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Freedom, Absurdity and Identity crisis in the novel *Mosquito* by Roma Tearne

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Abstract
Roma Tearne is a British novelist who was born in Sri Lanka and has made a substantial contribution to the subject of trauma studies. Identity crises, trauma and migration are among the topics she addresses in her novels. *Mosquito* is the novel chosen for the analysis. This novel demonstrates how people who have experienced trauma can still choose existentialism and find meaning in their lives. It demonstrates how experiences push people to improve. The novel is interpreted as a depiction of human existence in which people are supposed to find contentment and meaning in uncertainty. Soren Kierkegaard's existential theory is selected as the study's theoretical basis. According to this theory, people should prioritize freedom over control. Themes like freedom, accountability, faith, and authenticity are highlighted. By opposing the influence of social conventions, it fosters a rebellious spirit in people. It encourages people to take charge of their lives. It emphasizes the concept of imperfection and encourages people to accept their flaws and vulnerabilities. Additionally, it inspires people to recognize the absurdity of human existence.

Keywords: Freedom, Absurdity, Identity crisis, Rebellion, Alienation, Optimism

> "You will never to be able to experience everything. So, please, do poetical justice to yours soul and simply experience yourself "
>
> _ Albert Camus

Existentialism is a philosophical perspective that holds that people create meaning via their activities rather than having a predetermined purpose from birth. The philosophy of existentialism addresses the search for purpose in life. It is a phenomenon that encourages people to take charge of their lives. By encouraging people to act in accordance with their own desires, it highlights the idea of freedom over control. It inspires living in a world of choice. It is a philosophy that encourages people to keep moving forward even in absurd situation. Existentialism is an important phenomenon for addressing the variations that characterise human life. It emphasises self-awareness, faith, flexibility, willpower, and purpose.

Roma Tearne is a renowned Sri Lankan author and artist. Her contribution to war narratives has been significant. In particular, the Costa Book Awards shortlisted her 2007 debut novel, *Mosquito*. The themes of trauma, migration, identity crises, and alienation are frequently seen in her novels. Roma Tearne's novel *Mosquito* revolves around Theo and Nulani. Theo Samerajeeva is a Sri

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Lankan writer and Nulani is an artist who is totally devoted to painting. Sugi, Theo's servant, warns him to avoid Nulani throughout the entire novel. However, the characters' intense affection intensifies and leads to an impending confrontation. Another character, Vikram, an orphan, is enlisted as a Tamil Tiger terrorist, symbolising the corrupting of innocence through conflict. Conflict between Tamil and Sinhalese people grows throughout the book. Migration, identity crises, trauma, war and loss are all incorporated throughout the novel.

The capacity to act, talk, and think without limitations is known as freedom. It is an idea that encourages equality. The actual essence of freedom can be seen when moral principles are combined with freedom. People who live in conflict zones are particularly aware of the value of freedom. People in these areas strive for justice, freedom, and equality. They look for purpose in ridiculous circumstances. Characters like Theo Samerajeeva, Nulani, Vikram and Sugi in the novel "*Mosquito*" are victims of conflict. The characters manage to survive in spite of the circumstances. Theo, a middle-aged writer, relocates to Sri Lanka. Despite leading a prosperous life in England, he relocates because he wants to experience his native country once more. "An established writer, with a comfortable life in London, his own flat, his work, what could he wanted with Colombo?" (Tearne 4). Nulani, on the other hand, is a young artist who has a painting obsession. She uses art to find freedom in the face of conflict. Despite the large age difference, she too decides to love Theo.The couple chooses to defy patriarchal standards despite being warned by Sugi, Theo's servant. "Why doesn't he see this? Why, after all he has been through, is he not more careful?" (Tearne 37). Jim, Nulani's brother, chooses to migrate in order to advance his career, but Nulani chooses forced migration. Jim, migration is the path to freedom. "His teacher too believed he would pass the examination and be awarded the British Council scholarship" (Tearne 42). In a similar vein, orphan Vikram abuses his independence by becoming a member of a terrorist group. Retaliation is how he heals. His goal is to go after the group that killed his family. "The war was mainly a clash between the Sinhalese-dominated Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) insurgent group, the latter of which had hoped to establish a separate state for the Tamil minority" (Anandakugan).

