

Existence vs. Essence: An Existentialist Reading of Clive Barker's "Human Remains"

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Abstract

The present study applies Jean-Paul Sartre's notions of "existence precedes essence," "being-in-itself," "being-for-itself," and "the look" to Clive Barker's story "Human Remains" (1984), arguing that Gavin's shadow, a statue acting as his double, is a being-for-itself that gradually creates itself from nothingness. It draws upon Sartre's assertion that when the person is looked at, s/he may become an object for the other, thus getting alienated and attempting to objectify the other. Employing Sartre's and Heidegger's concept of "thrownness," this article argues that Gavin, a gay narcissist, is thrown into the world and gives meaning/essence to his existence only by preserving his beauty. In addition, the statue, Gavin's double, is also thrown into the world, and it encounters Gavin and is gazed at and hence objectified by him. Gavin's double, a being-for-itself, desires for being and creates itself from nothingness at the expense of others, particularly Gavin. In response to Gavin's look, Gavin's double gazes back at Gavin, who finds life meaningless after his double manages to take his beauty, consciousness, and feeling away for itself. Thus, Gavin ends up being in "bad faith;" he surrenders to his double's gaze and turns into a being-in-itself — denying his freedom, choice, and responsibility and becoming more of the remains of a man rather than a conscious human being. Thus, the story employs existential ideas and psychological motifs by way of serving its overall ethical comment on the insignificance of a soulless, empty life with no sentiments led by those who prostitute their bodies to become mere sex objects. An amoral life that commodifies physical attraction is a meaningless, faceless one reducing one to the level of "human remains."

Key Words: Clive Barker; "Human Remains;" Existentialism; Jean-Paul Sartre; Martin Heidegger; Thrownness; Existence vs. Essence; Being-In-Itself; Being-For-Itself; The Look; Bad Faith

1. Introduction

Clive Barker, a British writer, film director, playwright, and producer, has always been interested in the horror genre. He includes the elements of horror, dark fantasy, alienation, and sexuality in many of his works like the short stories collected in the six volumes of *Books of Blood* (1984-1985); "Human Remains" is published in the third volume of this book. This short story revolves around a bisexual narcissist who encounters his double that haunts him and badly affects his life. The present article aims at reading this short story from an existentialist point of view, mainly applying Jean-Paul Sartre's notions of "existence precedes essence," "being-in-itself," and "being-for-itself." It argues that Gavin's double in the story is a being-for-itself; Gavin's double that is in the form of a statue comes into existence and actualizes its being and essence at the expense of Gavin. Hence, Gavin who gets so cold and lifeless at the end becomes a being-in-itself whom his double consumes in order to have consciousness. While Gavin is reduced to mere existence, his double gains essence to modify and shape his raw existence.

Hanscomb (2010) examines the relationship between the horror genre and existentialism. He argues that Sartre's notions of nausea and anxiety call to mind the emotions evoked in horror art like fear and disgust. He also states that the protagonists in horror works absorb the horrifying features into their identities, becoming monstrous themselves. He defines monsters as having "the power to threaten – to be strong, violent, deadly, aggressive, malicious, and so on" (p. 3). Barker's "Human Remains" is definitely a horror story; Gavin's double is monstrous in that it threatens the stability of Gavin's life.

In addition, the double first appears in a filthy bathtub full of blood, and it spoils Gavin's beauty. Hence, the short story does invoke feelings of fear, anxiety, and disgust in both characters' and readers' minds as well. Hanscomb adds that existentialist protagonists "usually end up striving to come to terms with their condition. In other words, they look for ways to answer Nietzsche's call to affirm 'all that is' (p. 11). They are overwhelmed by anguish and anxiety, and they go through alienation, which they cope with. As a result, the heroes appear to be odd and monstrous. It can be noticed that Gavin experiences anxiety because his double follows him and ends up absorbing him by taking his beauty and consciousness for itself. At the end of the story, Gavin gives up and becomes frightening, ugly, and lifeless, and thus he is closer to a being-in-itself than a conscious human being with aspirations and sentiments. In fact, dread and angst characterize the existential experience of facing an absurd world. As Camus (1955) puts it in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, our desire for meaning, value, and order in life is countered by the silence and enigma of the universe and phenomena: "That nostalgia for unity, that appetite for the absolute illustrates the essential impulse of the human drama" (p.13). This irrational aspect of life—what Camus calls "the absurdity of existence" (p. 5)—justifies the dread and anxiety experienced by characters in existential works as well as a possible relationship between gothic/horror fiction and existentialism.

