

Ph.D VIVA PRESENTATION

The Absurd in Fiction by Women: A Study of Selected Novels

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Sylvia Plath

The Bell Jar

Toni Morrison

Paradise

Margaret Atwood

The Edible Woman

Margaret Laurence

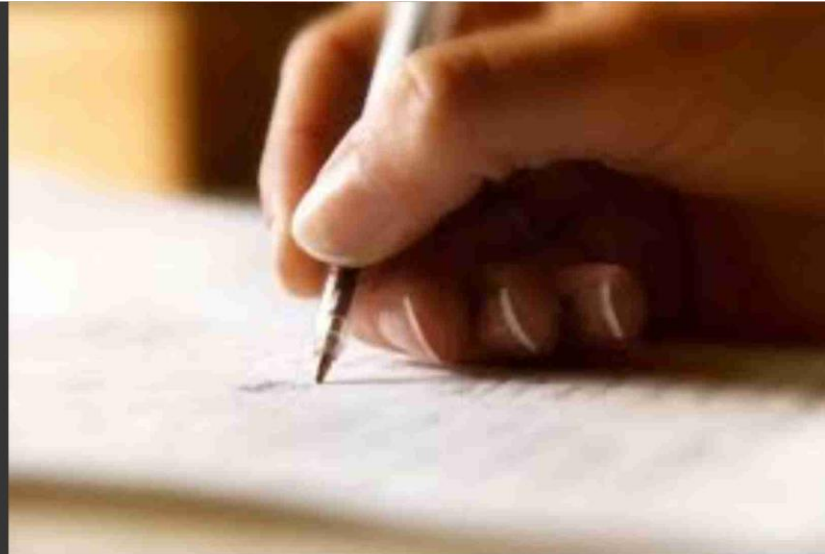
A Jest of God

Mahashweta Devi

Mother of 1084

Arundhati Roy

The God of Small Things



The expression of the
Absurd in the works of
women authors: a
study of selected
novels

Ph.D. Presentation

Shyaonti Choudhury

Chapter scheme

Chapter one Introduction: Tracing the Absurd in Philosophy and Literature

Chapter two The Absurd Redefined: An Experience and Expression by Women Authors

Chapter three The Absurd in Indian Fiction: Mythic Manifestations of Self-annihilation in Mahashweta Devi's *Mother of 1084* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

Chapter four The Absurd in Canadian Fiction: Wounded Goddesses in Margaret Laurence's *A Jest of God* and Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*

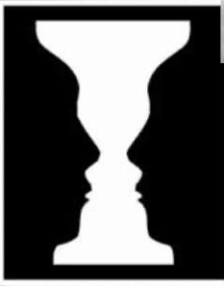
Chapter five The Absurd in American and African-American Fiction: From Death Wish and Rebirth in Plath's *The Bell Jar* to an Exclusive Female Space beyond Enclosures in Morrison's *Paradise*

Chapter six Conclusion: The Absurd Traced and Transcended



Hegel

Being: not an entity but an awareness of becoming.
Being is empty abstraction so it is the same as Nothing.



A consciousness of endless perspectives
- *Faulkner*



Phenomenology

The study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view.

Nothingness Theory in Physics

Entropy: all matter moves towards uniformity into a state of relative nothingness, from existence to non-existence to maintain cosmic balance.



Leap of faith: Theism and Existentialism

Atheistic existentialists outrightly reject any inherent meaning in life, the theistic thinkers insist that life is without a meaning we can understand.

Tracing the Absurd

Heidegger

Dasein: Being-in-the-world with a relationship with the world; echoes of Hegel's becoming and phenomenology; Dasein gives meaning to other entities.



Absurdity of existence

Dasein's thrown projection in the world combined with its temporality.



Sunyata Mahayana Buddhism

All that is contingent is without essence.
Thus the world exists without a self in the true sense.

Existentialism

Human existence is characterized by "nothingness".
We are continuously involved in creating ourselves through the choices we make.

- *Sartre*



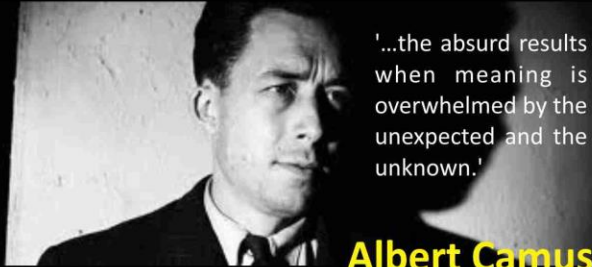
Courage is the self-affirmation of being in spite of the fact of non-being.
_Paul Tillich
Christian Existentialism



Hinduism

Acknowledges the futility of existence though negates the dissolution of being.

Tracing the Absurd



'...the absurd results when meaning is overwhelmed by the unexpected and the unknown.'

