

Existentialistic Perspective in the Select Novels of Joan Didion

Dr. S. ADINARAYANAN, M.A., M. Phil., Ph. d.,

Head of the Department, Department of English

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ARTS & SCIENCE COLLEGE, VILLUPURAM,

TAMILNADU, THIRUVALLUVAR UNIVERSITY

E-mail: adiysan6@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Joan Didion, a contemporary American author who demands consideration both as a non-fiction author and as a fiction author, is regarded a novelist, an essayist, and a New Journalist. An empirical approach to Didion's works shows a progressive change in her perception of the connection of literature to life.

The present research explores the impact of existentialist doctrines - both technically and thematically - throughout four major novels of Didion, and it is the critical study to suggest existentialism as granting a logical method by which to perceive the whole canon - focusing particularly on the existential experiences of the female protagonists in the novels. The study analyses *Run River* (1963) and *A Book of Common Prayer* (1977) which graphically reveal the existential experience of an individual entangled in Bad Faith.

The writings of Didion present a comprehensive detail about the Existentialist struggle in America. America could have been regarded as an "Existential" nation from the angle that it acquired several features that would have led Sartre or Camus to experience several classic symptoms connected with the ideology. Alienation, angst, nausea, ennui and a swarm of similarly dreary physical and mental conditions could have easily been found within the nation.

In conjunction with the increasing refinement of her fiction, there remains a core value consistent with the existential perspective Didion explores in each novel. Both in terms of form and content, technique and theme, the novels of Didion fit easily under the rubric of existentialism.

INTRODUCTION

Joan Didion, a contemporary American author who demands consideration both as a non-fiction writer and as a fiction writer, is regarded as a novelist, an essayist, and a New Journalist. An empirical approach to Didion's works shows a progressive change in her perception of the connection of literature to life. The stature of literature in current life holds a crucial position in contemporary literary theory, Didion's concern to this point posits her in the mainstream of American literary notion. Didion's essays and novels explore the fragmentation of American

ethics and cultural dilemmas, where the prevailing theme is individual and social disintegration. An insight of angst or horror imbues most of her creations.

To this day, Didion remains an eloquent, well-behaved, and physically modest woman whose supposedly passive, empirical writing style drives one to spontaneously underrate the power of her acumen and the sharpness of her view. Critics and scholars have strived to set creative and political labels on Didion for years. This is because of her eagerness to blindly criticize anyone with whom she has issue, unconcerned of their cultural or political relationship.

The present study explores the impact of existentialist doctrines - both technically and thematically - throughout two major novels of Didion, and it is the critical study to suggest existentialism as granting a logical method by which to perceive the whole canon - focusing particularly on the existential experiences of the female protagonists in the novels. The study analyses *Run River* (1963) and *A Book of Common Prayer* (1977) which graphically reveal the existential experience of an individual entangled in *Bad Faith*. Even though each female protagonist experiences some existential ordeal which impels her to become conscious of her existence in *Bad Faith*, she eventually opts to take responsibility, to live fairly, and to acquire self-respect.

Existential Dream in *Run River*

Didion's novel comprise her fictional canon, *Run River* (1963) recounts Lily Knight McClellan, whose marriage collapses in parallel to the fragmentation of the agrarian system of Sacramento Valley of California. Learned scholars have been strangely brutal in their evaluations of Didion and her female protagonists. In "The Case of Ms Joan Didion," Catharine Stimpson notices Didion to be "a curious creature, whose sense of literature and existence is common, disappointingly conventional, and always problematical" (36). She adds Didion women are small, badly timid, quarrelsome, and imbued with angst. In *American Fictions: 1940-1980*, Frederick Karl claims that typical Didion women "function minimally... [and] barely hang on to sanity" (398).

Beginning with a priority on the individual and the prominence of her choices, Didion's fiction then advances to touch bigger issues of political and social significance. Consistent throughout Didion's whole tenet is a function of existentialist doctrines that ends in a deeply moral vision. It is the hope that the present study will contribute not only to better critical recognition of the fiction of Didion but also to rediscovering existentialism as a prominent and advantageous method of literary criticism.

In "Didion's Grace," Peter Prescott says that the characters of Didion are "emotional invalids, all terminal victims of their own violence, corruption, or helplessness" (81), and in "Joan Didion and Her Characters," John Romano says that the novels of Didion originate "from that unfortunate genre, the lyrical-precious novel of female desperation" (63).

Run River takes place in Sacramento, California is highly significant in understanding the ways in which the notion of mobility and the American dream are at play in the novel. Westward geographical expansion and the stretching of the border are significant illustrations of mobility that have assisted to set movement at the core of American identity and history.