People who experience alienation are forced to create meaning in their lives. People who experience alienation may feel as though they don't belong anywhere. Alienation can occur for a number of causes, including social isolation, war, displacement and identity crises. "An alienated world presents itself to individuals as insignificant and meaningless, as rigidified or impoverished, as a world that is not one's own, which is to say, a world in which one is not "at home" and over which one can have no influence." (Jaeggi). Displacement can cause alienation when people start to doubt who they are. In the novel, Theo Samerajeeva, a successful author who has lived in England, feels alienated in the strange country and is compelled to relocate to Sri Lanka.Despite the devastation in Sri Lanka, he relocates merely to experience a sense of community. He had come to Srilanka, he said, because he felt it was better to put his energy into own country than waste it on foreign soil" (Tearne193). People occasionally attempt to overcome alienation by discovering their life's meaning. Theo Samerajeeva uses writing as a coping mechanism for the psychological effects of being brutally tortured by armed troops. Even if it's challenging to heal emotional wounds, trying to overcome them

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becomes a necessary part of life. Trauma can also cause alienation. People may become alienated as a result of traumatic experiences. Following the untimely loss of her father, Nulani Mendis, who lives with her family, falls silent. Nulani Mendis later relocated to London from Srilanka.She was uncomfortable in the beginning and had trouble adjusting to the new surroundings, but she eventually realized the changes and made the decision to overcome her difficulties by taking advantage of chances. Sometimes life's uncertainties inspire people to look for guidance. An orphan named Vikram decides to do bold actions in order to get over his estrangement. Alienation can occasionally make people hostile and push them in the direction of violence. People chose existentialism in order to survive in spite of all these unfortunate occurrences.

The absurdity of life abounds. It is difficult to find meaning in uncertainty. When someone tries to find order in life, absurdity results. Even though uncertainty makes people doubt their own existence, hope is the primary factor that encourages people to have faith in life. The French-Algerian philosopher Albert Camus discussed the idea of absurdity in his work *Myth of Sisyphus.* "He exhorts readers to embrace life's absurdities throughout the book. He advises people to accept life's absurdity and to be despondent. He counsels the people against thinking about suicide as a remedy.There are a number of absurd scenarios in *Mosquito*. The scenes of uncertainty and perplexity are often depicted by the characters. After arriving in Sri Lanka, Theo Samerajeeva's life becomes ridiculous. He had been concentrating on his work up until that point, but the political unrest in Sri Lanka disrupted his life. He is mistreated and wrongly accused in a case. His memory is lost as a result of the painful treatment. After much thought, he eventually regains all of his memories. Even after that, he returned to his normal self and began writing. There are also scenes where people are celebrating festival, while there is war happening else were, reflecting their awareness of their life's uncertainty. "Because of the festivities there was no curfew here, and the people strolled along the street" (Tearne70). After arriving in the UK, Nulani Mendis becomes ridiculous. Migration becomes challenging to manage when it is coerced. People encounter emotional discomfort, estrangement, and identity crises. After arriving in the UK, Nulani's absurdity was exposed in the letter she sent to Giulia and Rohan. She addresses the matter later by concentrating on my career. Another character, Vikram, is an orphan who turns ridiculous after joining the terrorist group. He is frequently urged to participate in dangerous things, and he is unsure of where his life is taking him. He eventually passes away. Thus, it is clear that absurdity has the power to change people at times and even take their lives at other times.