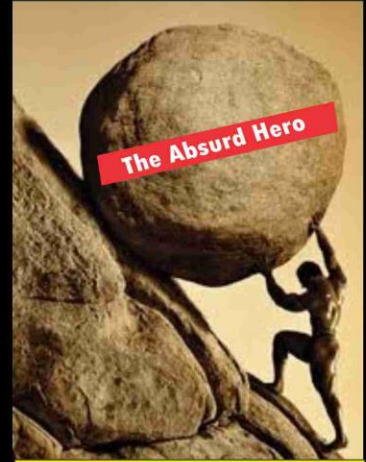
Albert Camus

indifference

Camus' Absurd manifested in two works:
The Outsider:
Society's indifference to man
The Plague:
Nature's indifference to man

embracing the
absurd

Sisyphus' had no meaning, no goal that could be reached — and it would never end. For Camus, this was a metaphor for life: without God, Heaven and Hell, all we have is a terrible struggle that in the end we are condemned to lose.



...conscious of the futility of life but continues to live anyway.

empty subjectivity

The possibility of redefining oneself: man is a manifestation of Nothingness with the possibility of being a lot of things. A sovereign subject in a universe full of objects.

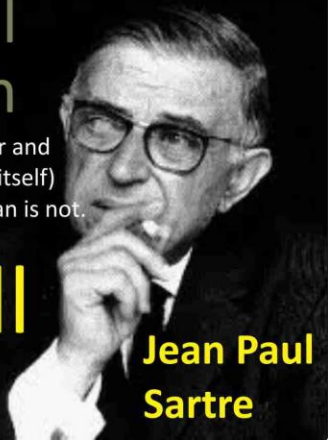
terror of being
objectified!

Inevitability of the role reversal of the subject-object status.
Conflict with the other
Inability to be the other in order to understand it completely
Self-destroying desire to live as an object in the eyes of the other.

man's existential
truth

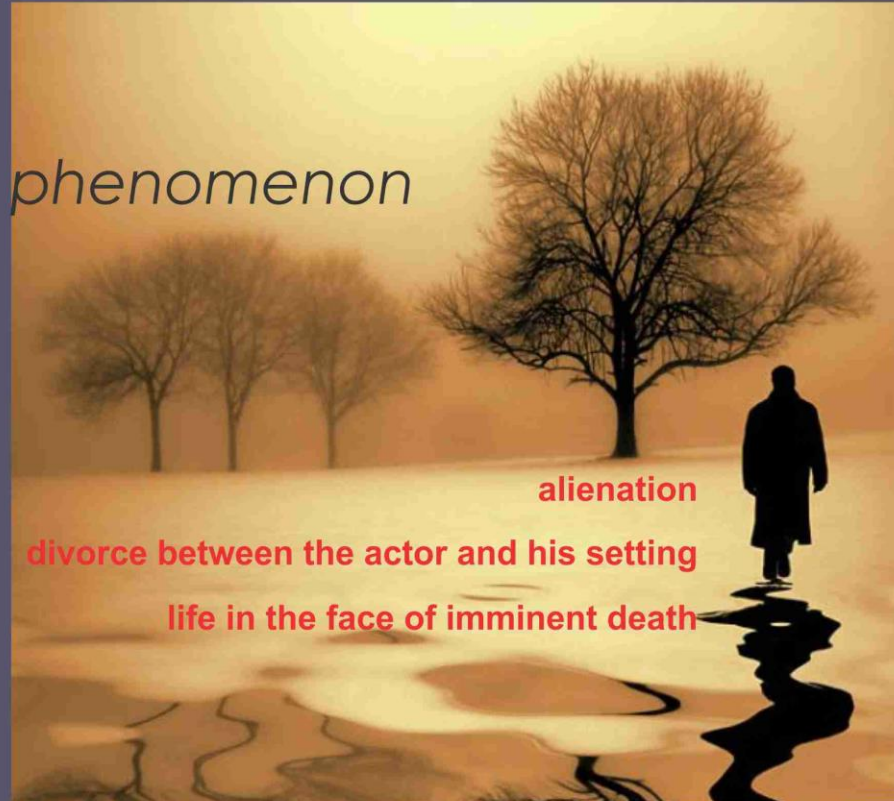
Inability to bridge the chasm between the signifier and signified. Inability to become the en soi (being-in-itself) resulting in disappointment because of all that man is not. Metaphysical distance leads to inadequacy and hopelessness.

Hell
is other people!