Run River set completely in dense acres of fruit orchards and hops fields among the Sacramento Valley of California, grants a case in point for the sorting of Didion as a Californian. The agrarian ambience of *Run River* gracefully highlights its powerful themes of historical power, tradition, family, and the specific tragedy of their loss. The background in *Run River* is straightforward and functional, emblematic of an early fictional attempt.

Walter Knight of *Run River* dreams existence as another edge, like California, to be confronted and overpowered, and he instructs his daughter Lily through a series of platitudes. What Walter desires is to become the Governor of California. Lily genuinely trusts in the prospective victory of her father, and she is shattered on election evening to pick up his loss to a second term in the Legislature, a defeat that knocks a death chimes to his political career.

Lily's mother, Edith Knight also contributes to the crooked, visionary world vision of Lily. Both of the parents of Lily trust in the value of putting the best face on situations and events; they want to endorse the fair image. Edith organises grand parties shown up by several guests. On these evenings, the Knights comply to embrace a posture, "a tacit promise between them" (38), to seem as their social class would claim as the solid and lucky couple of the Sacramento Valley. The inclination towards hypocrisy becomes more detrimental when one of the parties engaged does not understand that falsity is being provided in the case with Lily. She is ingenuous, young; her very viewpoints of ground reality are made with the unstinting commitments and the affluent pose of supremacy with which her father cherishes her. Walter motivates in his daughter a sort of false, misleading optimism, a perspective of the world that cannot ultimately be backed by reality.

Lily believes seemingly she is an interloper, "a house-guest who had stayed on too long" (69), in the house she shares with Everett, his family, and the nursemaid/housekeeper China Mary. A fair rapport between wife and husband naturally never prospers. Existence as the wife of Everett seems to Lily to be grounded on a progressively tough series of hypocrisies. She understands that she has nothing to talk to Everett; "sometimes whole weeks passed without their having what could be called, in even the crudest sense, a conversation" (88). Lily is not alone in feeling the emotional disconnection between them. They have been married for three years when, in November 1942, Everett thinks to enter the armed services. Lily's objection - "You have a son. You have a two-month-old daughter. Your father needs you" (89) - unconsciously affirms that the absence of Everett will not disturb her heavily.

Everett relishes his instead monotonous job at Fort Bliss, making friends and playing poker in evenings used up at the bar. Indeed, phone calls and the letters of Lily make the only disturbance in his times. For her role, Lily relishes the company of charming men. She involves in sexual relationships with Joe Templeton, a neighbour, and she likes the company of Ryder Channing, the suitor of Martha. Ryder comes home late one evening to meet Martha and, finding that she is sleeping at upstairs, he and Lily lapse into affable chitchat. Lily thrives under the spellbound attraction of Ryder; she notices herself speaking eagerly to him about her family. She even talks of her father, whom she has not yet shared with anyone after his death.

By the time Everett turns back from the service in 1945, nearly three-years have passed since he and Lily have lived together. The drawn-out physical separation of Everett and the sexual infringements of Lily compound to assure that whatsoever love they may have once enjoyed has vanished. Later Lily finds that summer that she is carrying, and not, she believes, by Everett.

Everett and Lily never restore from the nothingness that encircles them following her abortion. They play that pattern for years: she bids rarely to be held in his arms or to be inclined some sort of comfort and he callously rejects; he, once in a while, wants someone to speak to and she is out for the evening. Nothing is left between them but aged, known resentments and grievances. Long emotionally departed, they move slowly over the years into that swamp of spiritual desolation wherein each of them falls over and over to hear the advices the other one hardly sends. Everett and Lily, each in Bad Faith, deny admitting that their marriage has broken-up.

The family history and tradition are sources of pride for both the families of Lily and Everett in *Run River*. Both families extol their legacy and heritage, their origins in the California agricultural tradition that has been remained for generations. In spite of their similar upbringings, Lily feels exotic, as if she has meddled into a private, mystical family in which she will never own complete membership. She believes that the same radius to the less mysterious interests of mother and wife. As Lily rests in the hospital after the birth of her second baby, she starts to realize the barrenness in her existence and her failure as a mother.

The term of Lily as mother has ended in various instances of failure. Her son disobediently denies the ethics of agrarianism and family integrity on which the McClellan's and the Knights have entrusted for generations. Knight shuns the only lifestyle she has ever familiar, and he abhors her for her open sexual treacheries of his father.

