

Existential Escapism and the Tragic Triad: Sula Vs Fred Daniels

الهروب الوجودي والثالوث المأساوي: سولا مقابل فريد دانييلز

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Received: 29/04/2021

Accepted: 20/05/2021

Published: 14/07/2021

Abstract:

It is not a secret that being a black person in the USA meant at a certain time being a problem, a source of panic and despair. Black Americans react against oppression differently, some of them prefer to commit suicide; but others submit to the whites' supremacy. In "*The Man Who Lived Underground*" Richard Wright presents the protagonist who flies paradoxically to the underground world to discover its contradiction with the aboveground world, he sacrifices himself in order to feel free. Besides, Toni Morrison's "*Sula*" reflects self-destruction deeds that black women exercise against themselves to free themselves from pain. In the light of Victor Frankl's Logotherapy and the Tragic Triad, and through the two protagonists Sula and Fred Daniels, this study examines the different reactions that black Americans create to fly away from their racist communities, and to liberate themselves from the existential trauma that stigmatizes their beingness.

Keywords: African Americans, Existential Escapism, Tragic Triad, Viktor Frankl, Toni Morrison, Richard Wright.

المخلص: ليس سرا أن كون الفرد الأمريكي ذو الأصل الإفريقي كان في وقت ما مرادفا لكونه مشكلة ومصدرا للذعر واليأس. تختلف ردود أفعال الأمريكيين الزواج ضد الإضطهاد، فمنهم من يفضل الإنتحار بينما يختار البعض الآخر أن يخضع لسيادة الأمريكيين ذوي البشرة البيضاء. في القصة المعنونة "الرجل الذي عاش تحت الأرض" الكاتب ريتشارد رايت يقدم بطل القصة الذي يفر في تناقض جلي إلى العالم السفلي ليكتشف تناقضه مع العالم الآخر فوق الأرض، لقد ضحى بنفسه من أجل أن يشعر بالحرية. بالإضافة إلى هذا فإن الكاتبة توني موريسون تعكس في روايتها المعنونة "سولا" الأفعال المدمرة للذات التي تمارسها النساء الأمريكيات من أصل إفريقي ضد أنفسهن من أجل التحرر من الألم. في ضوء نظرية العلاج بالمعنى والثالوث المأساوي للباحث فيكتور فرانكل ومن خلال البطلين سولا و فريد دانييلز، توضح هاته الدراسة ردود الأفعال المختلفة للأمريكيين الزواج من أجل الهروب من مجتمعاتهم العنصرية وتحرير أنفسهم من المأساة الوجودية التي تضفي على كيانهم وصمة عار.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأمريكيون الأفارقة، الهروب الوجودي، الثالوث المأساوي، فيكتور فرانكل، توني موريسون، ريتشارد رايت.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Africans came to North America in chains, and during the Middle Passage, many slaves died, suffocated, or were strangled before reaching the shores of America. And, for two hundred years, African Americans were held in bondage in the United States, suffering untold misery, racism and discrimination. As a “curtain of cotton” encircled their lives during slavery, black Americans fought valiantly for their freedom, from the abolition period to Jim Crow to the Civil Rights Movement, to the present day. Despite the persistence of some forms of racism and discrimination in the United States today, many people in the academy nowadays reprimand researchers for the inconvenience and outdated research about racism, fostering a belief that racial segregation is reasonably a historical adversity that has to be preserved in the archival documentation for generations to read about. They also claim that the previous studies have sufficiently analyzed that conundrum to get it overcome by Americans for the sake of future reconciliation and brotherhood.

Although the historical record reveals that black Americans suffered hugely at the hands of their oppressors, research reveals they reacted to oppression in the following three ways. First, some blacks dealt with their oppression by metaphorically flying away through a suicidal behavior to a place where there is no oppression or prejudice between races, this group consists of very few people because blacks are known to be spiritually determined to protect the sacred life of the human being. Some of this category members, though very few, may be driven unwillingly to the world of the unconscious where they realize nothing of the world around them, this is also another form of flying away, it is flying away from the real world. This is seen as the response of the coward people who do not possess the capability of resistance, it is the second face of the ‘Fight or Flight’ coin.

The second category includes the ones who accepted their inferior status through what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr terms “acquiescence,” that is, they adjusted to oppression. They demonstrated their submission to be citizens of a second degree and these people have neither ambitious plans with motivational goals nor have they the willingness to break the shackles.

