

ROPES, SEPPUKU, NAPALM AND SMILE: THE MODALITY OF SUICIDE, DEATH AND LIFE IN JEAN TEULE'S *THE SUICIDE SHOP*

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Abstract

The rate of death because of suicide is high these days because of the lack of proper mental health to overcome the hurdles in the life. Jean Teule's *The Suicide Shop* is a black comedy which comically examines the mind of the people of a near-apocalyptic world. The family is known for their shop which sells equipments for suicide. It is a pretty normal aspect of the near-apocalyptic world to view suicide and death as something which has a value of a trifle. The ideas of Soren Kierkagaard, preferably for the concept of the self is referred to clarify the relation between man's self and God. WHO reports that the leading cause of suicide is stress. The post apocalyptic world with all its concern an monopoly over materialism will eventually drive a person mad if a failure hits his/her hard.

Keywords: Suicide, death, self, optimism and near-apocalyptic world

Introduction

Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time? (Ecclesiastes 7:17)

The Bible has it all when it comes to live a life without being intelligent enough to find cruel ways to end one. God is a trifle in the ruins of a near-apocalyptic civilization where the life of a human is valued not by his/her birth but by the death, preferably a suicide. The fragrance of depression and anxiety is so intoxicating that an individual has to construct a dam or invent a bulb to live a life without mastering his death. The gloomy ambience of the suicide shop of Tuvache's, never had a tint of sunshine but light from neon strips fell on the floor like a discotheque. "No sunshine ever penetrates this small shop." (TSS-1). The Tuvaches' had a shop to sell people various things to end their life like ropes and poison. The business was good as many customers with weary perdurance decided to wade their way through the Styx and meet Hades by killing themselves with one of the products of the suicide shop. Mishimata talk about the poison of napalm and the ritual of seppuku. "I thought about petrol or napalm....We have everything you need for that, but, frankly, seppuku." (The Suicide Shop 17)

The father Mishima, mother Lucrece, first son Vincent and the daughter Marilyn were unhappy always. The youngest son Alan of the Tuvaches' is all smiles and the only element of happiness and 'immediacy' in the novel. So particular was Marilyn to end her life as she is never allowed to enjoy life and boys. She is in her teens and emotionally checked by her mother. Even

the greetings for the customer is rephrased as “Terrible day, Madame or: May you find a better world Monsieur” (The Suicide Shop 05). Lucrece was totally in irritation with the cute gestures of life by Alan. She is so particular that the smiles of Alan mar their business as the customers are not there to see some smile. “Do you think customers come here to see your smile? It is getting on my nerves” (The Suicide Shop 05). Lucrece is proud of her son Vincent as he is ever depressed with bandaged to mitigate his migraine pain. As a mother she is never worried about her son’s health but finds pride in his depression. She is even proud of the suicidal bloodline of Vincent. “He’s got suicide in his blood. A real Tuvache, whereas you, Alan....” (The Suicide Shop 17).

In the home of Tuvache, the bed time stories were never a lullaby but an opera on death and suicide. Marilyn was told a story about the suicide of Cleopatra by her mother Lucrece to ease her to sleep. “Madame Tuvache is sitting on her daughter’s bed, telling Marilyn the story of Cleopatra’s suicide to help her get to sleep.” (The Suicide Shop 09).

A simple smile of Alan is an irritating pathogen that finds its way inside the minds of the Tuvaches. Being a melophile, Alan was always singing and hearing happy songs that drove Lucrece out of her comfy sofa in a cozy house. She is bothered by the happiness of Alan. Even when Lucrece and Mishima enter the shop, they could see Alan hearing an optimistic song in headphones. “He is listening to an optimistic song and singing the words to himself as he brushes around.” (The Suicide Shop 89)

This concept of suicide is always pretty easy to study, as qualitative analysis of the rate of suicide is prevalent in all societies. It is so plain and obvious that a person commits suicide not because of his happiness but because of his anxiety about the upcoming future. The youth of today's world is more exhibited to social media and gadgets which constantly keep them connected to the internet where every detail of good and bad is stored. The basic platform of their mental health is in the brink of destruction. They are not strong in their minds and always look to end their life by the mythical and contemporary guides in committing suicide. WHO reports that the leading cause of death in 15-19-year-old humans is suicide. Suicide not only affects the family and friends of the committed, but also the society where he/she lives in. Suicide is much more prevalent in high-income countries.

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Soren Kierkegaard in his seminal work *The Sickness Unto Death* parallels his thoughts with G W F Hegel. He argues that humans are driven by self and the concept of ‘other’ never relates to man but God. This relation of being in the form of soul (geist) is grounded in another self-called God. This is the main argument of a religious person. Atheism has spread its wings wide and the world of today without considering the consequences of the future has recognized the idea to be genuine and intelligent.

The book *The Sickness Unto Death* opens with a definition,

“A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself, or is the relation’s relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation’s relation to itself to itself.” (The Sickness Unto Death 13)

Soren Kierkegaard is so clear in isolating the self from God, but an optimistic mind can be nurtured by religion and not anything else. Kierkegaard recognizes the main reason for suicide and death is despair. Despair is the sickness of the spirit. The connector of the self and God is faith, and its absence breeds doubt and despair. Kierkegaard comments,

“If the despairing person is aware of his despair...and does not speak of it as though it was on account of something exterior which had befallen him...and now with all his power seeks to break the despair by himself and by himself alone-hs is still in despair and with all his presumed effort only works himself all the deeper into deeper despair” (The Sickness Unto Death 17).

Conclusion

Though Soren Kierkegaard is conscious of death to be self-made, The Bible constructs death to be administered by God and one has no right in doing otherwise. In this post-apocalyptic world people are much more intelligent and lack the association of their self to God. In the whole text of *The Suicide Shop*, there is no single mention of religion or optimism except for the smile of Alan. However Alan finally dies after an accident realizing his family once death stricken and depressed is happy.

“Their collective happiness, their sudden faith in the future and those radiant smiles on their faces are his life’s work. Two metres away from him, his sister is laughing. Madame Tuvache watches him approaching as if she has suddenly seen her mother arrive in the school playground. Alan’s mission is accomplished. He lets go.” (The Suicide Shop 169)

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