Jean Paul Sartre

The Absurd as a post world war *phenomenon*



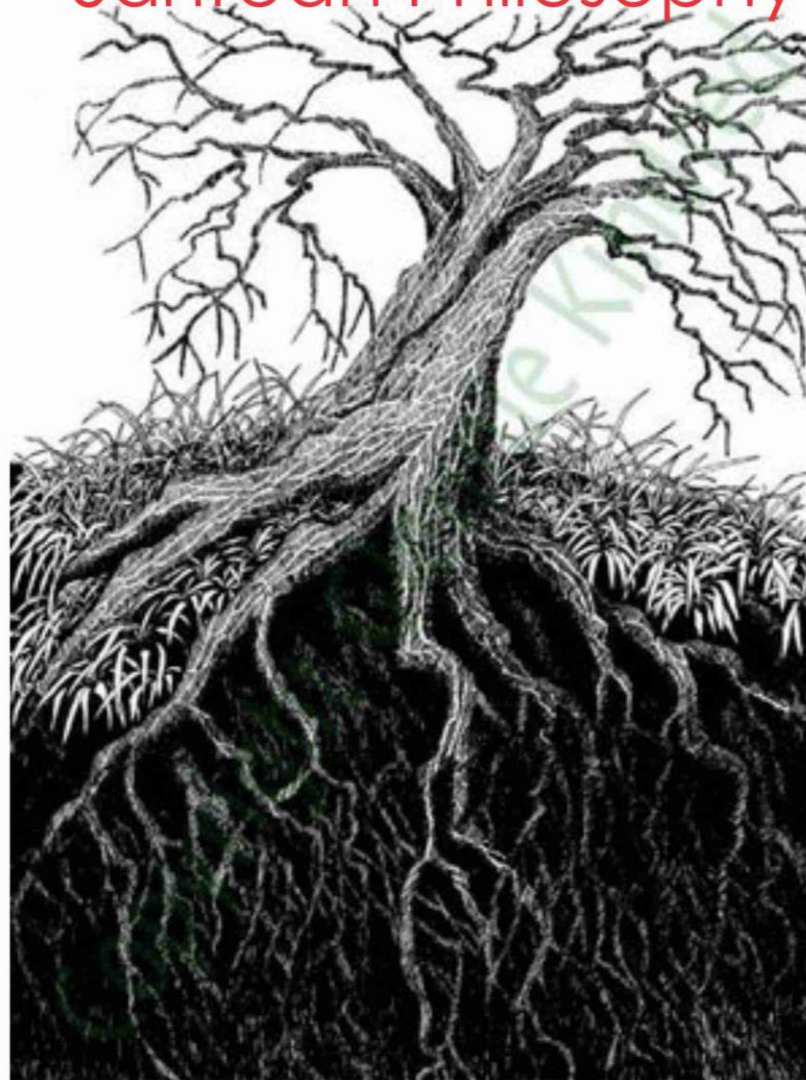
alienation

divorce between the actor and his setting

life in the face of imminent death

Sartrean Philosophy

Antoine Roquentin's
confrontation with
the roots of
The Chestnut Tree



Roquentin can find no words to describe the root - it is simply *there* suggesting a metaphysical distance between the sign and the object it signifies.

The assumption
that man has lost
his world presumes
that once he *had* it.



man
an
isolated existent

Man has lost his world; woman never had hers.

'...his presence in
this world is an
ineluctable fact, that
of woman, a mere
accident – but a very
happy accident.'



- Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex*.

The di vide



Natural consciousness
of the 'I'

Consciousness,
externally imposed by
language and culture.



the cultural consciousness of the
'I as a woman'.

VS

Fractured Consciousness



Woman as an organic entity is the object whereas woman with her cultural, gender-specific and feminine sensibility is the sign (consciousness) from which she is logically distant and different.

implies

a derived existence

**A woman's existence
unlike a man's:
not redefined but
predefined by**

culture and language

very strong
signifiers



The Absurd



Man exists in the face of Death.

Man experiences existential angst in the face of imminent death: annihilation of body.

Man leads a linear existence: he is born, he lives and he dies.

Man is born free

A matter of defying or accepting one or numerous ideologies

Existential hero: good is authentic bad is inauthentic



Woman exists in the face of Patriarchy and Death.

Woman experiences angst in the face of patriarchy and death: annihilation of and body and erasure/transformation of identity.

Woman exists in cycles: she is born and reborn several times..

Woman is born into patriarchy

All matters of accepting and defying lead through patriarchy.

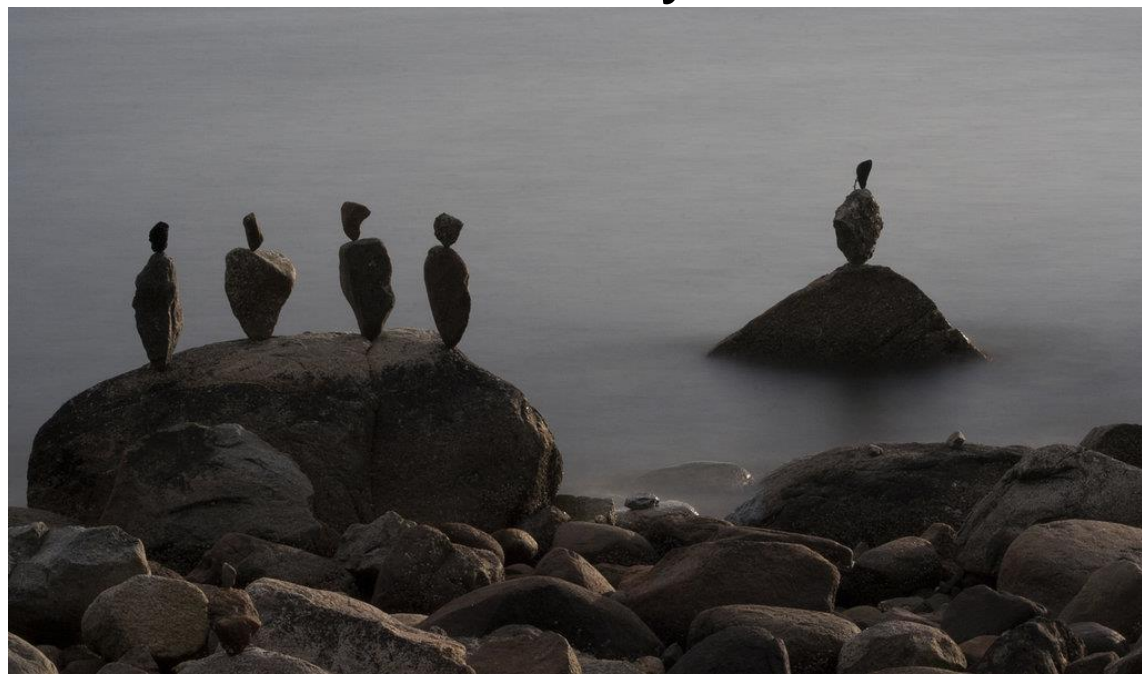
Good is resisting patriarchy and bad is embracing it.



