

HYPOCRISY AND THE LIES OF TIME: AN ANGELIC DILEMMA

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Hypocrisy of Time

He is ageless, the hunter
With neither beginning nor end
Changeless, yet the father of all change.

His gaze is eternal
Without preference or guile
He loves, yet loathes all.

And...thus...Cassiel...falls...

*E*xistence is determined by time, and as a result there is a correlation or parallelism between both existence and time. Thus, an effort to define one's self outside of time is impossible. In Wim Wenders' film, *In Weiter Ferne, So Nah!*, the time-existence conflict is illustrated through the characters of Cassiel, an existential figure, and Emit Flesti, an embodiment of time itself.

Time and existence: is it possible for these two intertwined factors to exist outside of each other's realms? Time occupies an almost uncontrollable and untouchable role, and questioning its existence is paradoxical, even

laughable. Human existence is often viewed in connection with the philosophical movement of existentialism. It is an accepted human trait to question well-set patterns in order to establish societal variances or to more clearly define one's existence.

Wim Wenders, a contemporary writer and director, in an attempt to define the interrelationship between time and mortal existence explores each one separately, by creating separate characters to portray each phenomenon. The personality of each character reflects the nature of the respective phenomena, i.e. time and existence.

Through the physical separation of these characters/phenomena, Wenders shows that they are intertwined, that they cannot be understood or defined outside of each other's realm. This paper is an examination of the contrast between socially constructed ideas of time and existence, versus an individual depiction of them shown through the interaction of Cassiel and Emit Flesti.

Through the interaction of Cassiel and Emit Flesti, it is possible to visualize how crucial time is in order to attempt to define existence. Newton postulated that absolute time "of itself, and from its own nature, flows equably without relation to anything external" (qtd. in Slife 17). He explains further that time is the standard by which all things and phenomena are judged. The order and directionality of the world is thought to be synonymous with the absolute and linear organization of events (17–18). This concept allows time to exist outside of mortality.

Emit Flesti or t-i-m-e i-t-s-e-l-f is a paradox in his own right, because he not only condemns, but at the same time, redeems or releases Cassiel from his earth-bound

An Angelic Dilemma

perception of time or his earthly existence. Emit Flesti dictates the rules of time, and only he can bend or stop them as visually illustrated in the scene where Emit Flesti physically stops the hands of time. Cassiel does not fit in, meaning he cannot comprehend and conform to the absoluteness of time and its already set regulations; instead he floats tangently to the circle of time, because he lacks the ability to make time his own.

One becomes aware of Cassiel's struggle with time soon after he encounters Emit Flesti. Time robs Cassiel of the only angelic possession that he has: his armor, his last tool of identity. *He gets a bad deal*; his initiation into mortality foreshadows a harsh human reality. Emit Flesti ensures that Cassiel will continually struggle during his mortal existence:

Emit Flesti: Old hunters never die...they just fade away, I know, but not me never!
Raphaela: What do you want from him?
Emit Flesti: He just doesn't belong here: he's irregular.

(Wenders 14)

Time offers no preferential treatment, and Cassiel must adhere to its regulations.

Wenders depicts Emit Flesti as time and uses him as the ultimate authority and frame of reference. One does not question him/it; he/it is a given or an absolute. Time, however, has the ultimate authority to question everyone. Time binds people by his/its rules as seen in the conversation between Emit Flesti, Damiel, and Cassiel at the

Casa del Angelo, the pizzeria owned by Damiel:

Emit Flesti to Cassiel: They say: time is money, but they got it all wrong: time is the absence of money. Would you agree, Karl?

Cassiel to Emit Flesti: Tja, was soll man dazu sagen? Time is running away from me, Mr...Speedy Gonzales.

Cassiel to Damiel: Was der in kurzer Zeit zusammen redet. War eine Menge Geld. Hast du Schulden bei dem?