In reality this category concerns those people who are not physically weak but who are victims of their insistence to show an intellectual and spiritual

weakness. The third category includes the brave ones who refused to surrender and kept, instead, struggling to confirm their beingness and to reach their ultimate objectives which are human liberty and social justice.

Those brave people had gone through a very difficult long path in which they had faced considerable obstacles to confront trauma and the meaninglessness of life while trying to find meaningful answers to their questions in the middle of the absurd world. To talk about bravery of, it is to make allusion to real heroes who courageously accept to sacrifice their lives to protect their communities, to preserve their dignity, to set justice and to reach freedom.

Fascinatingly, these categories mirror Viktor Frankl's three pillars of "Death, Pain and Guilt," and depict his "Meaning Making Theory" that he uses to explain people's stimulus-response integration. He briefly explains his notion that man has to protect himself from the existential escapism by facing the three components of the triad in an attempt to reach meaning despite all the difficulties and constraint. This study argues that literary characters in African American literature mirror convincingly Frankl's three pillars of death, pain and guilt. His analysis is valuable because it provides a useful template for understanding how African Americans react to oppression and racism. In that study, I examined the works of Toni Morrison and Richard Wright for what they reveal about how black Americans have coped with the most virulent forms of racism and prejudice in the United States.

2. Meaning Making and Existential Escapism

Logotherapy is the theory that emerges from Psychotherapy, or the Viennese School of Psychotherapy as critics call it, and was first coined by the researcher Viktor E. Frankl to be mainly concerned with the meaning of the human existence and man's struggle to find that meaning. The concept expresses man's attempt to get healing through meaning and through the strife to reach that meaning; many people decide to commit suicide simply because they are unable to find meaning in their lives and they find themselves within emptiness and void all around. The main concern of Logotherapy is to fight that terrible emptiness and aid people create and discover the meaning they live for in order to be healed; this may be strongly tied to philosophy because psychotherapy is constructed on the philosophical treatment of subjects. Frankl's will to meaning

is different from Sigmund Freud's will to pleasure and from Alfred Adler's will to power though they are all perspectives of psychoanalysis.

The meaning that Frankl writes about is unique and specific to the concerned person as he is the only one who can search for the meaning of his life, nobody else is able to do it instead. It is by no means a technique to respond or defend one's being; it is somebody we live for or something we struggle to maintain. Man's longing for meaning is as substantial as the yearning to live authentically with no masking of motives or inner conflicts. Man should seek a genuine existence that does not only seek existence per se; man should not seek meaning in being a human being. Man is supposed to use all means to reach the end but he should not be the end himself.

Meaning making and escapism are derived from the theory of Existentialism that takes the human existence into consideration analyzing the various depths of the being, life, death, freedom and the absurd. The term Existential for Frankl (1984) particularly goes beyond existence itself to include other motifs: "The term "existential" may be used in three ways: to refer to (1) existence itself, i.e., the specifically human mode of being; (2) the meaning of existence; and (3) the striving to find a concrete meaning in personal existence, that is to say, the will to meaning." (Frankl, 1984, p123). The will to meaning is essentially a predestined component which is different from what previous existentialists used to work on. Frankl's main focus is man's struggle to achieve meaning. Besides, the Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist also dissects the concept of man and his freedom as follows: "Logotherapy's concept of man is based on three pillars, the freedom of will, the will to meaning, and the meaning of life." (Frankl, 1988, p14).

The Existential vacuum occurs when man is caught in a state of emptiness, aimlessness and void that he can hardly find enthusiasm to move forward or to feel the need to struggle for meaning. It is not pathological; it is a momentary state that man can evade through either creating authentic unique meanings or overtaking values and traditions to be mastering his existence again. Man is vulnerable and when he is dropped in that sterile arena of nothingness through lacking creativeness and enjoyment, he is imposed to determine his attitude then stand strong in the face of meaninglessness even if he is stuck to suffering; he has to try to find meaning in the bosom of pain and tragedy. It is difficult to achieve

meaning within pain as much as it is powerful and promising because it results from the frustrated will to meaning and it can be overcome after working out the implemented reason accurately. Studies about the issue result in horrifying statistics about people having problems with despair, depression and meaninglessness since the Eighties and they developed terribly in the last decades.

