

Immigrating into Depression: Claustrophobic Spaces in Kafka's, Camus's and Salih's Fiction Reframe Homeland

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Abstract

Immigration has emerged as a prevailing political issue throughout history and it has had numerous consequences particularly on literature. Advancing into a new country may be to some individuals like advancing into the unknown, into an ever-agonizing exile. Franz Kafka, Albert Camus and Tayeb Salih are writers whose lives and narratives were mapped amidst the most violent times on all ideological levels. The three writers were geographically displaced which equipped them with extensive personal experience in addition to having witnessed the agonies of numerous immigrants.

This paper aims to scrutinize Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, Camus's *The Stranger* and Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*. The three novellas under study have clearly shown the repercussions of modernity and the political struggles on the characters. The scope of this research shall focus on the psychological states of the three protagonists (Gregor, Meursault and Mustafa Sa'eed) and how internalized aggression and frustration with the political dynamics of the time has led to their downfall. The encounter between countries in the twentieth century fashioned an elaborate corpus of universal knowledge systems that suffocated those who disapprove of them. This confrontation has emerged with new labels and binaries as "the other", inferior/superior, East/West, colonizer/colonized to name a few.

Those who are defined as Others have become marginal to the Empire; consequently, this geographical displacement has left irremediable damage. Thus, some individuals, represented by Gregor, Meursault and Sa'eed, have constructed their own homelands as part of resistance and revenge. Gregor, in *Metamorphosis*, transforms into an insect and is locked up in a room where he is completely isolated from the bureaucratic and unjust world. On the other hand, Meursault, in *The Stranger*, commits an unnecessary crime to be sent to prison and sentenced to death. Sa'eed, in *Season*, constructs his exotic room in London as a revenge tool against the West, and then he constructs another in Sudan as an emblem of victory. Those created spaces can be considered as alternate homelands. They are intended to provide security for those characters that refuse to adapt and conform to the political systems. Such characters resist the hybrid ethos and are extremely attached to their own perspectives to an extent that they would reduce a whole nation to a room. However, this futile resistance proves to be claustrophobic and destructive.

Keywords: Franz Kafka; Tayeb Salih; Albert Camus; space; time; homeland; displacement; alienation; hybridity; depression; suicide

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Literature has always shown us that when fluctuating between life and death there is an entire life and that life is by no means negative. Departure or reclusion does not mean loss of personal self, nor does refusal deny any substitute existence. The significant issue remains, nonetheless, whether resistance or surrender might be the desired resolution of existential conflicts. Universally speaking, some individuals amidst their darkest moments might choose specific alternates that structure new perspectives and create a more reassuring existence. When one is frustrated with nation's spatiality and temporality, one may reduce all national representations into insignificant claustrophobic spaces hoping to create a better representation of the nation. Immigration which has emerged as a prevailing political issue throughout history and which has always been a source of examination, has amply impacted literature. Advancing into a new country may be to some individuals like advancing into the unknown, into an ever-agonizing exile. Franz Kafka, Albert Camus and Tayeb Salih are writers whose lives and narratives were mapped amidst the most violent times on all ideological levels. The three writers, who upon first look might seem disconnected spatially and temporally, yet when closely inspected, numerous subtle commonalities emerge.

Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, Camus's *The Stranger* and Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* [Season henceforth] have clearly revealed the ramifications of modernity and the political struggles in and outside Europe. The novellas under study meticulously portray individuals (Gregor, Meursault and Mustafa Sa'eed) who have internalized aggression and frustration with the political dynamics which ultimately lead to their demise. The political dynamics and specificities of the twentieth-century systems fashioned an elaborate corpus of universal knowledge that suffocated those who disapprove or resist. Such confrontation has generated new labels and binaries such as "the other", inferior/superior, East/West, colonizer/colonized to name a few. Those who are defined as Others have become marginal to the Empire; consequently, this geographical displacement has left irremediable damage. Thus, some individuals, represented by Gregor, Meursault and Sa'eed, have constructed their own homelands as part of resistance and revenge. Gregor, in *Metamorphosis*, transforms into an insect and is locked up in a room where he is completely isolated from the bureaucratic and unjust world. On the other hand, Meursault, in *The Stranger*, commits an unnecessary crime to be sent to prison where the reader accesses the nation with its representations from this claustrophobic space. Sa'eed, in *Season*, constructs his exotic room in London as a revenge tool against the West, and then he constructs another in Sudan as an emblem of victory.