Damiel to Cassiel: Tja, es fällt nicht alles vom Himmel. Time is precious! (25)

This dialog demonstrates that all individuals must pay time, that all are life-long, time-tax payers. Emit Flesti, the human personification of time, possesses an almost too stoic aura. The man, time, illustrates no feeling or attachment to anything; he is constant, yet detached. Time is the factor that determines and encompasses all human activity including existence and thought. Thus, time is the establisher or policing force of all patterns of existence.

For one to exist and to survive one's own existence, one must learn how to function within the realm of time. However, those who do not follow his/time's patterns are characterized as *misfits* or *irregulars* and tend to fall into existentialism. Existentialism is the point that humans achieve in their understanding that in actuality, they (humans) are not what society says they are, but instead, they have been wrongly perceived. Once humans define reality in this context, they encounter feelings of pessimism, despondency, and loss of hope in self.

With this line of reasoning, there is no such thing as an essential self, rather it is an illusion, because human beings are nothing except what they have become at any given moment; it is the sum of the life they have created at any point of reference. As quoted in Rychlak's book, *Introduction to Personality and Psychotherapy*, "[H]uman beings are probably always more 'about to be' something we are not quite yet than we are anything fixed and 'given'" (641). Thus, they (humans) are not what or how they envision themselves, rather what time allows them to be in specific moments.

This situation creates a nothingness, and it is the source of their (humans') freedom, because it allows them to choose how to act or if to act at all. This nothingness begins at a distinct point of departure, which entails human consciousness and mental processes. In contrast to most previous philosophical systems, which maintain that an *a priori* essence precedes or transcends the individual existence of people, existentialists conclude that existence precedes essence.

Cassiel is a *misfit* of time or an *irregular*, because he has an angelic essence and lacks a mortal existence. At the moment of Cassiel's metamorphosis, he is only a fallen angel with good intentions. His angelic essence, a do-gooder among humans, forces him to fall into mortality. Cassiel's fall causes an angelic dilemma; how can an infinite being ameliorate humans within the parameters of mortal or finite time? As an infinite being, Cassiel's source of freedom, his nothingness, is his good intentions, which allow him to act in specific moments of finite time.

The journey that Cassiel embarks on has a linear

nature. Each moment is the sum of what he has become at that time, and what he has become evolves from moment to moment. His linear journey allows him to progress in time, meaning that the character is *immer im Werden*. Existentialists ask existence-related questions such as ‘why am I the way I am?’; ‘why is life the way it is?’; ‘what is life?’ etc.

Cassiel epitomizes existentialism because of his focus on raising questions, rather than answering them. He becomes lost or loses his identity through defining and limiting questions, such as: “Warum bin ich Ich und nicht du, warum bin ich hier und warum nicht dort, wann began die Zeit und wo endet der Raum” (Wenders 1). Life according to Cassiel should provide definite patterns. The lack of such patterns causes one to forget the purpose of life, and one becomes lost in a vicious circle of questions.

The mortal existence of Cassiel resembles a state of perdition, because it is a direct result of his inability to understand and survive within the mortal constructs of time. In order for Cassiel to define his mortal existence, he must apprehend the mortal notion of time. As an angel, he never worked in accordance with mortality-based precepts of time. He cannot fully grasp this mortal notion, and because of this ineptness Cassiel falls in the literal sense. Through his fall, Wenders illustrates that the internalization of the concept of time is closely connected to one’s survival, in fact, it ensures survival. Time transcends all previous unearthly experiences. As a result of this idea, Cassiel’s entire existence is held captive by time as visually illustrated by Emit Flesti’s desire to control Cassiel’s every thought and action.

Cassiel is inauthentic because he simply belongs nowhere. He does not have the necessary tools to be a literal citizen of Earth; he has no mortal identity:

Policeman: Wie heißen Sie denn? Sie haben bestimmt einen Namen!

Cassiel: Natürlich. Ich bin doch nicht irgendwer.

Policeman: Eben! Was ist denn daran so schwer? Nur ein Name! Sie können mir auch rückwärts buchstabieren! Wie heißen Sie?

Cassiel: Raabe.

Policeman: Na, sehen Sie! Nun fühlen Sie sich viel wohler! Raabe! Mit einem oder zwei a?