Filling the vacuum is a difficult task to do and it requires man to resituate himself again on his path toward meaning recovery or creation. Logotherapy is concerned with solving the problem of filling life with meaning and leading man through the path to discover, attribute and even create a meaning for which he would be ready to live, to resist and even to die. Death plays a crucial role in the Existential field as the ultimate end of man that he can hardly control. As a falsified attempt to control death and achieve meaning through that act, man is more or less inclined to commit suicide and put an end to suffering, vacuum and all existential questions turning over his mind. Frankl(1984) declares: “Not a few cases of suicide can be traced back to this existential vacuum. Such widespread phenomena as depression, aggression and addiction are not understandable unless we recognize the existential vacuum underlying them.” (Frankl, 1984, p112) The quote confirms that the situation is highly dangerous and frightening because man decides to end his life after he is entirely convinced that his life is meaningless and he has nobody and nothing to live for.

Existential escapism is one of the notions that Frankl dissects within his Logotherapy despite the critical views that blame his theory for strongly focusing on the negative pessimistic characteristics of human existence. In one of his outstanding books entitled “The Feeling of Meaninglessness”, the writer defines it as: “True escapism means evading reality, and it consists precisely in fleeing from the reality and from the predestined necessity of suffering, and from the possibility of filling that suffering with meaning” (Frankl, 2010, p199). For an ordinary life, man is in need of a balance between three dimensions: the somatic (physical), the mental (cognitive) and the spiritual.

The American politician and author Eric Greitens confesses in his book “Resilience”: “No one escapes pain, fear, and suffering. Yet from pain can come wisdom, from fear can come courage, from suffering can come strength—if we

have the virtue of resilience.”(Greitens, 2015, p03). Why does man need to escape? Where does man expect himself to escape, and from where? How does man see that escaping is the only solution? These questions frequently accompany the issue and are analyzed by many psychotherapists such as Viktor Frankl who develops the ‘Tragic Triad’ to explain the Existential escaping phenomenon.

3. Viktor E. Frankl’s ‘Tragic Triad’

The psychotherapist Viktor Frankl is known to be the founder of Logotherapy and he is also credited for the creation of the trilogy called the ‘Tragic Triad’ that is made up of three pillars ‘Pain, Guilt, Death’. The ‘Tragic Triad’ is Frankl’s confirmation that life can bear meaning despite the tragedies of life; it can be meaningful and optimistic even within the darkest spots of life misery and ambiguities. His basic question turns around the extent to which man can say yes to life despite the pain he handles, despite guilt that he abhors, and despite death that marks the end of everything. It is an Existential question which has already been issued by philosophers earlier about the dichotomous ‘life and death’, ‘tragedy and optimism’ expressions and the value of life in the face of meaninglessness. Logotherapy is basically an optimistic tendency as it teaches man how to become triumphant and how to render loss and despair into victory and hope, it is the reason for which the theory is created. The most appropriate quote explains the relation between escapism and the ‘Tragic Triad’:

How is it possible to say yes to life in spite of all that? How can life retain its potential meaning in spite of its tragic aspects? ... After all, saying yes to life in spite of everything, presupposes that life is potentially meaningful under any conditions, even those which are most miserable. (Frankl, 1984, p161)

Suffering, death and guilt are unavoidable and inescapable in the human nature but man destroys his present with over-thinking about future mortality on the one hand, and imprisonment within past fallibility on the other hand. He hangs himself between the past and the future and he spends his present on unfruitful suffering. However, man can save himself from that dilemma when he strives to find meaning in these situations through choosing where to stand, through emphasizing his attitude toward life difficulties. In his article entitled “Existential Escapism” Frankl declares:

What threatens man is his death in the future and his guilt in the past. Both are inescapable, both he must accept. Thus man is confronted with the human condition which is both fallible and mortal. The acceptance of this twofold human finiteness adds to life's being worthwhile, since only in the face of guilt does it make sense to improve, and only in the face of death is it meaningful to act. (Frankl, 1970, p308)

First, death is the most terrifying fact that nobody can expect, change or reject; the death of a beloved is extremely deconstructive but man is required to turn his plague into triumph and strength. Why is man required to find meaning despite his knowledge that his life would come to an end sooner or later? How much important that meaning is if it will reach the end with his finder? These are crucial questions that man has to answer before he starts his struggle to overcome death. Besides, choosing an optimistic perspective to view that fate may serve as a defense mechanism and it is the weapon that man can use to be safe. Focusing on death itself leads nowhere and remembering the dead is never getting him back from the other world. Man has to choose whether to overcome the catastrophe successfully or be besieged within that event for the entire life.