Absurdity of Being

and....

Absurdity of Existence



The Absurd for a woman

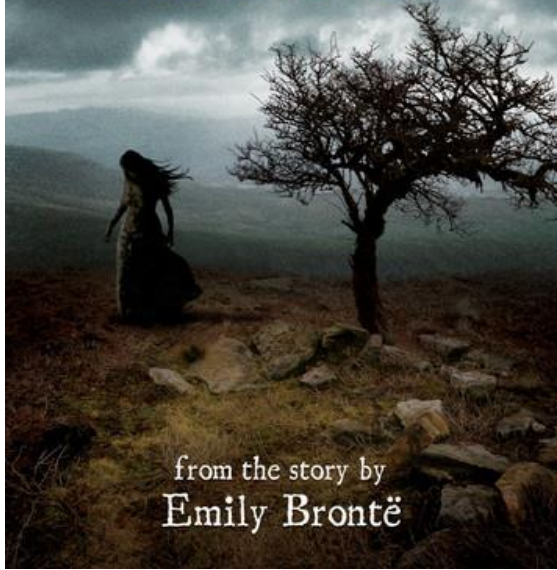


Absurd is the inevitable and inescapable feeling unique to woman which she experiences at one point in time or another resulting from her fractured consciousness of 'I' and 'I as a woman'. It surfaces invariably and manifests itself in the form of terror, fear, obsession, self-evasion, self-deception, dreams, fantasy, drudgery, abnormality, even success.

It is the accumulated, conscious, though involuntary manifestation of the subconscious nothingness, which she has internalized in her formative years.