Sartre (1945) states that all existentialists, Catholics or atheists, believe that "existence precedes essence ... man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards" (p. 3). Existentialists believe that people first exist, and then they give meaning to their existence through their consciousness, and that things are not predetermined by any forces. Rather, people are responsible for their behavior and actions, and they are "condemned to be free" (p. 5) and to make choices that define their existence. Sartre as well as Martin Heidegger argue that man is thrown into the world; Sartre says: "from the moment that he [man] is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does" (ibid.). Gavin's double is arguably thrown into the world; it then creates itself from nothingness, exploiting Gavin and ruining his beauty. Being an atheist, Sartre does not believe in determinism or predestination. Instead, he believes that although people are thrown into the world, they are free and responsible for their actions and decisions. Hence, Sartre challenges Freud's ideas of the id, ego, superego, and Oedipus complex, and Freud's assumption that most human behavior is driven by the libido, i.e. psychic sexual energy.

In the distinction he draws between being-for-itself (the conscious being) and being-in-itself (the unconscious being), Sartre (1956) posits that being-for-itself, like that of human beings, is thrown into the world and is free to choose the way of being since it has consciousness and does not have a predetermined essence. Nevertheless, being-for-itself is unable to choose not to be or to choose not to be free, for it is condemned to freedom. In addition, Sartre states that being-for-itself is aware of its incompleteness, so it creates itself from nothingness because it has to actuate its being. On the other hand, being-in-itself is not able to change itself, nor is it able to create its being, for it lacks consciousness. Sartre contends that being-for-itself depends on being-in-itself for its existence: coming into existence and continuing to exist. Hence, being-in-itself is prior to being-for-itself. Gavin's double arguably depends on Gavin to actuate its being; it consumes Gavin and becomes more of a human, whereas Gavin becomes more of a being-in-itself than a being-for-itself. Being-for-itself is condemned to be free, and it tolerates this absolute freedom. Being-for-itself also has the desire for existing, the choice of being, and—in Freudian terms—the instinct for self-preservation. It is aware that this existence is not eternal, yet it is obsessed with immortality; it pursues being and tries in vain to escape nothingness. In an abortive attempt to gain safety and reduce the lack of being, the for-itself yearns to be one with the in-itself by possessing or absorbing it. The for-itself becomes in-itself only in the case of death. Gavin arguably becomes a being-in-itself at the end because he no longer has consciousness; he turns into remains of a man, as the title of the short story suggests.

Sartre (1956) also discusses the idea of the encounter with the other through the gaze or the look; he says: "I see myself because somebody sees me" (p. 260). When human beings are looked at, they become aware of themselves and of their being. Stack and Plant (1982) state that according to Sartre, "being looked at is a sign of the presence of the other as a conscious individual" and "being in the face of the other in the world is a universal characteristic of our being, one that is indicated by our awareness of the 'alienating reality' of the other as an anonymous reality" (p. 369). The gaze of the other arguably limits freedom, for it is objectifying and alienating. As a result, the person looked at and hence objectified tries to objectify the other by gazing back at him/her. When Gavin's double is confronted with the gaze of Gavin, it does respond to this gaze by objectifying Gavin and absorbing him; Gavin turns into a lifeless man at the end because his double consumes him in order to actuate its being.

Gavin gets to the stage where he becomes unwilling to give any meaning to his existence; the “denial of responsibility for one’s future” (Gordon, 1999, p. 5) is one of the things through which one becomes alienated from oneself. Gavin is alienated because he eventually denies himself freedom, responsibility, and choice, becoming more of a mute being-in-itself than a being-for-itself.