An identity crisis is a state of confusion that people experience while thinking about where they fit in. This may result from a number of circumstances, including social rejection, alienation and displacement. Studies have shown that a person's struggles in later life are significantly influenced by their early experiences. It occasionally happens when they attempt to blend in with the patriarchal system. Anxiety about a fixed identity is the root cause of identity crises. It is an interior disarray that looks structured from the outside. Understanding the flux of identity is the only way to find a solution. Theo Samerajeeva, the main character of *Mosquito*, relocates from England as a result of an identity issue. Despite leading a calm and peaceful life, he travels to Sri Lanka because he is unsure of who he is. Despite the fact that his original place has changed, he decides to remain in order to maintain

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his identity. When Rohan and Giulia relocate to Italy, their relationship changes. They relocated to Italy because they felt frightened in Colombo, where their exile caused them to become mute." Giulia took some comfort in this, hoping his solitude might inspire him to paint again" (Tearne229). The pair feels like they don't belong anywhere. Nulani Mendis, another character, relocates to the UK and finds it difficult to adjust." I don't know what I'm doing here I feel I can't go on living. Everything is finished for me. Yesterday I was eighteen. How many more years of my life must I live? I haven't gone out much since I got here.Its is cold and I'm tired, Giulia.I want to come home" (Tearne196) Despite each character's unique decision to migrate, they all face difficulties after they arrive in their new country. Some characters feel insecure even in their own country, while others go through identity crises as a result of migration. Being an orphan causes confusion for Vikram.No one is there to show him love. A recruiter named Gerard takes advantage of Vikram's uncertainty to coerce him into joining a terrorist organization." If you are successful, Vikram, I promise you, I shan't forget', you'll be part of it.My right-hand man, no? Understand? He stared at Vikram" (Tearne175) As a result, identity crises can result from emotional instability as well as migration.

Existentialism maintains the idea of freedom while simultaneously demanding that people face the repercussions of their choices. Existentialism emphasizes both responsible and unrestricted freedom. People who choose existentialism should also ensure that their independence does not contradict social norms. "When we become aware of our freedom as an inescapable given of the human condition, the awareness is often accompanied by anxiety because we realize that we alone are responsible for our choices and the projects we undertake" (Existentialism). Theo and Nulani from the novel *Mosquito* serve as prime examples of this point of view. Theo continued to deepen his bond with Nulani in spite of Sugi's constant cautions. Despite their differences in age, culture, and power, they both decided to seek love despite their differences. Even after a series of horrifying incidents, such as trauma, Sugi's murder, torture and detention. They both chose independence over consequences. Theo anticipated the consequences and prepared Nulani's passport ahead of time. In light of the repercussions, he also made arranged Giulia, Sugi and Rohan to protect Nulani. This demonstrates that the characters made the decision to pursue freedom and were ready to handle the consequences.

One of existentialism's key characteristics is optimism. It is a positive outlook that motivates people to move forward. Possessing a strong mind set can protect against pessimistic thoughts and improve focus towards life. Positivity aids in preserving excellent health, while negativity deteriorates one's health. It supports dealing with and solving issues rather than avoiding them. There is currently a therapy called existential therapy that aids in the healing of people who are experiencing profound grief in order to overcome issues associated with hardship. Acknowledging uncertainty and having a clear perspective on life are also beneficial. It mostly focuses on the experiences of people who have extreme dread and anxiety. "Existential therapy posits that we are free to choose among alternatives, and thus we are responsible for our lives, actions and any failure to take action. If clients blame others for their problems, therapists in this modality would help them recognise how they allowed others to decide for them and the price they pay for doing so, and would encourage them to consider the alternative options" (Counsellor Tutor Ltd). Theo Samerajeeva and Nulani Mendis are viewed as