Usborne Classics Retold 

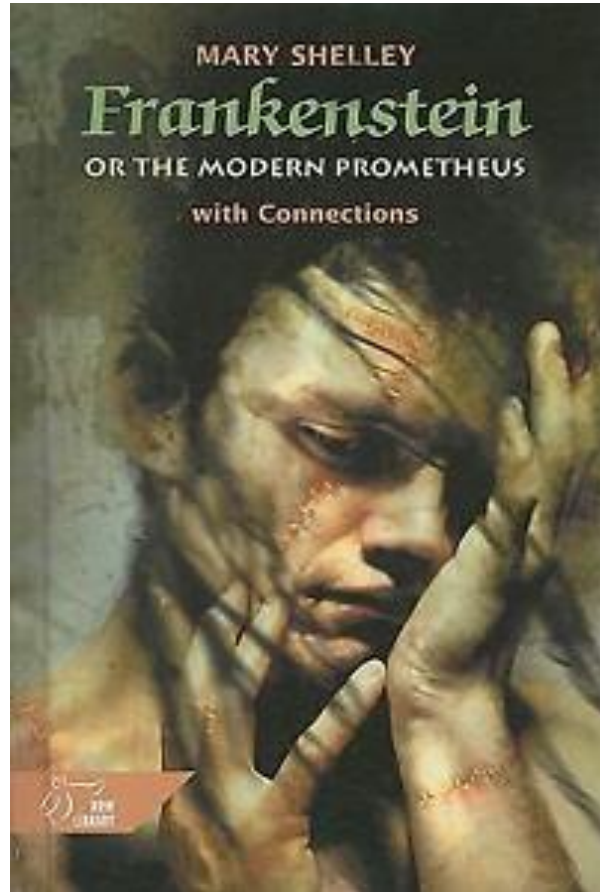
WUTHERING HEIGHTS



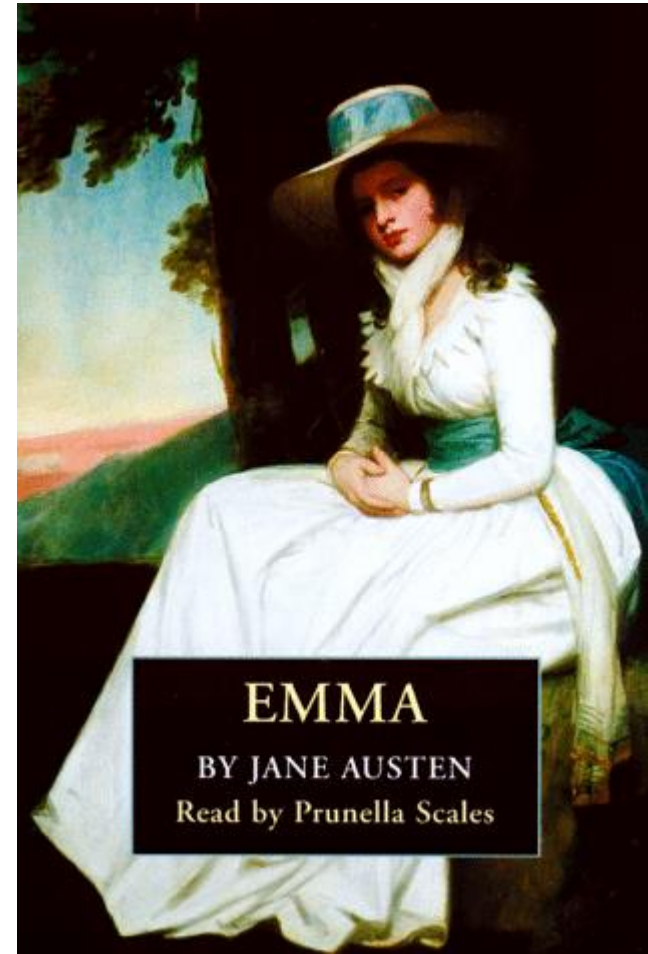
from the story by
Emily Brontë

Literary

Canon



MARY SHELLEY
Frankenstein
OR THE MODERN PROMETHEUS
with Connections



EMMA
BY JANE AUSTEN