2. Discussion

Heidegger (1996) affirms the idea that mortals are thrown into the world; they do not choose to be, nor do they choose their past, yet things are never deterministic or predestined. By analogy, Sartre (1945) says: “man is condemned to be free ... because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty” (p. 5). Sartre argues that people have absolute freedom and responsibility. In Barker’s “Human Remains,” Gavin, a bisexual man living in London, arguably has absolute freedom to make as many choices as he pleases and can take whatever decisions he wants. For instance, he chooses to be a prostitute; “he sold what sweated in his jeans to all comers ... indifference was a trade-mark of his, even a part of his attraction” (p. 142), and he promises himself that “he’d find a marriageable widow (the gigolo’s pension) or a legitimate occupation before he was twenty-five” (p. 146). Gavin is a bisexual prostitute, which indicates that he is not an average man. Hence, he is really the epitome of freedom in that he does not abide by rules, and he does what he pleases because he never cares about his reputation. As an existential hero, Gavin rejects the “herd mentality” of conformity to social norms. All that Gavin cares about is preserving his beauty, which helps him to make money. In addition, when Gavin has a terrible toothache, his beauty saves him, for he does not have to schedule an appointment. He just smiles at the receptionist, and thus he has an instant dental appointment. Instead of following conventional morality or religion, this secular hero worships his own beauty.

Gavin also chooses to be indifferent; for example, he is never interested in knowing the names of the women or men whom he deals with; he earns money and forgets all about his clients. He undertakes a stone-like attitude in his life. Moreover, he does not remember exactly when his father has died, nor does he go to his father’s grave. Gavin is very much like Meursault, the main character and narrator of the existentialist novel *The Stranger* (1942) by Albert Camus, because the latter is apathetic and indifferent to everything, including the death of his mother. Meursault embraces the absurdity of human existence, an idea which Camus examines in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1955). In addition, Gavin is like the quintessential existentialist protagonist Roquentin in Sartre’s *Nausea* (1964) who is also filled with meaninglessness. Sartre (1956) calls meaninglessness “absurdity;” “man’s existence is absurd because his contingency finds no external justification. His projects are absurd because they are directed toward an unattainable goal” (p. 628). Gavin tries to give meaning to his existence by preserving his beauty, but his attempts and efforts to create meaning in a meaningless world prove futile, so he gives up at the end and denies himself responsibility and freedom. However, it does not seem reasonable to assume that Gavin lacks consciousness at this moment; he just sets his priorities in a way that makes him quite unemotional. Since Gavin has consciousness and harsh feelings, makes choices, has a desire for being, and has this instinct for self-preservation; he is arguably still a being-for-itself.

As a being-for-itself, Gavin is thrown into the world; he gives meaning to his life and existence only by preserving his beauty. Gavin makes use of his beauty to attract others, so he is “meticulously self-critical, never allowing his weight to fluctuate more than a pound or two to either side of his self-elected ideal, careful to feed his skin if it was dry, or swab it if it was oily” (Barker, 1998, p. 142). Gavin likes his beauty to the extent that he is so much interested in “the idea of having ... likeness, however crude, carved in stone and put up on the spot where ... bones lay” (p. 153). Gavin wants to immortalize his beauty because it is his beauty that makes his life quite meaningful. Freud (1914) calls narcissism “the libidinal complement to the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation” (pp. 72-73). Gavin is arguably driven by narcissism, for he overwhelmingly desires to preserve his beauty, just like the mythical character Narcissus who has “a stubborn pride in his own beauty,” rejecting “lovers of both sexes” (Hamilton, 1982, p. 21). Narcissus ruins his life by himself; he falls in love with his own reflection in the water, and he keeps gazing at his reflection until he dies, making his beauty fade away. On the other hand, Gavin is very careful about his beauty because he is a prostitute, and thus preserving beauty is vitally important to him. Unlike Narcissus who disdains those who love him, however, Gavin likes to feel that his beauty and charm are appreciated, and he likes to be looked at because he loves to see his beauty through the eyes of others. As a result, Gavin goes to hotels or the movies so that he finds someone to spend the night with.