Second, man is destined to suffering and he is required to move beyond pain too because it is inevitable. Life is almost overstuffed with hard moments from which man learns to develop his patience and wisdom; without suffering man can hardly develop his consciousness and experiences. Suffering is not a curse; it is a grace, a gift that man has to thank God for because he is destined to taste the good and the bad, the sweet and the bitter, the happy and the sorrowful. Life is a mixture of all these contradictions and pain is the best teacher ever, it teaches man what no other school in the world can teach him. Without suffering, man is sentenced to a childhood state of mind that sticks to a determined level. Man is not required to enjoy suffering but to turn it into victory and power through a roadmap that starts with meaning and finishes with accomplishments. Frankl writes about suffering that man cannot avoid, but when pain proves to be simply avoidable, man is not required to exercise needless heroic efforts to handle it because there will be no meaning to be fulfilled out of the avoidable suffering. It is suffering that comes beyond our ability to evade or refuse it.

Third, regret is the balance that can measure man's conscience and ability to differentiate the good and the bad, the moral and immoral. No one is infallible, all human beings make mistakes. Without mistakes, man is predicted to learn nothing and without guilt, he is hardly resilient to change, improve or apologize. Because mistakes belong to the past, man should not stick to the past; he has to confess his wrong doing, ask for forgiveness and create meaning out of it. Feelings of regret denounce man's responsibility of assuming his action and his spirit of correctness and virtue. The problem is not when man makes a mistake, the real problem is when he refuses to assume or correct it; at this moment exactly man is free to choose where to stand: whether to assume responsibility or to withdraw. Frankl explains the notion of freedom related to guilt and regret as: "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." (Frankl, 1984, p14). Man is free and is responsible for his freedom to evaluate and straighten his faults to make meaning in life and escape absurdity and meaninglessness.

4. The African Americans' Escapism

Escapism is man's ability to evade reality and avoid life difficulties; it is a falsified version of freedom where man totally believes he is free but it turns down to be an illusion. Man can hardly escape pain, sorrow, guilt, trauma, fatigue, depression or despair without causing a psychological damage to himself; that damage takes a lot from him to be healed. African Americans are among the American minorities that encountered existential threatening as being black, inferior and submissive. It is a response against whites' prejudice and segregation through which they manifest their Black identity and demonstrate their pride and anger simultaneously. According to Frankl, man's escapism is not allowed to occur before the 'Tragic Triad' and before exerting all efforts to fulfill meaning in life; it is otherwise an unnecessary strife that exceeds its steps and is predestined to reach failure. It is strongly linked to Frantz Fanon's crucial and fundamental question when he asks in his masterpiece "Black Skin, White Masks": "What does a man want? And what does a black man want?" (Fanon, 2008, p xiv)

Sula and Fred Daniels are two examples, though fictional, of blacks who are forced to seek their way to escape reality in order to survive. Despite

dehumanization and ugly discrimination adopted by White Americans to deepen the hatred fissure and strengthen the potential of enmity and antagonism, Black Americans survived throughout centuries of slavery. Escapism is developed as a defense mechanism when the individual is unable to attack or face; escape may be chosen as a solution as for Sula or imposed by conditions as for Daniels. Both of them prefer to stay in their created worlds until their death because loneliness that they feel is hundreds of times better than reality and meaninglessness. Their quest for meaning, freedom and self-discovery processes are similar to a large extent though they have different initiatives and arguments to choose a special world to stay in, a world which is theirs, a world that belongs to them uniquely, not to anyone else.

4.1 Sula's Quest for Self-Discovery and Meaning

Toni Morrison is among the African American writers who strove to depict the history of slavery in their literary works, and the struggle of black Americans for their freedom. Sula is her second novel that narrates a story of two girlfriends Nel and Sula and the latter's struggle to challenge social conventions and warrant her independence as a strong black female. The story is about the slave era and it starts with Shadrack's tradition of having January the third of each year to be the National Suicide Day. Nel and Sula are intimate childhood friends despite the immense differences in their personalities and families. The relation retreats after they both contribute in the murder of Chicken Little, one swings the boy over the river until he falls then drowns and the other watches her attentively. Sula lives with her mother Hannah and her grandmother Eva and the aunt. She is rebellious, eccentric and careless and after her friend's marriage, Sula leaves the town for ten years and has various disrespectful affairs and relations with men.