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symbols of optimism in *Mosquito*. Even at the beginning of the novel, both characters are very optimistic, even though they are aware that they are in a war zone. When Nulani is passionate about her painting ability, Theo Samerajeeva, who is already an accomplished writer, is focused on advancing his writing career. In the face of hardship, the characters are very optimistic. Because of their perseverance, both Nulani Mendis, who initially felt displaced in the UK, recognises her goals and becomes a famous artist. Theo Samerajeeva, who is already a skilled writer, is focused on advancing his writing career. The characters are incredibly optimistic in the face of hardship. Because of their persistence, Nulani and Theo ultimately achieve their intended outcome. While Nulani Mendis, who initially felt misplaced in the UK, recognises her goals and becomes a well-known artist, Theo, who previously lost his memory, regains it and advances in his writing career. Additionally, the two characters reunites at the end. Therefore, Optimism is a key component of existentialism. "Nulani does not care, Theo; I don't think you understand how she has longed for you. I don't think you can imagine the women she has become. Just come. See for yourself" (Tearne291).

Death is a symbol of human limitations. At times, it can even play a significant role in motivating people to live better lives. In the novel *Mosquito*, death appears to be an important element that drives characters to live a purposeful life. In particular, the setting is a war zone, where situations are more uncertain. Despite the absurdity of the scenarios, the characters are always moving, either through migration or through pursuit of a goal. For example, the title *Mosquito* itself represents the fragility of human life. For example, Mrs. Mendis dies from a mosquito-borne illness. Sugi's death is one of the novel's most brutal. Sometimes it might even be a major factor in encouraging people to improve. Death appears to be a significant factor that motivates characters in the novel *Mosquito* to lead meaningful lives. In particular, the location is a combat zone, where circumstances are more unpredictable. The characters are dynamic despite the ridiculousness of the scenarios. There is always movement, whether it be due to migration or the pursuit of an objective. For example, the title *Mosquito* itself conveys the frailty of human existence. For example, Mrs. Mendis passes away from a mosquito-borne sickness; death is inevitable. One of the cruel deaths in the novel is Sugi's. He knew that protecting Nulani would get him into trouble, but he still did it because listening to his master, Theo Samerajeeva, was his life's mission "I promised him I would get you out, he said again, in a voice barely above a whisper. But I will find him. Sugi was calling hoarsely to her, urging her to hurry for they were in a exposed and vulnerable position" (Tearne150). On the other hand, Vikram perishes by joining the terrorist group Tigers. There are scenes where people are killed as a result of intercommunal strife. Theo and Nulani, the main characters, progressed, believing that their death could approach at any moment. There are scenes were communal strife results in deaths. Therefore, death may occasionally be a major factor in people's search for purpose in life.

Rebellion is another important idea in existentialism. It makes reference to the refusal to blindly follow social norms. It asserts that conforming to social norms may cause an identity crisis. It makes it possible to choose what to follow and what not to. Rebellion isn't necessarily violent; it can occasionally be a quiet protest against social standards. Certain perspectives on marriage and relationships are determined by social norms. Society tries to penalise those who disobey societal rules with severe criticism or even violence. In the novel, *Mosquito*, Theo, a middle-aged widower,

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moves to Sri Lanka.Despite rigid societal norms, he develops feelings for Nulani Mendis, a young artist. Different social groups were the primary cause. Another factor is the wide age difference, which is generally disapproved of in society. The final aspect is the significant age gap. Theo could not help but remove himself from Nulani in spite of Sugi's cautions." Be careful, Sir, 'was all he said in the end. I told you this girl's family is watched. You do not yet fully understand this ruined place." (Tearn79) Even after Theo was arrested; they continued to look forward to their reunion. Despite the claims that Theo had died, Nulani remained patient. In the end both gets happily reunited. "Come, Theo, please you must come. She has suffered enough. She wants to see you. If anything can bring you here it is this. That she has not once, not for one moment, forgotten you. Everything she has done, every way she has lived has been in the shadow of the loss of you. So come." (Tearne289). Thus, despite bad circumstances, the characters in *Mosquito* are driven to continue forward in life. Theo Samerajeeva and Nulani, in particular, are motivated by existentialist principles and ultimately succeed. Additionally, it emphasised that people should not strive for perfection in their lives. Existentialism is therefore regarded as an important concept that can assist people in adjusting to this absurd environment.

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