The daughter of Lily imitates her own ruined traits and seems liable to the same erratic rambling through life that has knocked out her own existence. Lily has aborted one time, and she has lost the physical capability for motherhood as an outcome of that incident. Lily sidesteps

responsibility both in the taking care of her kids and in the abortion she has impregnable fourteen years ago.

In every quarrel, the abortion stood between Everett and Lily as “the heaviest weapon in both their arsenals” (218-219). Because Lily feels that Everett “made [her] get it,” and because she cannot conceive since the abortion, she fixes the blame of her discomfort on Everett: “all that had happened was in some way his responsibility” (138). Because Lily declines to hold responsibility, her motherhood stalls her existence in *Bad Faith*.

Lily survives in *Bad Faith* due to personal inertia and a paucity of involvement. For two decades, indeed, Lily has ignored her personal accountability and attempt to charge others for her hardships. The remark of Lily “I’m not myself if my father’s dead” (73) obviously shows her attitude towards Everett, too, is liable of *Bad Faith*; he also avoids action. Even though he notices their marriage has been broken-up long ago, he oscillates whenever he concerns breaking up their relationship. For several years Everett chooses the simpler way of easily doing nothing.

Lily contemplates for a moment on the paradoxical nature of reality. Just now as she has found an inner source of power, of strength, of action, Everett urges her to leave him alone, to let the horrid truth be visible, not to act. She thinks:

May be once you realized you had to do it alone, you were on your way home.
Maybe the most difficult, most important thing anyone could do for anyone else
was to leave him alone. (247)

Alone, that is, to act as an individual finishes he should, alone to seek his own personal fate. The revelation admits her to feel relaxed “cutting clean” (246), letting go of Everett, and she discovers the strength to endure on her own, alone. Now informed and revealing a readiness to face life genuinely, Lily coolly stands to face the sheriff and starts to regard how she will recount to the children.

For Lily, the fantasy of the West is a lived fantasy in which the experimental ideas correlated to mobility and the American dream — modernity, progress, opportunity, freedom, democracy and independence - are portion of her own personal life.

As an offspring of the West originated from immigrants who first settled the Sacramento Valley, the legacy of the journey west and the search for the American dream is something that has been imbued in Lily from her early age in *Run River*. Walter Knight, Lily’s father, appears to symbolise the immigrant tendency of the West and even act as a manifestation of the American dream for Lily when she is adolescent.

In a course, the Knight family acts as prevailing evidence that the American dream is in fact achievable, and it is therefore not tough to perceive why Lily might believe in such promises and ideas. Though she comes to trust in the myths of the West through her father and shows a solid faith in his competences to move up the social status and accomplish anything, the

perspective of Lily of herself in connection to the American dream is unclear. It is as though it plainly does not happen to her that she directly might attempt to chase such a dream, and she discovers herself married and settled before she even has a chance to concern what she desires for her life and future.

Lily's lack of decisiveness here in terms of the accomplishment, and even the development, of any targets for herself can possibly be understood with the ideas of Gillian Rose, feminist geographer, on women's experiences of space in general and spaces of knowledge in specific. This sense of one's future and one's identity as having already been determined and outlined for her by others surely appears to apply to Lily; her character's level of lethargy and lack of power in the novel are fascinating. The determination of Lily to marry Everett is a perfect example of her attitude to plainly go along with someone else's deal, as if she has no control over her own destiny, as if her future has in fact already been drawn up by somebody else. It appears that the life of Lily became drawn up for her the day Everett takes her purity on a riverbank at the ranch of his father.

The referral of exile and inescapability of Didion here is of specific concern in contemplating about the understanding of Rose of "paradoxical space," which, she contends, outcomes from the concurrent positioning of women as both "prisoners and exiles" within "the masculinity geographical imagination".

Lily's overt sense of space as risky and overwhelming is quite saying in terms of her concept of where she stands in relation to the ideology and myths of the West and the American dream. Lily's personal experience of space is evidently not inclined with the philosophical sense of freedom and the idea of space and land as feasible and open that is so interlaced with the American dream of mobility.

Lily in fact appears to see herself as an object that has been conquered, and her consciousness of such embodiment is saying not only in terms of her hazy consciousness of her recognized incompetence to obtain the American dream, but also in terms of the common paucity of power and mobility she presents in *Run River*.

Lily's sense of up rootedness and disorientation due to the changeover of Lily's motherland surroundings is blended in *Run River* by the loss of Walter, her father, who killed unexpectedly in a car accident. The death of her father seems to portray the height of the disorientation of Lily; it is an important turning point for her in terms of faith, identity and mobility. Likely that "Lily's sense of rootedness was defined largely in terms of her relationship with her father" (80), observes Winchell in *Joan Didion*, it is not stunning that his death is a rather jolting experience for her.