Cassiel: Zwei a. Raabe.

Policeman: R-a-a-b...Und wie lautet der Vorname?

Cassiel: Ralph.

Policeman: Ralph. (15)

Another important facet of identity is the ownership of a passport; a passport represents a tangible symbol of identity and belonging:

Cassiel: Was ist daran originell? Sagen Sie nichts, hören Sie zu! Ich brauch' sofort 'nen Pass auf diesen Namen. Er ist zwar nicht schön, aber.

Forger: Ja, ausgesprochen hässlich.

Cassiel: Aber wenn ich nun hochgenommen werde, bloß weil ich meinen früheren Namen verschweigen muss, dann bin ich bereit, bis...bis zum Äussersten zu gehen!

Forger: Beruhigen Sie sich, mal, ja? Schließlich lassen wir keinen verhungern. Es dauert so ein paar Tage. Und, uh, dreitausend Eier...haben Sie eine kleine Anzahlung dabei?

Writings

Cassiel: Tun Sie erstmal was für Ihr Geld! Sie hören von mir! Der Mann mit den Schnittblumen.
(18)

He lacks a passport, a place of residence, and he does not even possess a name. Cassiel is a citizen of no particular place, and since he abandoned his angelic state, he does not belong anywhere, among humans or angels. Upon his arrival, Cassiel finds himself lost among such unfamiliar human phenomena as artificial light and the speed at which humans conduct their everyday lives. He says:

Wir haben uns ja immer gefragt, warum sie so eine Affengeschwindigkeit an den Tag legen, jetzt weiß ich es: es liegt an dem Licht, das sie gegen die Sonne gesetzt haben; sie sind verdammt spät, Raphaela, soviel kann ich jetzt schon sagen. Aber genug für's erste. Du glaubst ja gar nicht, was alles vor mir liegt, ich muss mich organisieren, planen, nachdenken; ich kann jetzt eingreifen, mitmischen; ich bin jetzt ein Mensch! (13)

He also explains that he has not forgotten his mission on Earth and that he is finally a member of human society.

Humans learn to cope with loneliness, but Cassiel does not have the ability to comprehend that it is a major part of one's existence on Earth. In a conversation with Raphaela, he expresses his frustration with humans' refusal to live with an open heart::

Das ist also die Einsamkeit, Raphaela. Oh, das ist

schlimm, sage ich dir! Keiner hört, was im anderen vorgeht. Keiner sieht dem anderen ins Herz. Neimand fragt mal was, nicht mal nach dem Weg. Was mach' ich denn hier überhaupt? Rumlungern und zugucken, wie es ständig Tag wird und wieder Nacht? Nichts macht mir Sinn. (21)

Cassiel yearns for the human warmth, which he experienced only as an angel. This is ironic because his desire to do good forces him into an inauthentic status. All that remains static is his desire to do good. He never falters from his original mission, “Ich darf meine Mission nicht aus den Augen verlieren” (21).

The character of Cassiel fails to see that human things have a double nature. The good is associated with the bad and vice versa, and they are necessary to define each other. Cassiel vacillates from one side of the spectrum to the other, and he cannot find a balance. Leopardi, one of the most well-known Italian existentialist writers, addresses issues of disillusionment with present reality. In his *Operette Morali*, he literally captures Cassiel's situation. In a short story entitled “Dialogo della Terra e della Luna” he focuses on a conversation between the Earth and the Moon. The Earth asks the Moon whether she is familiar with such Earth-like characteristics as ambition and political arts. The Moon replies in all honesty that she does not know anything about them. The following conversation ensues:

Earth: . . . Were you ever conquered by one of your own?

Moon: Not that I know of. And how? And why?

Earth: For ambition . . .

*Authors' translation

Moon: I don't know what that means . . . (75)*

Cassiel is similar to the Moon in Leopardi's story. He, like the Moon, originates from a different source. Their worlds interact with humanity but are still separate and distant. Both Cassiel and the Moon observe humanity or the Earth—they see, but they do not entirely comprehend and feel, because they cannot relate. Humans survive because they compromise. In a sense, they (humans) understand the lies and hypocrisy of time.