Sartre (1956) argues that people are condemned to be free. However, there are limitations to this freedom; for example, one is not able not to be free; Sartre calls this “facticity.” In this story, Gavin cannot determine whom he encounters, yet he has the freedom to take decisions. Hence, he meets Reynolds by chance, but “against habit, Gavin made the opening move” (Barker, 1998, p. 148) and makes the decision to go to Reynolds’ apartment and stays the night there. Gavin remembers the bad experiences he has gone through because a lot of the people he deals with are malicious, so he thinks that he will be thrown again into dealing with a man as wicked as the others are. Still, Gavin always takes the risk of handling such people. Gavin meets the statue, his double, in Reynolds’ apartment; Gavin is thrown in Reynolds’ place in order to meet this statue.

The statue is also thrown into the world; we are not told how it has come into existence, but since it exists, it needs to actuate its being and create itself from nothingness. Thus, the statue is a potential being-for-itself that does everything possible to actualize its existence. The first thing the statue does is making a banging noise in Reynolds’ apartment to the extent that Gavin gets seriously disturbed and decides to see what is going on in the apartment. Gavin looks for Reynolds when he disappears in the apartment, and he stays in order to help him because Reynolds is wounded. In addition, Gavin arms himself with a knife so that he can defend himself if attacked by the intruder who has hurt Reynolds. Gavin never forgets to preserve himself, so he is very careful about preserving his beauty as well as his life. However, things happen against Gavin’s wishes; this attack causes him to encounter the statue, his double, that is all free and insistent on creating itself from nothingness by consuming others and causing them trouble. Gavin who insists upon taking the risk of helping Reynolds by fetching him a bandage does not really know that he will meet a being-for-itself that will actuate its being at his expense.

Sartre argues that existence precedes essence and that being-for-itself exists and creates itself from nothingness because it is acutely aware of its incompleteness. The for-itself “creates itself as fleeing from Being in order to be consciousness of Being, to be the assertion that there is Being,” and it “strives to eradicate the nothingness that separates itself and Being in order to reunite with the in-itself— while conserving itself as for-itself” (Gordon, 1999, pp. 34-35). Hence, Gavin’s double, the statue, is a being-for-itself that gradually creates its essence. The short story traces the changes which the statue undergoes; it creates its being, making use of Gavin and other characters. At first, the statue is described as having “anatomy no better realised than its features” (Barker, 1998, p. 158). The statue does everything possible in order to actuate its essence; for example, it attacks Reynolds, and causes him to bleed because it needs to wash itself in blood so that it continues to exist. The facts that the statue washes in filthy water full of Reynolds’ blood and that it smells like “the wet fur of a dog” (p. 157) do excite fright and disgust. In a sense, the statue occupies that liminal space between the in-itself and the for-itself, that abject zone in which human beings come to be nauseated by their own consciousness and life force upon confrontation with matter and soil. In a sense, the for-itself feels nauseated by the in-itself and by the absurdity of this unconscious being.

According to Sartre (1956), the look of the other is objectifying; the person looked at becomes an object gazed at and judged by the other. In addition, the look of the other limits one’s freedom, for “freedom escapes ... in order to become a given object” (p. 261). In response to the gaze of the other, Stack and Plant (1982) state that the person may “transcend the state of being fixated as an object” and “seek to objectify the other person by fixing him” (p. 370) in his/her gaze. It can be contended that the statue responds to Gavin’s gaze at it in the bathroom by gazing back at Gavin and hence objectifying him; the statue sees Gavin’s face and decides to take it away for itself, making Gavin have a featureless face. Immediately after he encounters the statue, Gavin is no longer described as beautiful. Instead, his features start to change, and his face becomes drained. As a result, when Gavin has a terrible toothache the day after he meets the statue, the receptionist at the dentist’s does not give him an instant appointment, against his expectations, because “his charm was at a low ebb, his eyes weren’t sparkling quite as luxuriantly as usual” (Barker, 1998, p. 160). Gavin’s beauty matters a great deal to him because his beauty and charm really make him cherished. The fact that his beauty fades over the days causes him serious trouble, for he has to wait for a long time in order to get a treatment for his toothache. In addition, Gavin is no longer “chased by admirers” who used to “follow him round for days, from bar to bar, from street to street” (ibid.).