At the news of the death of Walter, Lily exhibits both physical and mental gestures of disorientation as she falls down in the floor, "shaking" but otherwise inert, and stays mostly unaware — with the use of enough pills to make her calm for another two days — until the day of his funeral, when she cannot dress herself and finishes as looking like "a stray from *The*

Grapes of Wrath" (81-82). This incident in the life of Lily is specifically confusing for her because it symbolises not only the loss of her father, but also a huge loss of her own sense of identity and place: "I'm not myself if my father's dead" (78). In as much as before she has managed a sense of rootedness in her family's land with her father and appeared to think that she is linked and empowered to that land, now that link to the past is rather dissolved. Moreover, the high-level of disorientation Lily encounters at the episode of Walter's death, coupled with the climatic cultural transformations infusing her ambience, gets to a sense of alienation from the society in which she is brought up.

At this moment in *Run River*, Lily cannot understand the land of her childhood just as she is cannot understand herself and her space within it. Having lost the principal bond to a motherland that is changing before her eyes, Lily is in fact left feeling alienated from both the society and land of the place she refers home. This sense of alienation from her Western motherland, furthermore, appears to incite a sense of alienation from the American dream of mobility to which that land is so highly bonded. Previously obscurely attentive of the pragmatic inaccessibility of the glorified ideas of opportunity, freedom, and mobility connected with the mythical West, Lily is now more alienated from that ideology.

The effort of Lily of escape stemming as it does from alienation and disorientation from the self, from society, and from the social responsibilities to which she has been entrusted, appears to aid as an illustration of the practical competence of "paradoxical space". The reality that Lily, attempt as she might, easily does not fit into conventional roles and fails to perform them convincingly and successfully points to that "excess" of her identity that Davidson and Bondi stress as being so significant in granting emancipation or escape. While on the one hand the acute estrangement of Lily causes her to seem as a "deaf-mute" (51) or even a ghost walking among the existence, it is that very limb — that top-level of mental estrangement — which is significant to her accomplishment of mobility in the form of escape from conventional gender roles.

Though Lily surely does not achieve a level of absolute freedom or lasting getaway from the roles she opposes, she does attain several forms of getaway and thus shows a large increase in mobility as the novel develops. Beyond her astute estrangement, giving her with a certain level of psychological getaway and playing as an impetus for psychological mobility in the structure of realization, Lily also attains getaway on a social and a physical level by moving outside of both the domestic realm and the social roles that are linked to that world.

The flight of Lily from the repression of ethical roles through repeated acts of marital adultery presents a confrontation to those roles and their contrariness; these acts are accordingly important illustrations of mobility in *Run River*.

Lily's sexual violations and abortion are substantial method by which she opposes conventional female roles and breaks away from them to a certain point. Yet, it has been presented that these forms of physical and social flights are limited and surely do not go unpunished.

Majority of critics, observing the Didion women in comprehensive terms of their fallibility or other emotional or physical frailty, are substance to evaluate the female protagonists as static, non-developing characters. For that reason such critics constantly neglect to accept or to view the important personal change of each protagonist's existential struggles.

Didion's range of differences in fictional technique surfaces in the manner in which she perfectly fuses existential ideas with a variety of similar styles. Her *Run River* show a evolving finesse in creative technique in three elemental manners: in terms of narrative context, setting and her adoption of some phenomenal stylistics.

Existential Delusion in *A Book of Common Prayer*

It may be that Didion's more contemporary priority for surreal tropical setting acquires from an instinctive sensation that nature itself is surreal. Didion discovers it elemental to lead a metropolitan life, and thus nature to her endures only in dreams. This idea is hypothetical, but it is a fact that the romantic appeal towards singleness with nature has remained a component of her writings. Nature is perceived as contributing to, or interacting with, the human ego or sense of self with nature that needs the loss of human ego.

The exploration of Didion of female companionships is inquisitive in regard to both her evolution as a writer and to her connection to the literary tradition which she acquires. The equivocation of Didion becomes even more evident in *A Book of Common Prayer* because the story fixates on the predicaments a female narrator experiences in attempting to narrate a tale. The factor that Grace is a female is not inconsequential to her story of yet the life of another woman. In spite of her disclaimers concerning any relationship with the feminist movement, Didion uses a classic feminist technique in the structure of this novel. Didion conceives a narrative whose content and form explores the relationship of two women to each other and to the literature created by and about them. Simultaneously, Didion realises her points of difference from radical feminists while essentially admitting her closeness with women as a group.

