

NO REASON TO
LIVE,
NO REASON TO
DIE

POEMS OF AN EXISTENTIAL CRISIS

BY SCOTT PEYTON AND STEFAN KOBILJAK

PREFACE

We wrote these poems as part of a project for our class in Existentialist philosophy. It is no surprise that when we tell people we are taking such a class, they almost always ask what Existentialism is. Unfortunately for our curious friends (most of whom are just trying to make small talk), the answer is quite complicated. Existentialism is a philosophical and literary *movement*, not a specific *system* or *worldview*, and because of that it resists a simple definition. Many thinkers – among them Fyodor Dostoevsky, Friedrich Nietzsche, Soren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Simone de Beauvoir – have contributed to the tradition over the past two centuries and have brought different worldviews and perspectives into their arguments. However, there are some thematic undercurrents that encapsulate much of Existentialist thought. Existentialists tend to deal with questions pertaining to the way in which we exist in the world. What kinds of beings are we? The Existentialists answer this question in a variety of ways, but they share certain characteristics. Existentialists tend to emphasize a radical individualism, human freedom, the idea that meaning in our lives (if it exists at all) is created by us rather than given to us, that our existence is finite, and that we ought to live authentically.

These poems present a narrative of someone undergoing an existential crisis in response to the death of a loved one. The term “existential crisis,” while quite common in popular culture, is not always clearly understood. In this case, we are using it in its technical, philosophical definition. An existential crisis, in this sense, is an event or series of events that forces one into a confrontation with certain underlying truths about the nature of one’s existence that are unpleasant or contradictory. Such truths include the “absurd” nature of the human condition, the inevitability of death, or the recognition of the idea that there is no pre-given meaning in our lives and of our

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responsibility to create that meaning for ourselves. What these poems are attempting to convey is what it feels like to go through such a confrontation.

In creating these poems, we are under no delusions of grandeur. This collection is far from a masterpiece, having been written over the course of only a few months by two undergraduates with no formal training in poetic writing. However, we hope that despite this, these poems can help you process your own moments of existential dread. We hope that we can engage you and help you learn about the themes present in the long and rich tradition of Existentialist philosophy and literature. At the very least, we hope that these poems can pique your interest enough to find out more about Existentialism through other sources. We have placed a list of recommended books for those of you who want to learn more at the end of the collection.

With all the explanations out of the way, we humbly submit our work to you.

Scott Peyton and Stefan Kobiljak

“Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage

And then is heard no more: it is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,

Signifying nothing.”

-William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act V, Scene V

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I

Our love is like a symphony
Played in perfect harmony.
For though the tempo may rise and fall
We stay together through it all.
And as the melody hits my ears
Its beauty pushes back all my fears.
This moment transcends time and space,
As I brush my fingers against your face,
Pulling your lips where they're meant to be,
As we finish our perfect symphony.

II

ah, my beauty unheard of,
the sweet songs of my heart,
look up on me with those devilish eyes
that I'll never be doomed to part.

my eternal sun,
my sweetest hue,
our love is forever renewed.

crawl on over and hug me now
while in my head
I recite all our marriage vows.

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III

As I fall asleep beside you,
I can think of no better reason to wake up
Than to see your face.

As I leave in the morning,
I can think of no better reason to come home
Than to hear you rant over dinner about how Nietzsche
wrote so narcissistically,
Only to chuckle because you know I've heard it so many times
that I may as well be trapped in an eternal recurrence.

And when I say you mean the world to me,
I mean it.
Because when I'm with you your love envelopes me,
Spreading out in every direction,
Forming a world of warmth and light.

IV

Wham.

Heavy metal machine music.
Titanium vs. Titanium screech
spinning round in the air
as if we were ballerinas.

Bam, bam, blank.

awake,
air raid siren of horror
ringing freely in my brain.

Terror sinches in my stomach -
they're out of the car, too.

Formless, unmoving,
shrapnel sits softly in their chest.

fingernails dug deep into the concrete,
my infantile crawling over,
desperately slow.

Their body dragged away.

eyes,
open and wide,
no longer the ones I've known.

V

The eyes look into me
All else fades into nothingness
As a mouth I cannot see
Makes sounds I cannot comprehend

Why must they look?
If only, somehow, I could escape the gaze
That looks so penetrating
Waiting for the anguish to show itself
Waiting for the tears to pour forth.

But they can't
Because

 This
 Can't
 Be.

 You
 Can't
 Be
 Gone.

The eyes look into me
And they are expecting me to cry...

So, the tears that formed in the eyes that look upon me
Come rushing out of my own.

VI

How Strange it was
Looking at it.
A body, devoid of life
Taking up space where you used to be

But soon, I don't look at it at it anymore
As they close the casket
And lower it into the ground
Where a stone bears your name.

I too take up space.

I am suddenly aware of my teeth,
Of the saliva in my throat,
Of my eyes moving in their sockets
Of my muscles constricting as I move

I too will soon be nothing more
Than something through which blood used to
flow.