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characters resist the hybrid ethos and are extremely attached to their own perspectives to an extent that they would reduce a whole nation to a room. This study examines the urge that Kafka, Camus and Salih portray in their fiction to escape the collective space which proves to be destructive to the individual and their characterization fits Gabriel Zoran's theory of space and time. Zoran argues that characterization "can be conceived of as transformation from the physiological-psychological existence of characters in the world to their textual existence, i.e., dialogues, descriptions, actions, etc., all arranged in a temporal verbal continuum" (313). He assures that such "transformation is a two-way relationship from the text to the world and vice versa" (313). Zoran differentiates between two major relations in a narrative: *synchronic* and *diachronic relations* which shall help to analyze the novellas under study.

In 1922, Kafka writes in a letter to his friend, Max Brod,

But what is it to be a writer? Writing is a sweet, wonderful reward, but its price? During the night the answer was transparently clear to me: it is the reward for service to the devil. This descent to the dark powers, this unbinding of spirits by nature bound, dubious embraces and whatever else may go on below, of which one no longer knows anything above ground, when in the sunlight one writes stories. Perhaps there is another kind of writing. I only know this one, in the night, when anxiety does not let me sleep. I only know this one. And what is devilish in it seems to me quite clear. It is the vanity and the craving for enjoyment, which is forever whirling around oneself or even around someone else... and enjoying it. The wish that a naïve person sometimes has: 'I would like to die and watch the others crying over me,' is what such a writer constantly experiences: he dies (or he does not live) and continually cries over himself. (qtd in Kohzadi et. al 1601)

Kafka clarifies in this deep reflection his dissociation from the common and collectively adopted perspective of space and time. His portrayal of finding clarity amid darkness and absorbing space into the underground empowers anxiety and renders it effective on his soul as a writer. The fable reflects Kafka's own frustrations with the modern age. *Metamorphosis* can be considered an analogy to the claustrophobic modern era where people have become too mechanical and far from human connection. The novella becomes the equivalent of reality, an object to be perceived and discussed, but lacks a final explanation of its ultimate truth.

Likewise, in "Call for a Civilian Truce in Algeria" published in *Algerian Chronicles*, Camus expresses the "pressure" of his situation and his "profession as a writer." He shows his struggle and responsibility to bring opposite perspectives closer. He comments on the French/Algerian struggles saying,

[m]y only qualification to speak about this issue is that I have experienced Algeria's misfortune as a personal tragedy. Nor can I rejoice in any death, no matter whose it is. For twenty years I have used the feeble means available to me to help bring harmony between our two peoples. To my preaching in favor of reconciliation, history has responded in cruel fashion: the two peoples I love are today locked in mortal combat. The look of consternation on my face is no doubt a cause for laughter. But I myself am not inclined to laugh. In the face of such failure, my only conceivable concern is to spare my country any unnecessary suffering. (150)

Robert Zaretsky confirms that "[f]ew writers were more conflicted over personal and national identity than Camus." Since he was a "pied-noir" – the moniker given to immigrants who during the nineteenth century came to French Algeria from other parts of Europe and "becoming citizens of a nation, France, whose language they did not know, and whose language they did not speak, whose history they did not know and whose soil they would probably never step foot on"

intensifies the feeling of alienation. However, all these facts were neglected at the time and Algeria was considered part of France, “not a foreign nation containing several million Arabs and Berbers deprived of the rights of citizenship.” The situation grows worse and worse and Camus feels frustrated by the 1950s. Zaretsky compares Camus to “his mythic hero, Sisyphus, bolted not to a pillar, but instead to the tragic impasse of Algeria’s resistance to a foreign occupation”. No one can deny how hard Camus “labored for a solution that would satisfy the imperatives of justice for both Arabs and *pieds-noirs*, risking his life of an impossible peace since he could not take one side in the political conflict. Camus failed and fell silent - a silence he maintained until his death in 1960” (7-8).

