

Postmodern world through the lens of “Enzo”- Narrator of Garth Stein’s “The Art of Racing in the Rain”

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Abstract— *To be able to see the world through a clear lens is what should be implied not fancied. Sadly, to dismay, people now a days do not sober this practice yet yearn to make Earth a peaceful place which is just as imprudent as to expect a fish to adapt to land just because the ocean water is prevailing salty. In such age where values and norms seem faded by such lens, Enzo explains the realities quite well by diving into complex yet extremely obligatory philosophies of our daily lives. Neither the world is what we see nor what we want it to be for what change this temporary dwelling could manifest if we were only to think about our benefit, solely? Enzo—a quadrant breed; by examining, analyzing, proposing and probing various attitudes, simply qualifies to be much more than a human because we homosapiens deliberately miss quite many chances to express our inner most gratitude or even abhor towards a fellow being. We don't even relish the present moments nor do we care to ponder over our ethics which is why Enzo pledges the initiative and tries to bring us back to where we actually belong through dragging us to wander in a blissful fantasy of magic realism. It is both exceptional and warily common to contour someone's voice in our head and Garth Stein has successfully managed to implement this concept through The Art of Racing in the Rain. The joys, the sorrows, the exclusions, the harmonies and the coherences we feel in this postmodern world shape our attire of being a human but Enzo, in this case, transforms this foregone concept of ours by introducing us to an unexplainable reality where one should not only bind bridles to the tongue but should also care in uttering even the slightest grain of sympathy for these are the words which shape this postmodern world.*

Keywords— *Postmodern world, Magic Realism, Reality, Manifestation, Gestures.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Art of Racing in the Rain is a remarkable masterpiece written by Garth Stein where he discusses the emotional treacheries and repulsive behaviors of human beings caused by various ups and downs occur on mundane basis. Stein narrates the story from the perspective of a dog who seems reluctant to the momentous changes in a human's behavior and thus wishes to have in possession of a tongue through which he could impose on us the real effect of our words. Gestures may not be everything but they are way too much when it comes to express feelings. We don't shake hands with someone we dislike. We tend to incline our head, and the brain in it, to people we would like to open up with. We never withdraw our legs from an interesting conversation. We don't slap someone we adore. In short, we might use the right gestures at the wrong time but we can't fake them for they are repulsive in nature and showcase themselves more swiftly and accurately than our tongues.

In a world where humans are nothing but hasty runners merrily concludes the fact of uncertainty of their lives. Death, an impartial judge, announces everyone's end yet the homosapiens remain heedless to its call and carry on with their biased showers and feasts of cruel words and afflictions upon others. This postmodern world we live in, has shaped our ethics accordingly and we readily behave conforming to its bestowed trials. We feel privileged in clashing with gaieties yet, at the same time, distressed for not attaining the remainder ones.

Enzo might not be a human like you or me but he surely has humanity slashed in his every inch. He views calamities as a portion for strengthening one's belief in the fact that “*Bad things don't last forever and better things will come*”. For each time Denny was being struck with quite a many mishaps and tragedies, how desperately Enzo wished to take control of the situation or to, at least, confer his inner most problem solving abilities to his master. How sharply he

noticed the ruthless gestures of the Twins and wished to rip their zebras apart.

Enzo understands our race more than us and thinks of homosapiens as living beings with an intensive nerve for grooming ourselves to look good for the ones we want to look good for. Beginning of chapter 6 is a perfect example of Enzo's psycho analysis of Eve where he says:

"Her name was Eve, and at first I resented how she changed our lives. I resented the attention Denny paid to her small hands..... my nails grew too long and scratched the wood floor; she frequently attended to her nails with sticks and clippers and polished to make sure they were the proper shape and size." (Chapter 6; Page 21)

Continuing the same chapter, we further see how Enzo remembers even the slightest detail about Denny's parents that they don't travel well with his master and how men prefer protecting their personal belongings than their pets when Enzo was allowed to Denny and Eve's wedding on strict conditions. It's ultimately true that men have enslaved themselves with materialistic stuff and have become ignorant of what's more important. We will automatically be more reliable to our own child or relationships rather than our pets for they do not possess tongue and hence can't convey their feelings which would automatically make it vulnerable for us to understand them better. It is also crucial to keep in mind that we humans have passionate desires. For everything. We live by the choices we make yet deny the opportunities available in our way. We ignore the gifts we are given and greedily yearn for more.

Today's man is bound by countless covetous cravings which readily enable him to wish more. The same goes for Denny Swift when he became hopeless of getting Zoe back for he ran out of money and had no other option but to let go of her daughter but then again it was Enzo's profanity that he peed on the documents and Denny, ultimately, had to ponder over his decision of handing Zoe over to the Twins.