Read by Prunella Scales

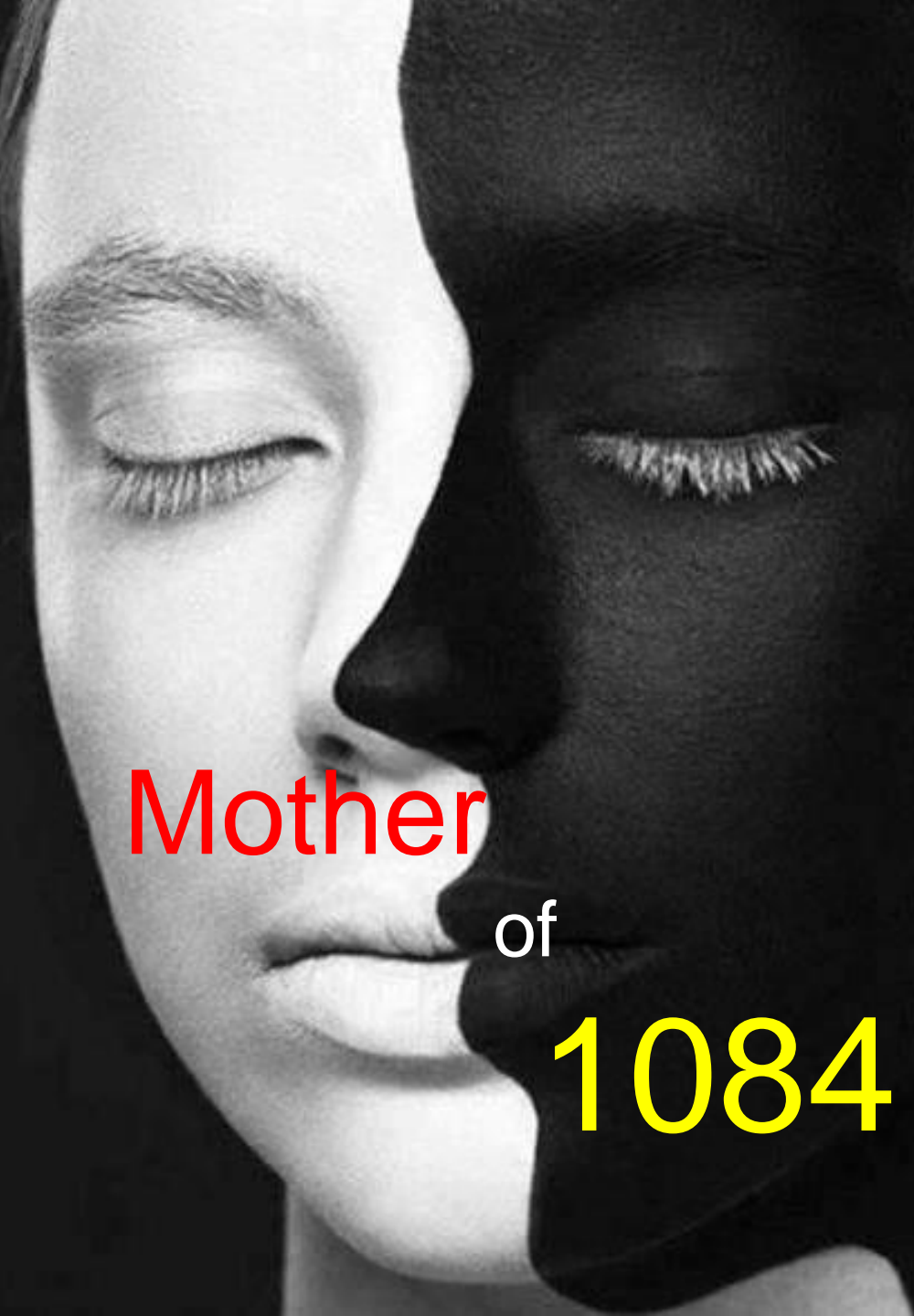


goddess

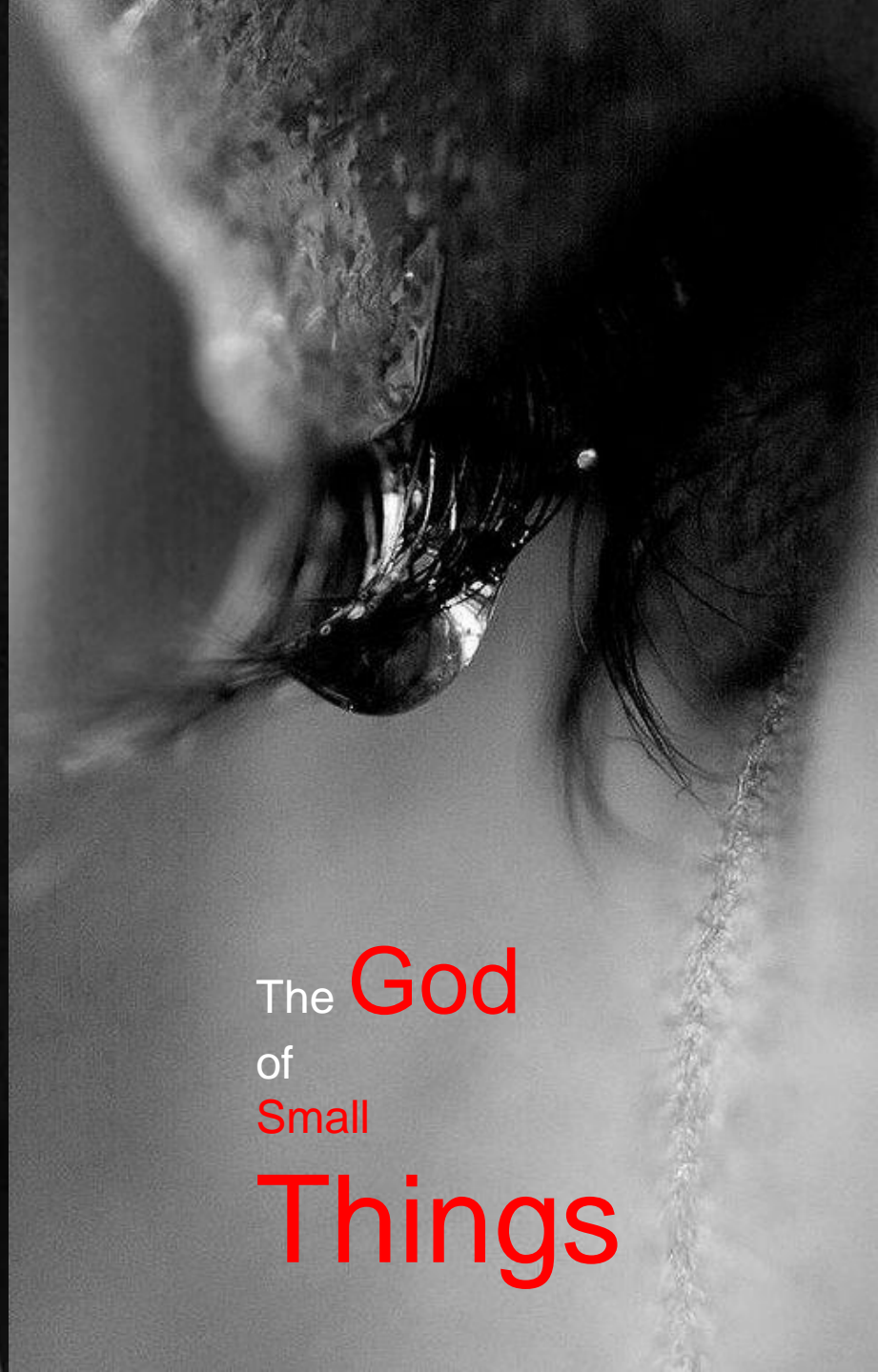
nymph



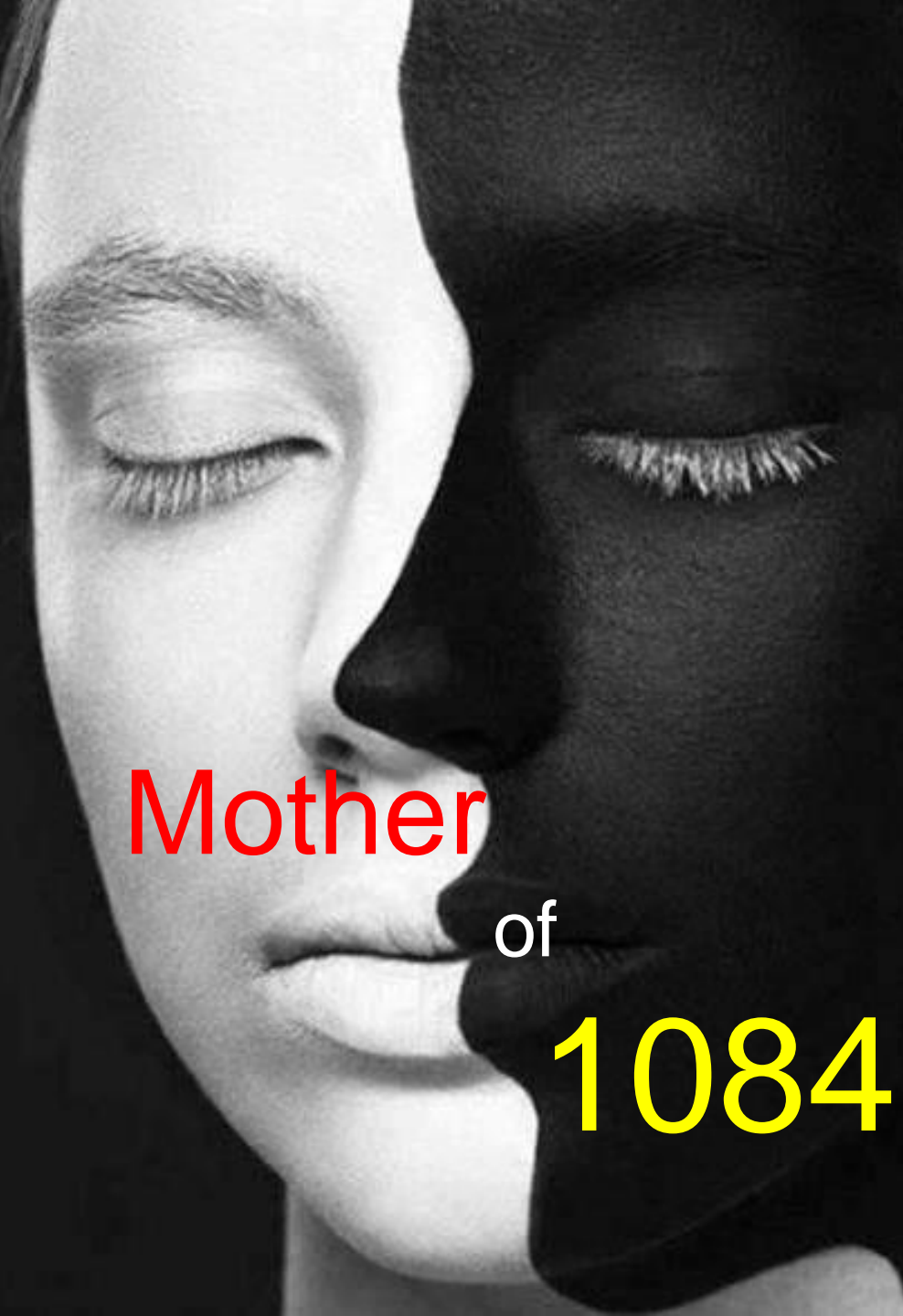
human



Mother
of
1084



The God
of
Small
Things



Mother
of
1084

- Passive and impassive subject
- Subversion of the reigning ideology
- Pain withheld
- Protest manifesting only as silence
- Kafkaesque universe
- Caricaturish characters
- Defunct and putrid institutions
- Communication breakdown
- Parallel narratives
- Mythical self-destruction
- Chaos underneath order
- Linguistic Absolutism