Since its coming into existence or what Sartre (1956) calls “apparition,” the statue, a being-for-itself, uses Gavin’s beauty as a means of actuating its essence and exploiting the being of others. Having human qualities is absolutely necessary for the statue to actuate its being.

Hence, the statue starts to resemble Gavin over time, having the same voice and wearing the same clothes, which makes Gavin have terrible trouble with Preetorius. Along with his goons, Preetorius blocks Gavin's way, accusing him of attacking and hurting one of his sons.

Gavin's double has taken a shower in the blood of Preetorius' child, "hanging him up and cutting him everywhere" (Barker, 1998, p. 163). As a result, Gavin has to pay the penalty in behalf of his double; Preetorius and his goons strike Gavin and bruise his ego. Gavin feels so humiliated because "he'd beg, he fall down on his knees and lick their soles if need be, anything to stop them doing a job on him. Anything to stop them spoiling his face" (p. 164). However, Preetorius uses a knife and cuts Gavin's face by "pressing the point of the blade against Gavin's chin," causing Gavin to have "a scar along his jawbone" (pp. 165-166). Immediately before Preetorius spoils Gavin's face more, Gavin's double rescues Gavin and kills Preetorius.

Sartre (1956) argues that being-for-itself is "the nihilation of Being-in-itself; consciousness conceived as a lack of Being, a desire for Being, a relation to Being ... each For-itself is the nihilation of a particular being" (p. 629). As a being-for-itself, the statue is in desperate need of Gavin in order to create itself. Since Gavin's double is badly in need of Gavin's face, it saves Gavin from Preetorius and his goons; it does not want Gavin's face to be spoiled further. It can be contended that Gavin's double becomes more of a human as time goes by; it grins, moves, bows, speaks, yawns, and murders and injures other people. Although Gavin's double has "crude features" and "startled, lifeless eyes" when Gavin encounters it for the second time, there is "some improvement in its appearance ... the brow seemed to have swelled; the face was altogether better proportioned" (Barker, 1998, p. 167). In addition, the double wears a ring identical to Gavin's and creates a scar on its jawbone similar to the scar that Gavin has.

The fact that the statue encroaches upon the freedom of Gavin and other individuals like Reynolds evokes in them "nausea," as Sartre (1956) puts it, because the characters taste facticity when the statue starts to create its identity at their expense. Gavin's double tells Gavin: "I'll reject my life as a tormentor of children, because I'll see through your eyes, share your humanity ... because I am yourself ... I am a thing without a proper name" (Barker, 1998, p. 168). Since Gavin's double needs to create itself from nothingness by taking the physical characteristics of Gavin as well as Gavin's personal qualities for itself, Gavin gets paranoid, feeling that his life is in danger, on the grounds that his double may become his exact replica over time. Moreover, people think that Gavin has murdered Preetorius, and thus Gavin can no longer go back to his house; he has to keep out of sight, otherwise he will be sent to prison or rushed to the psychiatric hospital in case he tells the police that a statue has committed the murder. In addition, Gavin feels down because the doctor tells him that his scar cannot be cured. For Gavin, his permanent scar, which ruins his beauty, aches more than his teeth do. However, Gavin is indifferent to the fact that the police have taken his house and possessions, feeling "something akin to relief, happy that his life had been stolen from him in its squalid entirety" (p. 170).

Despite the fact that Gavin is indifferent to his possessions, he is in fear of losing the beauty that he possesses, for his double has almost gotten his face. Sartre believes that fear is "provoked by the possibility of being changed or even destroyed by something outside" (Gordon, 1999, p. 156), and according to Heidegger, fear is described as follows: What is feared is a threat, which means something known to be detrimental to a specific sphere of things within a practical context in which we are involved. That the fearful object is a threat also means that it is coming closer, so close that it is near enough to imposing its detrimental effect. (p.155)