Dog is man's most loyal partner either in crime or in felony. He feels every pain and senses, even the slightest motion, at the peak of perfection and that was the main reason Enzo could sense Eve's disease long before it had occupied her brain. In the end of chapter 7 where Enzo says:

"My nose-yes, my little black nose that is leathery and cute-could smell the disease in Eve's brain long before even she knew it was there." (Chapter 7; Page 37)

It clearly showcases his supernatural abilities over which we humans doubt. We often forget the fact that we are not everything nor we can be. We, sometimes, have to let things

control by others so that better results can be achieved. Sometimes, we must trust on other's abilities in order to incorporate a change.

Stein has mischievously managed to knead the plot in the impression of Magic Realism where he present both the reader and the narrator an artistic fantasy to dive into. The main genre of this novel as described by Sharon Bliss is:

"In magical realism, the realism plays a bigger role. The primary plot will be about real things in the real world, but there is an undercurrent of magic. It's so real in fact, that the author may imply that the characters themselves may not be reliable narrators, so as to not be too decisive about the existence of magic. In magical realism, the magic often sneaks up on you and you wonder whether or not you're supposed to believe it's really happening."

The main theme line of this story *"That which you manifest is before you"* summarizes everything that's being elaborated in the whole story. We are the creators of our own destiny and we can fight any calamity and constraint prevailing in our way through perseverance and diligence. We must cherish the gifts we are given for free especially when it comes to appreciate our verbal skills. Tongue might seem a loath of flesh but it's our persona' identity. It's the main reason why Enzo felt irritated in Chapter 12 where he says:

"It's frustrating for me to be unable to speak. To feel that I have so much to say, so many ways I can help, but I'm locked in a soundproof box on my microphone and they never let me out". (Chapter 12; Page 63)

Another main point to contemplate here is about opportunities available to a common man like Denny, you or me. In the same Chapter 12 where Enzo says:

"If you taught me to read and provided for me the same computer system as someone has provided for Stephen Hawking, I, too, would write great books". (Chapter 12; page 65)

This line highlights the lack of chances appear to common homosapiens or abundance of venues presented to people like Stephen Hawking where they utilize their potential and travel on a path to change the world. Whereas, a common man remains common and his potential unnoticed. Enzo felt that scarce pain and hounded a painful voice against the brutality of today's postmodern world where the one who availed a successful opportunity seem to encounter quite a few barriers in the path of his prevailing success whereas a local man rests while his talent rots. Contrary to this reality, not everyone gets equal opportunity nor will everyone be able to; for not everything we fancy does good to someone else too. The miraculous experiments Stephen Hawking is

carrying out are of his mental capabilities and a common man, too, should strive to create opportunities if they aren't available to him for the life is a race and only that would win who had a control over his car and eyes because your car goes where your eyes go.

Garth Stein has sowed a many mythical elements in this novel and related them to reality. A few of twined Magic Realism concepts are as follows:

Enzo, being a dog, narrates the story which is usually unusual for the reader because Stein has given all the authority of judgment to the dog. (Magic Realism)

Enzo sees the flaws and positive aspects of human beings and present his views regarding different characters.

As the novel is a postmodern work, it justifies the behavior of the man accordingly. Characters are usually less patient, selfish and emotionless.

Enzo is not an ordinary dog. He is philosophical and sharp observer. He has abilities to respond and react to certain situations. Stein has given Enzo all the human like qualities except he can't talk that is why in the beginning of the novel, Enzo says:

"Gestures are all that I have; sometimes they must be grand in nature" (Chapter 1; Page 1)

Stein has also presented a fantasy concept of a "zebra", a toy which gets life at night. Enzo is so afraid of the zebra that he starts thinking that zebra will occupy his family and murder him. Whereas, Zebra is the metaphor for the evils of human soul.

"But trust me when I tell you that the zebra is real. Somewhere, the zebra is dancing." (Chapter 12; Page 66)

Enzo has feelings and he is too emotional towards his family. He understands the pain and emotions of Eve, financial problems of Denny, Ethical penury in Eve's parents and the other problems of different characters which a human cannot understand according to Enzo. He gives space to the family and he understands their privacy and family seclusion.

"They needed this. This moment. It was important to them as a family, and I understood that" (Chapter 14; Page 83)

Chapter 18 in the novel is about a "Mythical concept" presented by Garth Stein where Enzo says:

"I learned that from a program on the National Geographic Channel, so I believe it is true. Not all dogs return as men, they say; only those who are ready. I am ready." (Chapter 18; Page 98)

Enzo strongly believes this concept of Mongolians that Dogs are human and they will be returned in the human body. When he dies, he says:

"When a dog dies, his soul is released to run until he is ready to be reborn. I remember. "It's okay." When I am reborn as a man, I will find Denny. I will find Zoë. I will walk up to them and shake their hands and tell them that Enzo says hello. They will see." (Chapter 58; Page 316)

Along with the ultimate success of Art of Racing in the Rain, different people have stated out their opinions about the novel. Some of them are presented below:

If you have yet to read this wonderful novel, do yourself a favor and do so. It's original and captivating, and I simply adored Enzo (the narrator ... who also happens to be a dog). It tells the story of a particular family, with twists and turns that keep the pages turning. It's a perfect read for a rainy afternoon or while lying in bed, the kind of novel that you'll remember long after you've finished – Nicholas Sparks (Rain and Stein)

No, Enzo isn't the problem in Stein's novel. People are the problem. And as the plot thickens around Denny Swift, Enzo's owner, the narrative arc starts to sag – Maggie Galehouse ("The Art Of Racing In The Rain By Garth Stein")

This book reminded me of my Pitbull, Tipa. She passed away too young (5 y/o). She was there for me during some real tough times but what I learned from Enzo was to remember all the good times she was there for as well – Eric Rhodes ("Now The Whole Family Can Enjoy Enzo! - Bookreporter.Com")

I love this book! After reading, drying my eyes and feeling the warmth in my heart, I wrote my very first fan letter. I love dogs, treasure the ones I have had and those I have now. The junior edition should be required reading for middle and high schoolers. Go Enzo and go Garth! – Julie Vita ("Now The Whole Family Can Enjoy Enzo! - Bookreporter.Com")

While reading many comments, it's important to know the main inspiration behind writing such a remarkable novel. In an interview by Misha Berson, Seattle Times theater critic, Garth Stein explains:

"The Art of Racing in the Rain" came from the poem "The Revenant," by former U.S. poet laureate Billy Collins, which is "narrated by a dead dog speaking from doggy heaven." ("Garth Stein's 'The Art Of Racing In The Rain' To Be Staged At Book-It")

Now after all the analysis, if we take a closer look at the elements of this novel, we will notice many hidden messages beautifully crafted inside.

- **Unawareness of Death**

Being social souls, we take many accidents for granted including the major phenomena of death. Despite of

knowing the fact that we have to leave all behind, we crush our self in this materialistic world and for its temporary dwellings. But Enzo knew his end from the very beginning. He knew that his end is near yet he lived its every moment, treasured every memory and buried every sorrow. Despite of getting weaker bones, he didn't compromised his faith and stayed faithful to Denny till the end. Enzo also knew that something was stirring in Eve's brain yet he couldn't convey his deadly prediction just because he was at loss of words for not possessing any tongue.

- **Lack of Emotional Understanding**

It's ridiculously mesmerizing knowing how Enzo remembers Zoe's favorite breakfast and growls when Twins serve her other than that. Also, Enzo sharply understands behaviors of every person he comes across and mortifies himself on their unprompted usage. Enzo explains the behavior of postmodern man as he was the witness of all the ups and downs of his master. Enzo stood with Denny among his joys and sorrows. After observing such behaviors, he also doubts that does he really want to become human in the next life? Enzo explains Denny's trauma as:

Imagine this. Imagine having your wife die suddenly of a brain cancer. Then imagine having her parents attack you mercilessly in order to gain custody of your daughter. Imagine that they exploit allegations of sexual molestation against you; they hire very expensive and clever lawyers because they have much more money than you have. Imagine that they prevent you from having any contact with your six-year-old daughter for months on end. And imagine they restrict your ability to earn money to support yourself and, of course, as you hope, your daughter. How long would you last before your will was broken?" (Chapter 39; Page 229)

- **Artificiality of Relations**

Enzo realizes how the Twins fake their behavior and animosity. He also notices how Annika tries molesting Denny and demonstrates extreme artificiality. At times like these when human behavior encounter great loss of superiority, Enzo doubts his wish to be incarnated as a man. Eve's parents who were too sensitive about the custody of Zoe, did not nurture her in a proper way. After they filed a case against Denny, their image totally shatters down in the eyes of Enzo.

"Contrivers. Manipulators. They were no longer people to me. They were now the Evil Twins. Evil, horrible, dastardly people who stuffed themselves with burning hot peppers in order to fuel the bile in their stomachs. When they laughed,

flames shot out of their noses. They were not worthy of life, these people." (Chapter 39; Page 229)

"They didn't spend a moment thinking about her welfare; after dinner, they didn't even ask why she hadn't eaten the bananas. They allowed her to leave the table having eaten almost nothing." (Chapter 39; Page 231)

- **Prompt Usage of Gestures**

It's solely true that we homosapiens do not render our services until exchange of something valuable and we, also, do not ponder, not even for a good second, to utter what we feel. Words are way more powerful than Mount Everest and can easily shake someone's originality. Same goes for gestures. As superior beings, unlike Enzo, our gestures at the wrong time might bring a disaster upon our relations.

Summing up all the figures and elements, we can undoubtedly conclude the fascination of this novel and the messages it contains. Stein has used many metaphors to awake us from our slumber and ponder over the beauty of life. The life which is a race. A race summoning our fears, failures, successes and accomplishments. Accomplishments being attained by our control over our senses. Our senses, the second name of our car. Our car, our life.

We know we can't control everything so it's better to take responsibility of our actions so that we can measure our potential and act accordingly to overcome our fears, failures and desires for after all your car goes where your eyes go.

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