Overlapping consciousness

Fragmented beings Identity crisis

Objectifying and animalizing people

Death and degeneration

Ritualistic actions

Juxtaposing multiple worlds

Self-effacement and petrification

Linguistic deviations

Structural distractions

Intermittent narrative

A trivialisation of life through metaphors

Authorial anxiety

Linguistic inadequacy and manipulation

Desertion by language

Meaning indefinitely deferred

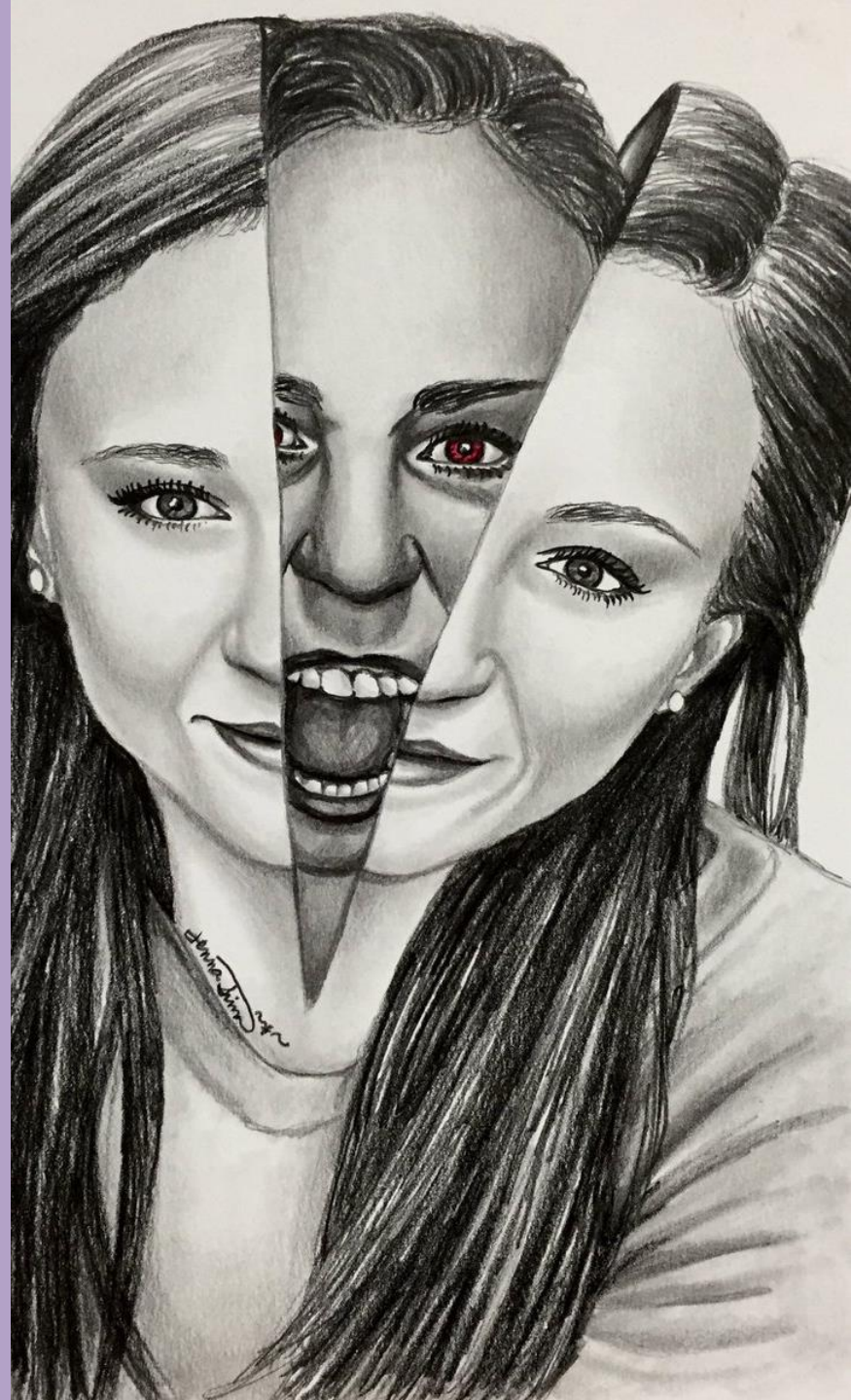


The **God**
of
Small
Things

The
Edible
Woman



A
Jest
of
God





A Jest of God

Unworded fears and apprehensions

Anxiety of being alone

Conflicted selves creating sustained tension

Desire to be nondescript

Carefully constructed reality through language

Phantom presence of the Absurd

Neurosis - manifestation of the absurd

Objectification by the self and by others

Claustrophobic narrative

Erratic emoting of events

Ruptures in the narrative

Emergence of an alternate language

Linguistic misrepresentation and ambiguity



The Edible Woman

Body as the site of the absurd

Menace in the animate and inanimate world.

Imagery of entrapment, incarceration

The dread of the normative

The terror of not really knowing the other

Bodies as consumables

Dehumanising humans, humanizing food

The Body as an Alternate Language of Expression

actual reality, perceived reality and created reality

Shadow projections

Incomprehensible fantasies and imaginings

orchestrated circumvention of language

Linguistic alienation

Substitution Activities and unexplained actions



PARADISE



The
Bell
Jar

Life-and-death Struggle

Non-normative Behavior

Existential Apprehension and Ontological Nervousness

The Absurd manifesting as Madness

Aestheticising Death

A Collapsing of Institutions

Hueless Narration

Time incapacitated

Alternate Linguistic Space

Alternate Rationale

Language as an Impasse

Minimalistic Tone

Communication as Tokenism





PARADISE



Haunted broken characters

Menace in the familiar

Dehumanising of people

Existing in the face of death and destruction

Post-structural Realism

Carefully crafted reality

Deliberate unpredictability in narration

Juxtaposition of the natural and supernatural

Language as a Cover-up

Language as a corrupt medium

Reappropriation of signifiers

Linguistic Paradox

Alternate language of articulation

Open-ended narrative

Inevitability of the Absurd

Inscribing the Absurd

Absurd intersecting women's writing



FINDINGS

Gendering of the Absurd

Ethics of the Self in a Post modern world

Absurd and Post Modern Literary Theories



thank you