Feminist scholars such as Pratt, Showalter, and Gilbert and Gubar have noted that female writers have much utilised apparently traditional narrative strategies to narrate their tales, but then have superseded those strategies for feminist reasons.

Yet, Gilbert and Gubar's current analysis of the connection of twentieth-century woman writers to their creative legacy invokes a retrospect of the connection to motherly ancestors. They suggest that by the twentieth-century, a woman writer has an option of either a patrilineal or matrilineal legacy to ask. After showing definitely through an etymological examination that

the concept of acceptance consists within the idea of affiliation, Gilbert and Gubar describe the merits of this idea for the woman writer.

Nevertheless, by the time she drafts *A Book of Common Prayer*, Didion has recreated a value in the creation of narrative as an elemental human life. By her third venture, Didion has propelled beyond the stunning impacts of dilative loss in present-day world. In fact, from this point forward, both in her non-fiction and fiction, Didion's creative powers are led toward the process of affiliation. The change of direction in intention is gestured by a transformation of terrestrial location. The geographical transformation is exhibitivive of a pursuit for a new means to build bonds in contemporary life.

A noticeable facet of Didion's retrospect includes an impression on and a review of the creative heritage which she acquires, and very specifically, the chiefly patrilineal nature of that heritage. In contrast, *A Book of Common Prayer* shows Didion's effort to detect her legitimate position as a female within a creative heritage whose right of patriarchal ethics has often rejected its creative daughters in equal position with their male offspring. The choice for a male instead of a female ancestor would probably be perceived by some feminists as proof of Didion's subtle internalization of patriarchal ideals. Such a perspective means an absence of critical sensibility on the author's side.

In *A Book of Common Prayer*, Charlotte is dead telling the truth of her "I" against the truth of the superhuman world, to the shades and dampness of that world. The succession from self-creation to self-destruction bears a component of mimesis, since it is nature that creates humans and nature that kills them. Didion here presents her first global locale. A fictitious Central American state, Boca Grande is plainly unlike North America, an element that includes to its mystery not only for Charlotte but also for the readers. As in *Run River*, theme and locale blend to create an effective literary affinity.

Roaming ever southward, Charlotte reaches eventually in Boca Grande as a conventional norteamericana, innocuous of politics and full of positivism, and however there she experiences corruption and violence in every part of life. The political system is badly impaired; social issues proliferate; personal bonds are constrained; even the water is unhealthy for consumption. In an ambiance as missing of reason as is Boca Grande, only an existential mentality of shared society will deliver the conflicts into peace; yet, it is a message the people of Boca Grande have not yet realised.

Charlotte comes of age in a wealthy family near Hollister, California. She is granted with all the elemental comforts of a middle-class existence. In brief, Charlotte thinks in an unduly optimistic perspective of the world, one in which affronts will disappear, all circumstances will progress, and victory will surely happen. The upbringings of Charlotte, with its reliance upon sincere faith, drive her as well into Bad Faith; it admits her to deceive herself into trusting that

the rest of the world functions under a code similar to her own. Charlotte bears serious mental agony concerning her lost children. Charlotte suffers physical and mental harm from their respective husbands, but they are more severely agonized by their neglect to link with their daughters. Charlotte has just given Marin the bracelet in token of her care and love, as a souvenir of purposeful family history. Marin successively reviles that family tradition. The image upsets Charlotte not only for its blasphemy but for the disintegration it implies. Charlotte feels that she should have flopped as a mother but where and when this failure started, she cannot dream up.

Charlotte's life is perforated with Bad Faith, with lies she says both to herself and to others. She consistently refuses the fact of the ambiance challenging her regarding Marin; moreover, she formulates tales to drive her lies seem credible.

After the birth and death of Charlotte's second daughter she identifies herself in Boca Grande, a place where she envisions she might be able to drop the gear of her children's misfortune. She cannot. Rather, she shifts her inherent optimism to the land itself.

Charlotte ignores to admit the impossibility of her monumental ventures. Worse, she denies acknowledging the immediate rebellious overthrow in Boca Grande. Charlotte triumphs in moving away from Bad Faith, away from delusion, and towards a state of legitimacy, braveness, and clear vision. Charlotte's remark that she is not going to walk away from here is sarcastically perceptive because she survives only a few days after her changeover.