Similarly, Tayeb Salih realizes the agonies of the era he lived in. Certainly the overall subject matter of imperialism and neo-colonialism echo in *Season*. Salih admits being influenced by Frantz Fanon who compares colonialism to the act of castrating the colonized nations. That might be the reason behind portraying Mustafa as a person who is obsessed by his masculinity and sexual dominance over the Western women. It is as if the East is reclaiming its dominance through the sexual colonialism of Western females. However, this dominance is shown to be false and fake as the narrative suggests. Despite the success that Mustafa achieves in his retaliation, and despite being portrayed by his lawyer as a victim of cultural confrontation, yet it “is a defense that Mustafa mentally rejects, for he knows he has victimized him-self” (Davidson 388). Salih states in one of his interviews that he writes with a mixture of consciousness and unconsciousness. Hence, it is quite normal for a mindful and self-conscious writer to feel alienated when he/she is repeatedly saddened by the prejudices and inequalities that dominant powers exercise in the world. In addition, there is an equal frustration with the motherland that fails to resist or protect its citizens properly.

This emotional frustration with their own cultures and nations might have unconsciously led the three authors to alienation and dislocation. Franz Kafka himself, despite the family constellation and insistence not to leave Prague, cannot resist the urge to dislocate from the suffocating and alien environment he was living in. Therefore, “near the end of his life (1923), [...] he became close to his sisters, particularly Ottla, in whose house in Zürau he convalesced in 1917–18 after the diagnosis of tuberculosis” (Rolleston 2). Physically detaching himself from his home and immediate society might have been his last defense mechanism to escape his depression. Similarly, Gregor, in *Metamorphosis*, primarily escapes his painful life and excruciating sense of alienation through his physical transformation into an insect; Gregor Samsa feels that he has been treated as a lowly insect and comes to feel that he is one: the story makes the leap from ‘I feel like an insect’ to ‘I am an insect’ (Kafka 1). Whatever the causes, Gregor’s feeling is rooted in the collapse of his nature between impersonal self (outside) and I (inner self)” (Kohzadi et.al 1603). After accepting his non-human condition, Gregor is convinced that dislocation might make him and his family feel better; hence, he locks himself in his room and knows that any attempt to reclaim his humanity is not accepted even by his parents. The effect of his dislocation creates a sense of emptiness and nothingness.

Karla S. Minar claims in her article “Shame and Alienation in Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*” that “the feeling of shame leads to alienation or the estrangement from others and one’s own self, as what others see is only a fragment of the possibilities of the self.” She believes that “alienation is caused by an internal factor, as shame occurs from within an

individual” (125). Throughout the narrative, Gregor is portrayed as a selfless individual who is ready to sacrifice his needs, ambitions and all types of self-fulfillment for the sake of pleasing his family. His devotion for his duties as a son and brother alienate him from his own needs. According to Minar, Gregor “experiences alienation before and after his metamorphosis. It is implied that since the time before his metamorphosis, Gregor has been selfless; yet, his family takes his selflessness for granted” (129). Being such a dutiful son made him feel more guilt after his transformation. He even “experiences shame, he sees himself the way his family sees him, a burden. This alienates him because he is denied from the possibilities of himself as an individual who constantly puts others before himself and does everything he is expected to do even though he has his own needs” (131). These strong emotions of alienation and loss are also emphasized by Pradip Mondal; “[t]he most gruesome aspect of Samsa’s fate is not his metamorphosis but the blindness with which everybody treats this metamorphosis. His self is what is absolutely alien, void, and nonexistent, not only in the world of business in the city but also in the world of the family” (69).