People are endowed with an instinct to grasp both the good and the bad, whereas Cassiel shows interest in only one aspect of the nature of things. Cassiel is not interested in human traits such as compromise and balance, and this is a recipe for failure from his initiation into mortality. In his conversation with Lou Reed, Cassiel learns that balance is indispensable:

Cassiel: Ich kenn' dich! I, I saw your concert: Why, why...can't I be good?

Lou Reed: I swear, if I knew, I would tell you. Come on! You can do it!

Cassiel: Why...why can't I be good, why can't I act like a man...why? Why not? (22)

Lou Reed expresses a human's unconscious ability to balance the good and the bad. He doesn't understand how to do it; he just knows one does it. There is no definite formula to follow; one learns to balance as one progresses in life.

Although Cassiel does not learn to balance, his essence is that of goodness; he comes and then exits life as a do-gooder. However, to be a successful survivor, one

An Angelic Dilemma

needs to understand how one can exist in the boundaries of time and accomplish one's mission. His angelic dilemma is that of one who is torn between mortal existence, and that of an outsider who possesses knowledge of what was and what could be without understanding the time-existence relationship. Even goodness on Earth exists in accordance with the precepts of time.

Emit Flesti or time, the ultimate frame of reference or mediator of existence, must drive Cassiel from his/its realm. Being the ultimate frame of reference, Emit Flesti needs to purge himself/itself of *misfits* or *irregulars*. One cannot cheat time.

Cassiel's second fall is also literal and symbolizes a falling back into his angelic state, illustrating his ability to transcend mortality. This is almost paradoxical, because time or Emit Flesti allows Cassiel to transcend it/himself without ever having understood it/him.

Because Cassiel is forced to leave mortality through a violent act, Cassiel's death could be viewed as tragic. His exit, however, reflects his entrance; in both cases, he saves Raissa allowing his essence of goodness to surface. This defining act mirrors Cassiel's tenacity to stay true to his initial cause or mission. Even the eventuality of death does not hinder him from performing a good deed.

Cassiel's angelic essence forced him into mortality and at the same time created his angelic dilemma, which is his lack of a mortal existence. His angelic essence, however, condemns but at the same time saves him from his angelic dilemma. The second rescue frees him not only from mortal constructs of time but also his mortal existence, or in other words, his angelic dilemma.

The correlation between time and existence is not

linear, rather they coexist. Time cannot be grasped outside of human existence, and existence has no essence outside of time. Wim Wenders clearly demonstrates in a visual medium that the internalization of time allows one's survival. Survival is made possible through one's total emersion in the precepts of time, which creates a mortal existence followed by essence.

Cassiel's conflict epitomizes the fall of any who try to create their own existence without time's permission. It is his incompetence and unwillingness to conform to set patterns of time, and it is time's lies and hypocrisy, that ensure his eventual fall back into his angelic state.

Emit Flesti as time seeks to corrupt Cassiel by way of such vices as alcohol. However, Cassiel's constant and inner purity frustrates time's controlling hand. Time's own nature is corrupt: he is a control freak and must bring all under his control. Emit Flesti struggles to completely destroy Cassiel's innocence, his angelic essence. He, therefore, frees Cassiel from his mortal existence, not out of the goodness of his heart, but rather to regain control over his realm.

Nick Cave ultimately captures the time-existence conflict illustrated through the characters of Cassiel and Emit Flesti in the following song:

It's a place where you did not belong, where time itself
was mad and far too strong, where life leapt up laugh-
ing and hit you head on and hurt you...While time out
ran you and trouble flew toward you, and you were
there to greet it weren't you...But here we are, we've
come to call you home and here you'll stay, never more
to stray, where you can kick off your boots of clay...For
death and you did recklessly collide, and time ran out

An Angelic Dilemma

of you and you ran out of time...And all the clocks, in all the world may this once just skip a beat in memory of you, but then again those damn clocks they probably won't, will they, Cassiel?

(qtd. in Wender , 41)

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