Grace feels that some facets of the human - such as scare of the dark - can be seen and produced in a laboratory dish by a specific package of amino acids, still her discussions with Charlotte tell her that Charlotte, like any human being, is too complicated a being to be sliced into various folders of information. Charlotte's visit into and out of Boca Grande, into and out of Bad Faith, into and ultimately out of a series of conserved delusions, is thus two-fold informative and fits the strategy of two-fold description employed throughout *A Book of Common Prayer*. Not only has Charlotte individually grown-up, she has also averted Grace from becoming trapped in Bad Faith by a too solid reliance upon the sanctity of her scientific approach.

The outlook in *A Book of Common Prayer* has a relationship not only to the concerns of Didion about the effectiveness of narrative but to the setting of novel. Moreover, there are two relationships to place featured by Grace and Charlotte, and it will aid to interpret those relationships to first outline the narrative relationship between the two women.

A Book of Common Prayer is about the effort of Grace to perceive the life of Charlotte by telling it. Apart from allusions, it is a "common prayer" because the narrative portrays both Charlotte's attempts to be sincere to a motherly value, and Grace's attempts to be a fair "witness" of Charlotte.

Didion has pronounced that *A Book of Common Prayer* is initially to have been set completely in motel rooms, and to be without event. Readers realize now about the importance

of motel rooms, and it appears partly reasonable to believe that an eventless novel is a presentation of some sort; it would not employ an energetic plot but it might use symbolism or be some kind of modern allegory.

The novel attains an allegoric, even a symbolical, effect, mainly and originally with the adoption of the fictitious locale. It appears plausible to believe that an author picks a fictitious locale because she does not want to be confined to realism, or to literal readings of every event in her novel. She also wishes to be liberated from the preceding understanding of reader of an actual locale and the belief that emerge from it. A more surreal feature is provoked by the use of a fictitious locale, whether the locale is the Land of Faerie, Forest of Arden, or Winesburg, Ohio. But, because Boca Grande is in Central America, it can capitalise on both the pre-conceived belief of a true Central America and the readiness to envision a fictitious country.

Even though Didion did not set the novel completely in motel rooms, there are several hotel or motel rooms in it, and her frequent scene-jumping makes the same impact of homelessness, a furious, on-the-run quality — which aids to make a sense of Marin in the minds of the readers, in the absence of Marin herself. Even when the scenes occur in people's homes, the homes signifies no sense of haven. There is a contributing theme of the absence of family stability, and the absence of history. The concept of nature is superseded by the image of the Central American climate, the dull light and the glowing surfaces that Didion wants her reader to walk away recollecting. The change of affinity at the end of the novel, from head to heart, or from Grace to Charlotte, is not as impressive as it must be, because Charlotte still appears a little maniacal to the readers.

The issue with Charlotte is caprice, which evolves from the need of a moral centre, an unsatisfactory ego. The explanation of Grace of the trouble Charlotte has in walking across a room having two of her lovers reveals her trouble managing a logical sense of self among the challenging emotional and moral allegations contrived on her.

The sensibility of Charlotte of the instinctiveness of all reality is not as influential as it evidently is suggested to be, yet. But readers have to be aware of that sensibility, if readers are going to analyse it. There is the “non-literal” belief of Charlotte that Marin should finally explore the cervix of the world, which shows her consciousness of the perpetual change probable within the “amniotic stillness” of Boca Grande. And the emerald she ships to Grace on the evening of her jailing proposes that she anticipated to die, and is thus not wholly deluded about the after-effects of staying in Boca Grande. But the fact that she never wants a true flesh-and-blood Marin to show-up, while it also shows some range of understanding, demonstrates that the change she is concerned in will be mentally, individually construed. Evidently, she intends to martyr herself to her hope in Marin, and maybe she wishes that the relic of the emerald and her narrative will help assure Marin that she is wrong.

Finally the novel appears to prefer to stand for kindness - unfortunate Charlotte is gunned down incriminating the battling discords for wrecking the vaccine, and exclaiming the daughter's name who has abandoned her for showy political concepts. Meanwhile, Grace has lost faith in cell structure theories, and realizes only that she is said things. All perception, for Grace, shows up from authority, and authority is doubt. There is no means to be right, except to trust in the daughter one makes in one's psyche, and to be truthful to this feeling, to determine to tell "Goddamn you all" to those who do not have a feeling which can put them merciful, and to stand strong, passive, alone, wrecked, but true in one's own way. This theme does not work in the novel because we feel less for Charlotte than we should; but the plot is well-knitted and the viewpoint keeps fascinating. This assessment, in any aspect, reminds of Didion's early concern in the female protagonists with ill-fated responsibilities. Such a concern, in *A Book of Common Prayer*, transpires as partly sentimental, and as a step on the road to a certainly less favourable fiction.