Gavin and Reynolds are in fear of the statue, which means that the statue is arguably a threat to the stability of the life of others. Since Gavin's double makes use of everyone around, Reynolds hides in his house, and he thinks that Gavin is the statue after growing, fearing that Gavin may kill him so that his double takes a bath in his blood. Reynolds knows that Gavin's double grows, making use of others; he tells Gavin: "When it's perfected its physical imitation, I think it'll steal the one thing it can't imitate: your soul" (Barker, 1998, p. 174). Reynolds' guilty conscience makes him tell Gavin about the aims of his double and makes him regret having stolen many antiquities, including the fearful statue. Reynolds is also so terrified that he will be killed at the hands of Gavin's double, and thus he commits suicide. According to existentialists, committing suicide shows that one's life is not worth living; Reynolds realizes that his life is meaningless, and thus he kills himself because the existence of the statue does fill him with dread and helplessness. As Camus puts it, suicide is a way out of an absurd existence: "Dying voluntarily implies that you have recognized, even instinctively, the ridiculous character of that habit, the absence of any profound reason for living, the insane character of that daily agitation, and the uselessness of suffering" (p.5).

Although Gavin is an indifferent person, he gets so angry when he feels that his beauty fades away; he is very narcissistic, as it has been illustrated before. Gavin realizes that he will lose his beauty, so he decides to take action to secure this attribute and intends to “find this beast that had his beauty, and best it” (p. 175). Although Reynolds tells Gavin that his double may take his soul away for itself, the only thing Gavin cares about is regaining his beauty, whereas “souls and humanity was for him so much wasted air” (ibid.). Gavin cares about his beauty to the extent that over time he begins to put up with the presence of a double that can be adored on the basis of the beauty that he used to have. In addition, the fact that Gavin’s double appears in his house, has a bath, wears his clothes, and sleeps does not make Gavin angry; Gavin does not carry out his threats of getting rid of his double forever. Escaping anxiety by regarding choice as engendered by others is what Sartre (1956) calls “bad faith.” At first, Gavin has been anxious because of the existence of his double, but he eventually decides to escape anxiety by denying himself choice, and thus he experiences bad faith or self-deception.

As time passes, Gavin arguably turns into a more indifferent person, not caring that his face changes, and his double has his beauty and gains complete human features. As mentioned earlier, the statue objectifies Gavin by looking at him. Stack and Plant (1982) state that “feelings of discomfort, anxiety, or fear are common normal responses to being stared at by others” (p. 368). At first, Gavin has been eager to preserve his beauty, so he feels uneasy and gets into a panic when he learns that the statue has gazed at him and desired his face or beauty for itself. However, he eventually becomes indifferent and realizes that he cannot do anything to keep his beauty. In other words, Gavin surrenders to the gaze of his double and becomes a being-in-self without freedom, denying himself choice, freedom, and responsibility.

Being-for-itself is described as “transcendent,” on the grounds that it is “dynamic, open-ended or future-oriented, and continually redefining itself” (Gordon, 1999, p. 469). Gavin’s double is a being-for-itself that grows, and eventually it no longer has to wash in blood; it has the things which all human beings have except for the soul and feelings. On the other hand, Gavin starts to have an unquenchable thirst and spend his days only sleeping or drinking water. He looks in the mirror and notices “his pitifully changed body” (Barker, 1998, p. 181), and he goes to the cemetery where his father is buried because he finds out that his double is there. It has been stated that Gavin has always been indifferent to his family; he never cares about his dead father and his mother and sisters whom he never contacts. At the end of the story, Gavin also becomes indifferent to his best attribute, which is his beauty. Gavin goes to the cemetery barefoot, not caring about the remarks of others. He finds his double in the graveyard, standing by his father’s grave and wearing his clothes. Gavin is surprised that his double’s “flesh was more radiant than his own had ever been. It almost shone in the drizzling light; and the tears on the doppelganger’s cheeks only made the features more exquisite” (p. 182). In addition, Gavin’s double tells Gavin that it cries hard whenever it comes to the tomb of Gavin’s father. Gavin’s double has consciousness and emotions more than Gavin himself; it takes everything Gavin has away for itself. It also claims that the dead man is its father, telling Gavin “you feel nothing at all ... whereas I ... I will miss him until I die” (p. 183). Gavin’s double becomes more convincing as a human than Gavin himself. Gavin’s double cries hard and proves its humanity; it asks Gavin: “Why is it all so painful? ... Why is it loss that makes me human?” (ibid.). At the end, Gavin’s double has a soul and emotions, which it has lacked at first; it takes Gavin’s toothache and hence feelings. Hence, Gavin eventually has a featureless face, and he becomes lifeless.