Similarly, Camus is a person whose sense of alienation due to the political situation at the time pushed him to dislocate from one country to another. Dislocation comes as a reaction to the dissatisfactions that he had towards the inhumane modern world. By writing *The Stranger*, Camus portrays a condition where space is not fixed but it fluctuates based on the psychological experiences of the main character or perhaps the writer. David Carroll quotes Jean Paul Sartre who states that the novella “itself is a stranger. It comes to us from the other side of the Equator.’ Carroll presents how Sartre describes the geographical and cultural remoteness of Camus’ novella:

The novel appears to have arrived in France from a foreign land located across the Mediterranean, a land of beautiful beaches and blazing sun where simple pleasures still exist, a land far removed from the war, occupied Paris, collaboration, and the continuing winter of French discontent. Coming from another place, the novel also arrives as if from another historical time, a time of simplicity, honesty, innocence, and moral courage, and in this way too it appears totally foreign to the French living in either occupied or Vichy France. (10)

Camus creates a double effect of dislocation. Meursault comes from a foreign land to France, and the French come into direct contact with this stranger and his victim (the Arab). The French characters are confused and try hard to understand the bizarre character of Meursault and to make sense of his crime. However, this confrontation proves to be absurd. James Hebron Tarpley affirms that the protagonist, Meursault, “inhabits a space between other spaces, often described using the rubric ‘entre *x* et *y*’. This young man between sea and shore and sand, between living and dead, between alone and *case*’, between France and Algeria, is forever grappling with his space and identity – metaphor for all *pieds-noirs* and, by extension, post-colonial existence” (53). After committing the crime, Meursault is dislocated from his empty and emotionless home to a prison to which Meursault quickly adapts and is no more fluctuating “entre *x* et *y*”; “I felt that my cell was my home and that my life was at standstill” (Camus 71). Indeed, the emotions of nothingness that filled his heart made him unable to really sense the difference between a real home and a prison.

Meursault’s focus on physicality proves his emotional detachment and sense of alienation As Sprintzen argues, “A lively sensitivity to the play of light and shadow colors his day. The

weather, qualitative changes in experience and in the modulations of nature practically enrapture him". Meursault receives signals around him as they are, "asking and expecting nothing more". However, what proves his alienation is that,

[H]e remains practically blind to the socially established meanings with which others embellish events. Nowhere is this more evident than in his relation with Marie. [...] he knows nothing of love and cares nothing for the institution of marriage. But when Marie smiles in a certain way he is attracted to her and wants her. His desires are not without warmth, but they lack premeditation or foresight. They are spontaneous responses to sensuous qualities and reflect little if any conceptual interpretation or social propriety. (23)

Meursault's deep sense of alienation is blunt when he is fully aware that his fate is doomed to a death sentence, yet again, he appears to be separate from reality. Undoubtedly, he is facing his own possible death, but on another level he additionally seems to be relating to his physical existence at a distance from his Self. Meursault feels alienated from the other "healthy" and "genetically normal" people around him. He fails to communicate properly with them. This "social alienation of Meursault" in Camus's *The Outsider* is labeled as "social absurdity" (Portz et al 165).