None of Didion's female protagonists has found personal fulfilment through marriage. Rather, marriage has enmeshed them because each woman goes in or goes through her marriage in *Bad Faith*. Marriage degrades the self-identity of the women characters through mental agony, through physical ill-treatment, emotional desolation, or sexual estrangement. Marriage means a pressure for Didion women: a yoke of shame that Charlotte should bear during her sexual infringement, a circumstance that deprives Inez of her own charms because she is anticipated to hold off to her celebrity husband. Somewhere along the line the initial bond mutates: either it becomes so weak that the women discover it hopeless to recreate the original source of attraction, or the bond becomes such a monopoly that the women can only draw their own prudent resources and walk away in a furious attempt to defend some shred of personal virtue. Marriage fails, in all cases, to upgrade the lives of the women.

Having found marriage disappointing, each of the female protagonists tries to find personal satisfaction through another external source: her children. Unfortunately, the extrinsic and lateral transformation of each woman, from husband to child, works only to increase extra years to her external quest for self. Each woman sustains in *Bad Faith* because she endures to lead her life for someone else instead of for herself. Being a mother shows up to be as disappointing a role as wife has been.

CONCLUSION

The writings of Didion present a comprehensive detail about the Existentialist struggle in America. In conjunction with Majority of the nation's occupants used their entire lives in Bad Faith, but Camus, Sartre, and their highbrows never urged anyone to strongly follow these features. America is a place to go if you liked to view the symptoms, not if you were searching for the cure.

The Existentialists tried to make a plan for surviving in the world of post-World War period. This plan engaged a stringent adherence to authenticity, the belief that one should live one's life as a self-directed person. In order to be self-directed, one has to obtain a close knowledge of his or her self, and approach life with as much intellectual sincerity as possible. This is one notion that Didion obviously has in common with the Existentialists. She trusted in a personal instead of a public orientation toward existence, the concept being that if each individual takes responsibility for his or her own actions, the world would be a much better place to live.

Camus and Sartre also think in a radical form of freedom asserted on the understanding that death is an inescapable eventuality and coming to terms with this fact. Camus's idea for purifying the agony that usually escorted the realization of one's mortality, and the absurdity that it hinted at, is metaphysical uprising. The incomprehensibility of existence requires people to find their own meanings of existence and to try a Nietzschean reevaluation of all values. For Camus, the base of this new value system is a sympathetic humanitarianism based on the concept of universal justice. This idea is a far cry from the dark, agonizing over philosophy that most ignorant observers imagined Existentialism to be.

The antithesis of a legitimate existence is a life lived in Bad Faith, the state of being in which an individual actually becomes a liar. Taking decisions or actions that contradicted one's own personal instincts or beliefs is one form of Bad Faith. Another, equally harmful manifestation of this condition is the refusal of one's responsibility for one's existence. A society that is asserted on Bad Faith would make unreflective, vacuous, lost souls incapable of making decisions for themselves or living authentically. Finally, such a society would become sick and die. This is what Didion feared is happening to America during the time she lives there.

Even though Didion never particularly used the term "Bad Faith" in her novels, it is evident that she views it as one of the most destructive forces of America. Everything about the America, from its geography and architecture to the music and movies produced there, is designed to persuade people to live doubtfully.

The female protagonists of Didion encounter severe personal alienation. Nothing has turned out quite right for them. These women have not found contentment in any of their roles:

as daughters they are nourished with mean optimism; as wives they are mentally or physically abused; as mothers they endure the painful losses of their children. Disintegrated as they are, then - with no husband, no parents, no children, and evidently no other avenue to promise contentment - it may seem at first that these female protagonists are doomed to be sentimentally invalid, to endure lives of anguish, of personal collapse, and of spiritual failure, the very assessment most Didion critics try to back. Yet, some readings minimize or overlook the significance of each protagonist's transformation from Bad Faith to a state of authenticity. While it is true that the whole deal of each woman's life has been so far interpreted in connection to someone else - to husband, child or parent — each woman ultimately finds a reason to surrender her inauthentic existence. That reason, accompanied by trauma, or allows her to escape the trap of Bad Faith and irresponsibility. Concurrent with each conversion is a beginning of a new self-awareness, the move towards authenticity which is the climax of the existential quest.

Lily, Charlotte, Maria, and Inez encounter such a catharsis. Each woman becomes excised from the very source (child or husband) which has given her with illusory backing. Finding herself liberated from all external systems of support, she turns for the first time to rely upon herself. In the clean ground that remains, each woman starts to respect herself.