VII

As I fall asleep without you,
I can think of no reason to wake up.
But I do anyways.

As I leave in the morning,
I can think of no reason to come home
Just to stare at your empty seat as I eat in
silence.

Only to tear up because I know I'll have
to return to this again and again, trapped
by the shadows of what once was.

And they say it will get better with time.
But they're wrong.
Because though every day, I push through the grief that penetrates
my soul.

When the day ends, I see that empty chair,
And the boulder rolls down the hill once more.

VIII

Your shimmering figure stands on the bank
upstream,
Reaching for me, as I push against the current
Reaching for you.
But the river, with the strength of a raging bull
Pulls me under, and I slip away.
Time fills my lungs,
As I flow limply towards the darkness where
the river ends.

IX

His soft, lidded form
naked, skinny and hung above me
I wish he'd open
his sour malt ball eyes.

I've seen what he's done for others
why curse and torture me?
No tests - his evil seethes through my soul.

I bought his ticket of faith,
I took his ride,
and where has that left me?

X

Blue midnight hours
Unloaded false faith.

What is this?
Who am I?
Why can I not escape
all my lonely skin?

My anguish intertwined
with this indifferent world -
Unholy houses
detached, callous, emotionless.

I am but a ripple,
in the coursing river of time.

XI

passive, consistent agony
blinding white snow,
pale as your once-warm eyes,

the world I live in is so
unreasonable and pure!

the world gives it always,
Pluto sticks his mighty claws in
and does so without any reason.

I regret my relationship with Mother Earth
She leaves me behind.

I drip away into a zomboid fever
from the world's constant beatings.

XII

Hell could not have been on Earth
with you here, yet

the Devil sat upon
His malevolent throne
cackling; smug with poison.

If we could walk
Together again -
Please take me away

my self-hatred
Is only matched
by my hatred of the world.

I have hate
pure, sweet hate
and I return to absinthe.

XIII

Perched upon a barstool,
dizzy, swimming,
my fourth night continued.

He appears,
in the dim owl-light
boisterous again.

He is happy and smiling -
an unforgivable sin
he knows me, I bet.

I follow, stalk
I watch him piss
and I strike.

Clawed hands wrapped around,
I take no quarter
and neither does the world.

Blue bulging eyes,
he can understand now,
understand like me.

Falsely smiling,
I sit and wonder
just what'd they'd think of me.

XIV

I stare at him.
He lies on the ground,
Simply a heap of matter.
My will has dominated.
My freedom has conquered.

But then, I see the eyes.
Glazed over, nothing behind them,
Just like yours were,
When the flames consumed your soul
And when they consumed mine.

I too have become nothing more
Than a simple heap of matter.
Reduced to nothing more than a thing,
I wish I could escape my actions.
Then, maybe, I could escape myself.

XV

Everything happens for a reason, they say.
As if that's supposed to comfort me
When *I* was the reason we were on that road.
I chose to go out into the world.

Every action branches into infinity
A slip of the tongue can save a life
Or level a city
Or get lost in a crowd
Never to be thought of again.

How can we bear the weight of what we cannot
see?
Must we run blindly into the dark?

XVI

I stand paralyzed
The shadows grip my throat
And my breath grows thin
As thousands of lives spread out before me

Some are filled with joy,
Others with sorrow.

I fall to my knees as I realize
That each is as futile as the next.

Every choice is a murder.

With every step I end thousands of lives
I could have lived.

And all this for the vain hope that I will someday
die a happy death.

XVII

Since I began loving you,
hours take so long
to turn into days.

Whether to continue or not
does not matter
in any sort of way.

I need you,
your lessons
your love,
all of you.

I need your memory
always in my brain.

XVIII

Free

Free again.

I stare down the yellow sun

And lasso the new moon.

The silence of my soul breaking

Remnants dying in the brand-new light!

Let the die be cast!

There's no reason to do anything

but there's no reason *not* to do anything -

and I choose doing!

XIX

As I look to the sky
The stars stare down at me
The eyes of gods larger than I'll ever be
Yet long dead and long forgotten

I fall to my knees and cry out
A raging scream
A crescendo terrifying and beautiful

I have no reason to live
But no reason to die.
The possibilities surround me
The future mine to shape.

So, I choose to live
I choose to love
In spite of the pain

Because I would prefer to live this
 Hellish existence
Again and again for eternity
Than to never have loved you.

My cry echoes in the night
And the gods blink
As the sunlight breaks out over a new day.

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RECOMMENDED READING

Philosophy:

Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

Camus, Albert. *The Rebel*.

De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*.

Kierkegaard, Soren. *Fear and Trembling*.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*.

Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Letters to a Young Poet*.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism is a Humanism*.

Wartenburg, Thomas E. *Existentialism: A Beginner's Guide*.

Fiction/Literature:

Camus, Albert. *The Plague*.

Camus, Albert. *The Stranger*.

De Beauvoir, Simone. *She Came to Stay*.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *Notes from Underground*.

Kafka, Franz. *The Trial*.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Nausea*.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *No Exit and Three Other Plays*.