

Literary and Philosophical Terms

Absurd: “Unable to accept the traditional religious and philosophical beliefs of the past, and incapable of perceiving a meaningful pattern in their lives or the lives of those around them, [some modern humans] discover they must somehow come to terms with this overwhelmingly absurdity, and react with laughter or despair (and sometimes both). In philosophy, the most important result ... is existentialism.” - from *The Harper Handbook to Literature*.

“If he keeps going at his present rate, working night and day, the number of people he’s saved will equal the number of people he let die—in the year 3010.” -Julian Castle about Dr. Schlichter von Koenigswald, ch. 83.

Black humor. "Humor discovered in pain, despair, horror, or a generally pessimistic view of the world." American black humorists such as Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnegut, and Thomas Pynchon "present a sense of alienation heightened by laughter." – from The Harper Handbook to Literature.

"Someday this will all be yours" – Philip Castle to his son Julian during the height of the bubonic plague epidemic in San Lorenzo

Existentialism. "a philosophy centered on individual existence as unique and unrepeatable."

Six essential aspects of existentialism:

1. Existence before essence. No essential, Platonic human nature exists. Individuals create their unique existence through their desperate choices. "Now I will destroy the whole world" what Boknonists say before they commit suicide. ch. 106.

2. Impotence of reason. Existentialists see reason as powerless until merged with the irrational to make a human whole. "'Beware of the man who works hard to learn something, learns it, and finds himself no wiser than before,' Boknon tells us. 'He is full of murderous resentment of people who are ignorant without having come by their ignorance the hard way.'" ch. 124.

3. Alienation. Industrial materialism and scientific rationalism have alienated humans from

(a) God- "What is God?" -Felix, ch. 26.

(b) Nature- "Mother Earth-she isn't a very good mother any more."
Mona, ch. 119.

(c) society "'Perhaps, when we remember wars, we should take off our clothes and paint ourselves blue and go on all fours all day long and grunt like pigs.'" -Horlick Minton ch. 114.

(d) self. "Sometimes I think that's the trouble with the world: too many people in high places who are stone-cold dead." -Marvin Breed, ch. 33.

4. Anxiety. faced with contradictory moral imperatives, people make desperate choices. "Well, maybe you can find a neat way to die, too." Newt to the narrator, ch. 126.

5. Nothingness. "No damn cat. No damn cradle." – Newt.

6. Awful freedom. "I know now that my karass has been working night and day to get me up that mountain, but what is supposed to be in my hands?" narrator, ch. 126.