One or both parents in both the novels of Didion educate their daughters to believe unrealistically in the existence of something better: to trust that they command power enough to assert that they own the valley; to believe that fortune will always smile on them; to trust in the upward spiral of history; and to trust in marriage, romance, happy endings, and that the love of a good man is all a woman could ever want. By encouraging them to acquire such a world view, the parents drive their daughters into believing a lie. Because the daughters regard themselves immune to the forces that affect others, each one indicates the goal of Bad Faith, which is to put oneself out of reach; it is an escape by which the individual views himself as erroneously privileged. Their attitudes of unrealistic optimism and their attitude towards Bad Faith accompany the women into their first adult decision: marriage.

Even though each woman marries with the optimism typical of adolescent girls, each one realizes, in years to come, the stupidity of her choice. Each woman realizes that in marriage she is denigrated and manipulated. Moreover, each marriage deteriorates through abuse, desertion, adultery, or a paralyzing form of entire spiritual and emotional abandonment. When the role of wife becomes unsatisfactory, each woman knows she is somehow responsible for her lack of contentment. Years will pass before she abandons her Bad Faith and finds that the source of contentment she searches is not to be found outside herself — in a husband or later, in children — but instead, that it exists within herself.

Just as the settings of the novels of Didion has increasingly expanded in scope, so too have her narrators become deliberately complex. The unusual pattern of Didion of narrative

presentation shows affinities to the form of the existential novel which can reach no satisfactory conclusion. Not only does Didion play with the conventional narrative line by offering it in inverted form in her novels, but also she experiments with unusual points of view and narrative strategies.

In each of the novels of Didion, she gives the “conclusion” first, with the remainder of the novel filling the reader in on the events that will culminate finally in the introductory action. Thus *Run River* opens with the murder of Ryder Channing and *A Book of Common Prayer* spells out evidently on the first page Charlotte’s fate in detail. This inversion of narrative order forces the reader to start with an incomplete and a fragmented knowledge: the reader knows certain facts about Lily, Charlotte, Maria, and Inez, but he should spend the remainder of the book fitting together the rest of the pieces into a coherent whole. With Didion’s presentation of the “conclusion” first, then, the reader progresses along a path of self-discovery just as the protagonists do. It is self-discovery that forms the basis for Didion’s unusual uses of point of view and narrative perspective.

Like *A Book of Common Prayer* explores two narrative strands: the breakdown of Inez and Harry Victor’s marriage and her subsequent, long-postponed relationship with Jack Lovett and secondly, the barrenness and hypocrisy of celebrity life. Similarly, as in *A Book of Common Prayer* proposes a narrative double: this time between the fictional Inez Victor and the very real Didion.

Didion takes up her narration by confirming her own inability to tell the story properly, her consciously defective but “unequivocal way” of beginning this particular novel. Another comparison to *A Book of Common Prayer* is just as Grace does, Didion self-consciously admits the faults in her narration. As the reader grows in self-awareness alongside Maria or Charlotte, so too does the reader become aware of this “static” author’s development; he watches Didion developing throughout the unfolding of her tale.

Based on the criteria Nelson claim in his definition of the existential novel, and based on much of Sartre’s delineation of the act that takes place between reader and author, it is possible to argue that the existential novel interacts with the reader; by the fact of the writer denying to give a “concluding authorial comment,” the final description of a protagonist’s position is often left ambiguous, open to interpretation. The existential novel, then, urges the reader to help to decide the successfulness of the quest of protagonist. This aspect of conscious interaction between reader and novel takes place in each of the novels of Didion with specific regard to the ambiguous conversion each protagonist experiences.

The technique also forces Didion’s readers to reassess her position as a novelist, in what tradition is Didion working with this unusual narration? Is Didion aiming a return to the Victorianism of Trollope – a genre clue she herself gives by referring to that author early on - or,

due to its self-referentiality, is the brand of metafiction or postmodernism to be precisely affixed on her fiction? The invasive novelist admits the unusual opportunity to learn certain accounts of the composition Didion felt compelled to excise the paradoxical nature of these remarks should be clear and to see the occasional disbelief of Didion in her own method. In every case the reader plays an integral role in the success of the any novel.

In terms of technique it is evident that Didion's novels establish a hierarchy of increasing refinement. Her settings become more complex, her narrative view deepens and matures, and she starts to consciously engross the reader into the very fabric of the fiction. In conjunction with the increasing refinement of her fiction, there remains a core value consistent with the existential perspective she explores in each novel. Both in terms of form and content, technique and theme, the novels of Didion fit easily under the rubric of existentialism.

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