Likewise, Salih experiences dislocation when he immigrates to England where he spends most of his life with his Western wife. He also portrays the conflict that a person feels upon displacement. The narrator in *Season*, for instance, could not wait for the moment he would return to his homeland, yet he could not turn a blind eye to the pitfalls in his own culture. As John E. Davidson argues, both the narrator and Mustafa Sa'eed "have allowed their minds and souls to be separated, and they fight feelings of betrayal of self and community. In the case of the narrator, the plight of the native intellectual is made more difficult because the foreign training that is questioned enables the native oppression to be seen and critiqued" (387). On the other hand, Mustafa is portrayed as a character that migrates geographically and psychologically. On the geographical level, he leaves his country to Cairo and then he immigrates to London. In that foreign land, his journey of internal immigration starts. He sets a fictitious space to allure women and starts changing his names. That being done, he distances himself from his own reality. However, this process of alienation and dislocation into a new geographical space only augments his loneliness and failure especially after the resistance he receives from Jean Morris. As a result, he adopts another model of displacement. By killing Jean, he hopes to be locked away in a physical space (prison) that would protect him from his frustrations. Unfortunately for him, his new strategy fails and he is only locked up for seven years. Consequently, he feels the urge of trying another form of displacement. That is when he geographically immigrates back to his native land hoping for a psychological and physical settlement. This new phase, nonetheless, is also transient especially after the appearance of the narrator who uncovers his secret. Subsequently, he decides to move away again by supposedly disappearing in the Nile.

All these forms of geographical and psychological migrations serve Gregor, Meursault and Mustafa very little; nevertheless, the only space that probably gives them a sense of security and identity is their room/prison. Hence, space plays a crucial role in a narrative as Zoran emphasizes;

It goes without saying that space is not a neutral material just existing in the world; it has various functions relating to other planes of the text. Every element in space - actually every element in the text - has to be regarded, to use the term of Hrushovski (1976), as a 'junction', in which patterns from all the textual planes may intersect: patterns of space together with patterns of characterization, ideas, mythology, and so forth. The functions of space may appear clearly when dealing with single texts and pointing out the system of relations within the complex of its components. (333)

The narrator in *Season* explains upon exploring Mustafa's room that Mustafa "wants to be discovered, like some historical object of value. There was no doubt of that, and I now know that it was me he had chosen for that role. It was no coincidence that he had excited my curiosity and had then told me his life story incompletely so that I myself might unearth the rest of it" (Salih 154). The three narratives show a "diachronic relation" where "in the space of a given narrative, one may move from point a to point b, but not vice versa; in another narrative, the movement may be reversible. In both cases, movement ceases to be potential; it is fully realized, and is, so to speak, incarnated in space" (Zoran 319). Thus, the movement of Gregor, Meursault and Mustafa in the symbolic space is from "point a to point b". It is the movement from the national or collective space to the claustrophobic smaller physical space (room) and inner space (depression).

Indeed, the three novellas combine nearly every aspect of claustrophobic spaces as an attempt to substitute their disappointment with their homelands. Choosing to retreat from the national space to a personal place can be considered as an escape mechanism to avoid facing the severe dissatisfaction with the socio-political dynamics. Hence, Gregor, Meursault and Sa'eed retreat to the room in order to distance themselves from the collective defeat. The characters' rooms are enclosed and dark which might oppose with Westphal's premises on space. Robert Tally explains that Westphal's ideas certainly do "not attempt to return to an unsophisticated notion that fiction is able to offer a mirror reflection of the 'real' referent out there. Rather, Westphal understands that the referentiality operating between fiction and the 'real' world is characterized by constant movement, or oscillation (Westphal xi). However, the three characters' movement in the studied texts prove to be heading in one direction: from the national space to the claustrophobic personal one.

Gabriel Zoran discusses in his "Towards a Theory of Space in Narrative" that within the overall chronotopos of the reconstructed world, one should distinguish between synchronic and diachronic relationships, which each have a different type of effect on the spatial structure. Before continuing, a clarification of the term chronotopos here is necessary. This Einsteinian term was introduced into literary criticism by Bakhtin (1978), who uses it to signify the entire complex of space and time together, including physical objects, events, psychology, history, etc. Zoran, however, has not used the term to signify the totality of space and time, but rather to describe a specific aspect. That is not to signify all things that may be found in space or in time, but only what may be defined by an integration of spatial and temporal categories as movement and change. He states,

At every point of the narrative, that is, at every synchronic situation, some objects may be found at rest and others in motion. Naturally, the distribution can vary from point to point. One may generalize and state that there are certain objects in space which are characterized by their capacity for movement and others which remain at rest. This is not the same as the relationship between subject and object, or between characters and environmental objects; the differentiation between the states of motion and rest may be determined

among "inanimate" objects and among characters alike. There are characters which have a capacity for movement and there are those which are, so to speak, tied to their places. (318)