Sula has been passionately looking for meaning throughout her life and she is the type of the strong woman who pays no attention to others' views and comments. She is determined embodying the spirit of curiosity, freedom and surprise; but she has no material inclination or greed. Morrison (2004) describes her protagonist as:

She was completely free of ambition, with no affection for money, property or things, no greed, no desire to command

attention or compliments—no ego. For that reason she felt no compulsion to verify herself—be consistent with herself. (Morrison, 2004, p119)

She also emphasized the impact of having no center in the house, the man who should teach her how to behave is absent and the women are almost careless and ignorant, this is what creates a girl of fiercely rude manners: “She had no center, no speck around which to grow.”(Id). She is partly the mother Hannah and partly the grandmother Eva, a renewed combination of the two. It is an outstanding contradiction between the two pictures: a mother with one leg who jumps from the window to save her daughter from the fire and a mother who puts her son into fire to liberate him from the burden of life.

Sula reflects Frankl’s “Tragic Triad” and its three constituent, she is a good example to depict the relation between her vacuum and her tragic life among Morrison’s characters. Sula faces death many times: the first time is when she swings Chicken Little over the river and he accidentally slips from her hands and drowns. She is extremely terrified to the extent that she tells nobody about it except Nel who has already been with her. The relation between the two deteriorates after the event as each one of them has been through a struggle, whether to tell the others about the accident. Sula grows unsettled and unconventional and she draws a defiant circle of determination around her that nobody crosses even her best friend. The boy’s death changes her nature and drives her from an innocent young girl to a mature -like woman burdened with guilt, shame and hatred.

She faces the terrifying death of her mother with no emotions of surprise, sadness or grief despite the horrific accident. She becomes alien and estranged from herself and wants to reach a state of mind where she really knows who she is, what she is doing in life, what the meaning of her life as a black woman is in order to get out of that existential vacuum. She is craving deeply and strongly to know what is the meaning of her life if it is a life of suffering and pain, if it is predestined to reach an unquestionable end. She sentences herself to a virtual prison surrounded by emptiness and void looking for herself and her identity. Sula herself thinks that death has a very bad taste and a horrific influence in: “Good taste was out of place in the company of death, death itself was the essence of bad taste.”(Morrison, 2004, p107)

Sula also confronts death when she discovers that Eva kills Plum after his coming back from the war as a helpless desperate man because he is weak and he is big enough to go back to her womb. Eva claims that it is due to her fears and love that she puts her son into fire; she explains to her daughter many years later that she sees that in her dreams and that she has to do it for him. For his baby-like behaviors and words, for his crawling and disability, the mother makes up her mind that her son is suffering and she has to end his pain and sorrows.

Similarly, Sula faces pain many times throughout the novel; her life is a hell as she describes it though she endeavors to live it according to her own norms without any regard to society or family values. Sula assures that the real hell of Hell is that it lasts forever (Morrison, 2004, p107) as she considers her life to be a real hell and that pain is all around, the reason why she craves to find meaning in life and keep alive. She even insists on her self-made loneliness because it is her own choice and not somebody's decision as she tells her friend when comparing situations: "My lonely is mine. Now your lonely is somebody else's. Made by somebody else and handed to you. Ain't that something? A second and lonely" (Morrison, 2004, p143) Though it is her decision to stay lonely and to sad; but her pain stems from the social inequalities and prejudice that black women suffer from in Medallion. She confesses: "Pain was greedy; it demanded all of her attention." (Morrison, 2004, p141)

In spite of her isolation, the people of the town consider Sula as a symbol of evil and dirt, and attribute all the bad things that happen in the town to her presence. She is also seen as a devil and a toxic woman because she sleeps with an uncountable number of men including white men, the conduct that blacks usually reject morally and socially. It is the revenge that Sula promises to take from everybody to seduce the town men and sleep with them to prove her ability to destroy their families; this is how she reacts to being described as a whore, a slut or a toxic woman.

Her pain is not only physical, it is also emotional; what hurts is not only the pain that she feels, but the remembrance of pain. Her description is exceptional and the potential she acquires to afford it is extraordinary because she compares a painful life to dying:

You think I don't know what your life is like just because I ain't living it? I know what every colored woman in this country is doing." "What's that?" Dying... Just like me. (Morrison, 2004, p143)

The writer even uses the word dying and not death because she wants to emphasize the slow motion of a deadly life that a colored woman may have. Pain is endless and infinite; it has no top and no bottom and Sula confronts her suffering but could not create meaning out of it, she fails to stand for a long time. She escapes toward her own world, her alienation and loneliness where meaninglessness and absurdity characterize her beingness.