As already mentioned, Gavin ends up being in “bad faith.” According to Sartre, bad faith is “inauthentic and self-deceptive refusal to admit to ourselves and others our full freedom, thereby avoiding anxiety in making decisions and evading responsibility for actions and attitudes” (Audi, 1999, p. 70). Sartre firmly believes that people are condemned to be free, so it is inauthentic to deny freedom and responsibility. Hence, he considers this lack of authenticity to be bad faith. In addition, O’Flynn (2009) states that Simone de Beauvoir emphasizes the necessity of creating meaning to one’s life, which is “of prime importance in living an authentic existence” (p. 67). However, Gavin decides not to give meaning to his life any longer, and he denies himself responsibility, choice, and freedom. By denying his freedom and giving up, Gavin becomes alienated, realizing that the universe is absurd. He also becomes more of a being-in-itself, having no consciousness and no freedom, and thus he is more of remains of a man than a conscious person or a being-for-itself. Having presented this transference the story depicts between the being-in-itself and the being-for-itself (and vice versa), we should now ponder the legitimate thematic employment of such shifts.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the present article has read Clive Barker's "Human Remains" from an existentialist point of view. It has employed Sartre's notions of "existence precedes essence," "being-in-itself," "being-for-itself," and "the look." It has also utilized Sartre's and Heidegger's concept of "thrownness." Existentialists argue that people are thrown into the world, and they have absolute freedom and are responsible for their behavior. Existentialists also believe that people exist first and then give meaning to their existence. In this horror story, Gavin, a gay prostitute, gives meaning to his life by preserving his beauty, for he is narcissistic and indifferent to everything except for his physical appearance. Gavin encounters his doppelganger in the house of Reynolds, one of his clients. Gavin's double that is in the form of a statue is also thrown into the world and confronted with the objectifying look of Gavin. The present article has argued that the statue is a being-for-itself because it creates its essence, and it has consciousness. Being aware of its incompleteness and having a desire for being, the statue manages to create itself from nothingness. To actualize its essence, the statue attacks people and cuts them, for it has needed to wash itself in blood at the beginning of its existence. In addition, it responds to Gavin's gaze in the bathroom by gazing back at Gavin and desiring his beauty and soul for itself. In other words, the statue creates itself at the expense of others, especially the ego-centric and greedy Gavin. The intersection between existentialism and psychological thrusts, we can conclude, intensifies the story's moral and ethical orientation.

At first, Gavin has been a being-for-itself, making decisions and choices and having a desire to exist and an instinct to preserve his beauty. Gavin attempts in vain to get rid of his double; after he finds out that trying to find meaning in a meaningless world is absurd and impossible, Gavin becomes more indifferent, and thus he surrenders to the gaze of his double. Gavin arguably becomes more of remains of a man than a conscious human being, which means that he is in "bad faith." Gavin accepts to be a being-in-itself and denies himself freedom, choice, and responsibility. Hence, Gavin eventually has a featureless and ugly face and has no consciousness and no feelings. On the other hand, Gavin's double cries hard by the grave of Gavin's father, and it has a toothache at the end. Hence, it is more of a being-for-itself, on the grounds that it has consciousness, human qualities, emotions, and feelings. The story, therefore, seems to employ this existential thrust toward an ethical end: those leading amoral lives become mere bodies with no souls. Moral depravity hardens people, making them more of human machines devoid of value/essence. In "Human Remains," Barker negotiates the fluid shift between two modes of being, the in-itself (the being of phenomena and objects) and the for-itself (the being of humans), to offer—we suppose—"ethical" commentary on the absurdity of a deviant life like that of prostitutes whereby the body becomes devoid of consciousness and morals.

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