This can be traced in the narratives under study. Gregor, Meursault and Mustafa Sa'eed seem to be tied to the chosen places (room/prison). After experiencing disconnection and detachment with the global space, their retreat to their enclosed places render them motionless similar to the few objects around them. Gregor's room remains static after his transformation. The only time his mother and sister try to move the furniture in the room, he changes from being harmless and obedient into aggressive and rebellious. He refuses to change the static environment around him as it represents a more secure spatial and temporal scope. Gregor's room successfully distances him from the bureaucratic and dull outside space that frustrated him; "with each passing day his view of distant things grew fuzzier, [---] he might have thought that his window gave on to a wasteland where grey sky merged indistinguishably with grey earth" (Kafka 99). Gregor adapts to his transformed body and feels more comfortable with the new spatiality and temporality which shuts him away from the world; "his physical mastery of his body was of a different order from what it had been previously, and so now he didn't hurt himself" (Kafka 101). In Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, the line stretching between the room and the outside world is the central axis in the spatial structure of the novella, focusing all the powers acting in the "world" despite the fact that it is never actively traversed by the main character. Gregor is representative of the "modern" human. Like all men, he is faced with the bafflement of existence; like all men he tries to understand his transformation and miscommunication with the outside world. He wants his world to be one thing but finds it another. He cannot relinquish his grip upon the explainable of his familiar world. Nor can he fully grasp the strangeness of his new one (metamorphosis). The Gregor lives in anxiety and claustrophobia the modern experience, persisting in a hope which is barren of fruit.

Correspondingly, Meursault feels upset every time he has to leave his cell and get in touch with the outside world. Despite the liminality of death and life, the prison seems to offer a more secure space to Meursault. His adaptation to his confinement comforts him as it guarantees a rare connection with the collective space. Similarly, Meursault feels more secure in his inner secluded prison than the outside world; "I felt that my cell was my home and that my life was at a standstill" (Camus 71). Withdrawing from the outside space/time, Meursault feels a sense of belonging, security and safety. Tirelessly, describing the farfetchedness of his cell, Meursault could stabilize the representation of his country at least momentarily. He does not resist the claustrophobic prison despite its darkness and "tiny window" (Camus 72). He also feels a sense of confidence describing the dark journey he has to take every time he has a visitor; "I went down a long corridor, then down some stairs, and finally along another corridor" (Camus 72). Meursault connection with the outside space turns into a painful experience as it reminds him of the injustices of the system; "I found the noise quite painful" (Camus 74). He also trains his mind to forget the outside world with all its fake freedom and steps up to thinking "like a prisoner" (75). He gradually succeeds in distracting his body from focusing on the physical pleasures of the world and enjoys the freedom of only connecting with the sky through the bars of the prison. He even enjoys the nothingness of time and space in his cell. He succeeds at subverting what life should be according to the social norms. To him, living in the world for just a day would easily allow someone to "live a hundred years in a prison" (77). Not only does Meursault destabilize social space but he also learns how to replace real people with fictional ones and how to control

time. He “ended up losing track of time in prison. [...] [He] hadn’t understood how days could be both long and short at the same time. Long to live through I suppose, but so distended that they ended up flowing into one another” (78).