Sula faces the third pillar of the triad when she makes outrageous faults and she sticks to her fault without apologies, regret or intention to correct. She leaves the town mysteriously after her friend's marriage which is a terrible fault that nobody excuses. Besides, she has many sexual relations with both black and white men, the behavior that drives her into even more degradation and devaluation. It is a double deterioration sword because she sees herself as a whore before the men do; she deepens her own wound with her own conviction.

She comes back to the town to be more grievous causing damage to all the people around her, seducing the town men and enlarging the circle of women hostilities. Sula crosses the human and ethical limits when she sleeps with Nel's husband for no specific reason except the void that she lives within: "Well, there was this space in front of me, behind me, in my head. Some space. And Jude filled it up. That's all. He just filled up the space." (Morrison, 2004, 144). She likes to cause pain to others though she has no love feelings for Jude but she wants to see the damaged Nel.

She uses Jude to destroy her friend and to fill the empty space in her head and around her. She does not ask for forgiveness or tolerance; she goes further to sending her grandmother Eva to the house of the old people because she no longer accepts her in the house. Sula's wickedness is symbolic as she deceives herself and her skin color first through her interracial sexual relation; she deceives her mother when she keeps observing her burning body; she deceives her grandmother by sending her to a house of special care. Besides, she deceives her only friend by taking her man; she betrays her town people and her family, and she still has not felt sorry about the damage she causes or suggests to correct her catastrophic deeds. Sula is guilty and mistaken most of the time but she does

never learn from her mistakes, this is what pushes her further to the existential vacuum where she lives alone and dies alone.

4.2 Fred Daniel's Quest for Freedom and Self- Realization

Richard Wright is one of the African American novelists and critics who have a long lasting influence in the world of literature. He was born to claim and protest against the white supremacy and the blacks' dehumanization. He writes about the American hunger, the white hegemony, the black trauma and the existential quest. He becomes famous thanks to his successful novels entitled "Native Son" and "Black Boy" and many other works. "Eight Men" is the title of his posthumous collection of short stories that is made up of eight short stories about black men but having a specific stream and thematic tendency each time. It is said to be Wright's unhappy product because it could hardly reach the same level of his previous works. However, it is a symbolic representation of black manhood, since it focuses essentially on black men stories, treating more importantly the theme of masculinity coupled with violence, gender, identity, humanism, alienation and consciousness. Besides, the author rejects and highly criticizes individualism which is a heavy burden that joins their poverty, loss, humiliation and hunger.

"The Man Who Lived Underground" is one of the short stories that were published during the forties of the Twentieth century. It is exceptionally longer and more complicated; it is about an African American man called Fred Daniels who runs away from the police as he is falsely accused of murdering a white woman. He can find no place to go to but the sewers. The underground world increases Daniels' sense of fear, dread, hatred, loneliness and then absurdity. He discovers a secret room in one of the buildings and it becomes his home, he could also find a way from the room to various neighboring stores, to the church and the theatre. He discovers in the world of the sewers that the aboveground world is extremely trivial and meaningless. At the beginning, he is obliged to stay underground but after some time, it becomes a preference as he finds that honesty, truth and goodness can only be found inside, in the hidden world where he gets access to the hidden secrets of people. The world aboveground is a world of the deadly sleeping people who lie, steal and betray each other with masks; it is a world of money, power and evil.

When he decides to go out to tell people he is not a killer and that the underground world that he escapes to is far better than their world, he is killed by the policeman who believes he is mad. He is the victim of his honesty, goodness and his belief that the world of sewers is a world of virtue, faith, truth and real men who refuse to be shadows. His journey is divided into three phases: the first phase of terror and pain because he feels terrified by the probability of being caught and the mystery of his obscure future in the sewers. The second phase starts when he acts out to detach himself from the aboveground world and create new values and principles. The third phase is distinguished by his attempt to transmit his acquired values to the outside world but he fails and dies consequently because he is loaded with new discoveries that a black man should not arrive to according to his murderer.

Daniels makes use of the secret opening to get into the different stores and grab many things even if they are invaluable like diamonds and dollar bills, which are useless in the sewers, just to decorate the cave in which he lives and also to discover the limits of his greed and wickedness. He uses money, watches, diamonds and many other instruments that he steals from neighboring stores to cover the cave walls to increase his miserable joy of absurdity and meaninglessness. His acts symbolize the extent which his new awareness about life absurdity and human evil may reach. He concludes from his observing night journeys that man escapes only when he is unhappy with his fate, he may escape to religion or entertainment.

