relationships and moral responsibility. By so doing, Albom restates the ability of literature to act as a guide to ethical and philosophical thinking in the modern world.

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