Sa’eed’s rooms, in London and Sudan, abound with objects that secure the image of the exotic triumphant East that he aspires for. However, this abundance of objects does not create any movement. On the contrary, the room in London represents a motionless image of the exotic strong East versus the dominant colonial West. Sa’eed’s room echo what Zoran states about the objects; “the objects structured belong to the reconstructed world, but the structure itself is imposed on them by the linguistic nature of the text (319). The other room in Sudan presents a fixated image of the triumphant East. Mustafa’s room in Sudan welcomes the narrator with “dampness and an odour like that of an old memory” (Salih 135). The memory of the long-lost traditional Sudan. What the room depicts is a complete symmetry with the outside space; “all that came in from outside was more darkness” (Salih 135). Suffocation extends from the outside space to the internal enclosure that Mustafa aspires to protect himself in. Mustafa’s room “was a graveyard that looked on to a garden” (Salih 30) “The room was heavy with the smell of burning sandalwood and incense, and in the bathroom were pungent Eastern perfumes, lotions, unguents, powders, and pills. My bedroom was like an operating theatre in a hospital” (Salih 31).

Kafka, Camus and Salih allow to make their choices and create their claustrophobic yet detached spaces. The reader feels a sense of suffocation in their work which is not merely physical; it extends to the intimate relationship between locale and content. The reader feels the entanglement of the characters’ attempt to go everywhere in their new spaces, yet they reach nowhere. This mixture of liberation and imprisonment within the space-time considerations of enclosure paradox is, apparently, the subject of the three narratives. We note the religious, political, and social implications, but we must resist seeing these works as anything but the tensions and conflicts themselves. Thus, it is significant to examine the real value of reconstructing new homelands by retreating from the collective to the personal. Kafka, Camus and Salih present narratives that show enclosure as an alternative. Enclosure reaches its highest creative point in the studied narratives. They have “profound reverberations in cultural terms; for such enclosure represents those time and space considerations which have dominated our thought since the eighteenth century” (Karl 424). For such enclosure writers, death is the essence of infinite space and limitless time, to the extent death entangles itself with every aspect of life. Gregor, Meursault and Sa’eed’s sanctuary spaces represent the nothingness and absurdity of modernity and their retreat is a temporary solution for their disappointment. Upon close inspection, the three characters prove to be withdrawn into the dark world of solitude and depression and death becomes the ultimate solution. In enclosure, it is only through death or something akin to it that the protagonist can reach more vital ground, if he or she ever does. With death as absolute, the individual is miniaturized, diminished, dwarfed, made to seem part of the fateful or circumstantial destiny that was so much a part of the late-nineteenth and twentieth century psyche. Gregor, Meursault and Sa’eed are three figures striving for a secure space, and like Prometheus being neglected or left to rot, are striving to overcome a fate that discards individuals. Working in time and space, these protagonists face a losing struggle against endless sweeps of space and time. Hence, the dilemma is always in reaching that beyond, escaping from a measured hell into an infinite paradise.

This paper has shown that cultures and nations, including their failures, push individuals to reinvent and reconstitute their homelands in an attempt to find more security, stable identity and cultural continuity. By doing so, the psychological states of the characters does not ameliorate. On the contrary, this defense mechanism proves to be another myth as it fails to grant the characters the happiness and satisfaction they seek. Reconstructing a new homeland by limiting the scopes of space and time renders the three protagonists more vulnerable to social judgement, alienation and depression. Initially, the claustrophobic space protects Gregor, Meursault and Sa'eed from confronting the real reason behind their misery. However, as the text progresses the reader traces the absurdity of their chosen paths and they are gradually dragged into depression which eventually leads to death. Thus, reducing the country into a smaller space (room/prison) is a desperate attempt to save themselves and eventually save their homelands. As Zoran affirms, "[a]ny spatial object may also be perceived as a synecdoche for a more comprehensive space" (329). However, they fail to successfully achieve both objectives and their downfall is seen as a symbolic downfall of their own nations or rather of the global modern world. This might be the human curse in the modern era and perhaps the best answer for humans' misery and their disappointments with their own nation is explicitly portrayed by the poet Riccardo Bacchelli who says: "We Europeans know the world too well. Columbus / did not realize the harm he was doing. History / which moves to the West will end up just where it had departed. / Is the earth so round for the sake of irony?" (qtd in Westphal 78). Life which is the most precious gift bestowed onto man shall end in death and there is no other way to reverse or stop this cycle in all spaces and at all times.

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