Besides, he comes to assure that conditions govern the behavior of the individual and his decision to choose right or wrong. When he makes sure that nobody sees him, Daniels steals a lot of things, expensive or cheap objects, necessary or unnecessary items. He would not even have a thought of doing the same in the aboveground world or in different conditions because he knows that he would be severely punished. He wants only to show himself that he can do anything in the world of total freedom, his new values that come out of his suffering give meaning to his life in the sewers. Double invisibility turns him into a different person, being invisible as a black American and being invisible because he lives in the dark sewers: "I have got to hide" (Wright, 2008, p. 19); the protagonist tells himself when the story begins.

Fred Daniels is another good example to reflect Viktor Frankl's Tragic Triad and the dilemma of pain, guilt and death being related to the existential escapism. The protagonist is unseen in most of the scenes and his name is not revealed until very late in the story. At the beginning, he rejects his loneliness and being invisible to the others, but after he reveals people's secrets during his night journeys, he changes his view and insists on staying in the sewers; he enjoys seeing everything without being seen. He experiences pain, he faces death more than once, he does terrible things and refuses to feel regret or to be called guilty whether he does things or not.

His pain is caused mostly by his skin color; he is made inferior, he is beaten and made a criminal because he is black. He is forced to adore his invisibility playing the role of a ghost and doing bad deeds for which other people are accused. The protagonist is invisible not only to the white men, but he is also invisible to himself as he is unable at a certain moment to remember his name and the old Fred Daniels of aboveground. The level of moral deterioration and psychological void he reaches in the darkness, smells, dirt and frightening silence fills him with a sense of terror and emptiness that creates in him a kind of sadism. The latter is reflected in the way he enjoys watching other people when they are beaten, tortured and murdered because of his own deeds.

The feelings of pain and prejudice influence him and he feels the need to get revenge from others but he does hardly feel regret despite all his evil deeds in the sewers. It is an attempt to free himself from his deeply rooted pain through causing pain to others then observing their weeping and shouting. He experiences pain throughout his life, before and after the murder because of his skin color. The writer describes it: "He had signed it to end his pain"(Id); what makes an innocent man sign his name to confess a murder that he has not committed? It is the pain of disability, oppression and wrath.

He realizes that he becomes different, that his stay underground has made of him a new individual who feels no pity toward the others. He is estranged but refuses to regret or correct any of his faults until before his death. However, deeply inside the world of the sewers, the protagonist could create new values and principles that may seem wrong to others but he believes in them, he develops his thinking, his attitudes and his life philosophy. He endeavors to

create meaning even within his pain and cries; he refuses to have a meaningless life like the one of aboveground people. He fills his life with meaning, a meaning that keeps him alive in the darkness, a meaning that people may find incorrect; it is a meaning that he discovers during his loneliness and spiritual reflection and that he likes to transmit to others when he goes aboveground. That meaning keeps Daniels safe from drowning in the existential vacuum and he waits eagerly to share his new values and truths with others.

Death for Daniels is faced many times with terror and dread. The first time he is caught with death is when he is accused of killing a white woman and he has to pay for somebody's deed. Then, he feels desperate when he finds a dead baby underground; it signifies that innocence and beauty are destroyed by the ugly aboveground reality that meets the darkness of the sewers. The picture remains in his mind for a long time as he considers himself concerned though he does not know the baby; it also signifies the death of the innocent baby inside him. After that, he sees the watchman when he commits suicide after accusing him falsely of being a thief whereas the real thief is watching silently. Death is no longer a source of fear or pain to him, he realizes how much different the new Fred Daniels has become. The last death in the story is his own death when he keeps watching the white policeman surprisingly. He remembers his conviction that life is truly meaningless and that the underground world is much more honest, transparent and faithful.

Guilt is one of the most significant themes of the story; it hits hard to let the reader think whether the characters are doing right or wrong. The hero's personality is paradoxical, Fred Daniels sees in himself a stereotype of all evil humans, and he realizes this fact after he reconsiders some events like when he steals the radio; yet he enjoys having seen the innocent boy being punished for the theft he has committed. Besides, he laughs when the policemen beat the innocent watchman after accusing him of stealing the safe content. These events drive him to think about the human nature and his own existence that he sometimes doubt whether he really exists. He recognizes that conditions determine the individual's behavior and one is not totally free to choose where to stand toward life events, it all goes back to the variables of the situation. The conclusion that he gets from his dark journey is that all men share the potential to

be evil and the inherence to be guilty, but they have to confront the atrocities and complicit readiness to be bad.

His experience underground teaches him a lesson that the aboveground world cannot teach him; the world of the deadly sleeping people is unable to give him lessons, it needs lessons from him, he believes, about how to be human. He describes guilt as seemingly innate. He believes that the watchman is guilty though he knows he is not, but he considers him guilty for he wants to see everybody going through the same experience that he has gone through; and this is the deepest point of guilt Fred Daniels has ever sensed. At last, the protagonist feels a deep regret and wants to get out and tell the others that he has been doing very bad things: “ I am guilty . . . I’ll show you show everything in the underground. I laughed and laughed.” (Wright, 2008, p77) His laughter signifies his joy that he is finally able to convey his knowledge to others and to liberate himself from the huge burden, the burden of truth.

The short story expresses that Daniels’ journey is a spiritual trip for the sake of self-realization to be later an attempt to transfer his newly found truth to the others. At last, the protagonist achieves a certain level of self-actualization then he dies before he is given the opportunity to transmit his insights to others. Fred Daniels believes that it is the material thinking that hinders people from living freedom and joy and it throws them into despair and nothingness in addition to the overpowering spirit of individuality that epitomizes modern life. The latter would certainly enlarge the circle of loneliness in which each individual is put. Besides, when man has unlimited freedom and large loads of oppression memories, he is more inclined to get revenge from his oppressors allowing them to feel the same pain and inferiority. Daniels is not totally free because he is strongly determined by his fears.

Daniels is an outsider in the two worlds he lives in, he comes down from a world of absurdity and dread to a world of morality and truth; he belongs neither to the first that tosses him away nor to the second that embraces his end. Living in the sewers enlightens Daniels’ mind about many philosophical issues as the absurdity of life and meaning of existence, life virtue, values and morals and most importantly death. The writer’s parable exposes an implicit act of suicide because when the hero decides to live in a world of values and morals, he breaks

his relation with human beings whom he believes to be unfaithful, dishonest and materialist. He decides in fact on his own psychological suicide first when he remains underground and second when he makes up his mind to go aboveground to declare the truth. However, he insists to go out where he is again confronted with violence and cruelty because he is unable to support living in between: “It was these walls; these crazy walls were filling him with a wild urge to climb out into the dark sunshine aboveground... He knew now he could not stay here and he could not go out.” (Wright, 2008, p57)

5. CONCLUSION

Viktor Frankl’s contribution to the field of psychotherapy is tremendous as he develops the theory of using meaning to treat patients with depression, anxiety and suicidal attempts. He claims: “If there is meaning in life at all, then there must be meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death, human life cannot be complete.” (Frankl,1984, p88)

Sula and Fred Daniels are two examples from African American literature that reflect the struggle of black individuals to survive through meaning making. The two share many qualities but come to different ends. Sula and Daniels are not immune from life difficulties, they both have a long career of suffering and misery; they are victims of nature, social inequality, life hardships, devaluation, oppression and even marginalization. They are thrown into meaninglessness then they choose to escape life and reality; they prefer though to stay alone away from everybody. Sula sticks to her isolated world as she feels proudly better inside whereas Daniels is forcefully sent to the world of the sewers to avoid the whip and the jail. The two feel lost in their isolated existential worlds where they escape the good and the evil, the beautiful and the ugly; but they struggle to achieve meaning, to create values, to confront death and challenge pain.

It is correct that both characters endeavor to survive through making meaning out of their pain and loss, Sula does not succeed to reach the desired meaning and she is unable to get out of her vacuum consequently. However, Daniels succeeds in finding meaning even in the darkest spot of the world, the sewers; he strives to change his beliefs and acquires new values that he develops during his isolation. Moreover, he wants to share his new morals and principles

with the outside world, the deadly sleeping people whom he believes he should awake with his logical interpretation.

Sula and Daniels face death, accept fate, and bear suffering similarly but when Daniels turns his suffering into triumph and attributes meaning to his life underground by creating his own logic and values, he gets out of the existential vacuum he is thrown into; Sula fails to find meaning in her life though she drives herself very far from people though she chooses to besiege herself in her own vacuum. Sula lives alone and dies alone because:

To live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in the suffering.
If there is a purpose in life at all, there must be a purpose in suffering and in dying. But no man can tell another what this purpose is. (Frankl, 1984, p11)

Daniels lives for a purpose but he is murdered before he can fulfill and transmit it to the world: “You have got to shoot his kind. They’d wreck things” (Ibid: 84), the white policeman says when he shoots him dead and here lays the whole story, here it begins and here it ends.

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