

paul bowles let it come down

paul bowles let it come down is a seminal work in 20th-century literature, notable for its exploration of existential despair and cultural dislocation. Published in 1957, this novel by Paul Bowles delves into the chaotic underbelly of Tangier, Morocco, during a time of political tension and social upheaval. The narrative follows an American protagonist who becomes entangled in the city's dangerous and morally ambiguous atmosphere. This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the themes, style, and historical context of Paul Bowles' *Let It Come Down*, highlighting its significance in modern literature. Additionally, it explores the author's life, the novel's critical reception, and its enduring impact on readers and writers alike. The following sections offer a detailed breakdown of the novel's literary elements and cultural relevance.

- Overview of Paul Bowles and *Let It Come Down*
- Plot Summary and Setting
- Themes and Literary Style
- Historical and Cultural Context
- Critical Reception and Legacy

Overview of Paul Bowles and *Let It Come Down*

Paul Bowles was an American expatriate writer and composer known for his unique literary voice and vivid portrayals of life in North Africa. His novel *Let It Come Down* stands as a key example of his exploration of alienation and the often bleak realities of human existence. Unlike his earlier work, *The Sheltering Sky*, this novel takes a darker, more psychologically intense approach to the expatriate experience and the complexities of cultural immersion. Bowles' background as a composer influenced his narrative style, which is often noted for its rhythm and atmospheric quality. His deep familiarity with Moroccan society and Western expatriate communities adds authenticity and depth to the novel's portrayal of Tangier.

Plot Summary and Setting

Plot Overview

Let It Come Down follows the story of Nelson Dyar, a young American who arrives in Tangier with few possessions and no clear plans. Soon after his arrival, Dyar becomes involved in a series of morally questionable activities, including drug use, violence, and a descent into existential chaos. The novel charts his gradual disintegration as he navigates the shadowy world of the city's underbelly. Through Dyar's experiences, Bowles examines themes of identity, alienation, and the consequences of surrendering to the darker impulses of the human psyche.

Setting: Tangier in the 1950s

The setting of Tangier is critical to the novel's atmosphere and themes. During the 1950s, Tangier was an international zone characterized by political uncertainty and diverse cultural influences. This cosmopolitan environment provided a backdrop for the novel's exploration of cultural clash and moral ambiguity. Bowles captures the city's exotic yet menacing qualities, revealing a place where traditional values and modern chaos collide. The city itself becomes almost a character in the narrative, influencing the protagonist's fate and underscoring the novel's existential motifs.

Themes and Literary Style

Existentialism and Alienation

One of the central themes in Paul Bowles' Let It Come Down is existential alienation. The protagonist's journey reflects a broader human struggle with meaninglessness and despair. Bowles uses Dyar's isolation and moral ambiguity to explore how individuals confront or evade the void at the heart of existence. The novel's tone is often bleak, emphasizing the sense of detachment from society and self that defines much of modern existential literature.

Morality and Decadence

The novel also delves deeply into questions of morality, particularly the tension between societal norms and individual freedom. Dyar's descent into decadence—marked by drug use, violence, and abandonment of ethical constraints—exemplifies the dangers of unchecked hedonism and nihilism.

Bowles does not offer easy answers but instead presents a complex portrayal of human behavior in extreme circumstances. This ambiguity invites readers to reflect on the nature of good and evil within a fractured social landscape.

Literary Style and Narrative Technique

Bowles' narrative style in *Let It Come Down* is notable for its spare, precise prose and atmospheric descriptions. His use of language creates a vivid sense of place and mood, immersing readers in Tangier's unsettling environment. The novel employs a third-person perspective focused tightly on Dyar, allowing insight into his psychological state while maintaining a degree of narrative distance. This technique enhances the themes of alienation and disorientation. Bowles' style is often compared to that of other mid-20th-century modernist writers, blending existential themes with a stark, minimalist approach.

Historical and Cultural Context

Tangier's Political and Social Landscape

The historical backdrop of Tangier during the 1950s is essential to understanding the novel's setting and atmosphere. At the time, Tangier was an international zone governed by multiple countries, creating a politically complex and unstable environment. This uncertainty is mirrored in the novel's mood of chaos and moral confusion. The city's diverse population, including Europeans, Moroccans, and expatriates, contributes to the cultural tension that permeates the story. Bowles' intimate knowledge of this milieu adds depth to the narrative and highlights the broader themes of cultural displacement and colonial legacy.

Paul Bowles' Expatriate Experience

Paul Bowles himself lived in Tangier for much of his life, making him a firsthand witness to the city's changing dynamics. His expatriate status and fascination with non-Western cultures informed much of his writing. *Let It Come Down* reflects Bowles' critical perspective on Western imperialism and the alienation experienced by outsiders in foreign lands. His portrayal of Tangier is neither romanticized nor overly critical but presents a nuanced view shaped by personal experience and literary insight.

Critical Reception and Legacy

Initial Reception

Upon its release, *Let It Come Down* received mixed reviews, with some critics praising its unflinching portrayal of moral decay and others finding its bleakness challenging. Over time, however, the novel has gained recognition as a significant work of postwar American literature. Scholars have highlighted its complex exploration of existential themes and its vivid depiction of a unique cultural moment. The novel's reputation has grown in academic circles and among readers interested in modernist and expatriate literature.

Enduring Influence and Literary Significance

Paul Bowles' *Let It Come Down* continues to influence writers and readers interested in themes of alienation, cultural conflict, and existential inquiry. Its portrayal of a protagonist caught between worlds and moral codes resonates with contemporary concerns about identity and displacement. The novel's stylistic innovation and atmospheric depth have secured its place in the canon of 20th-century American fiction. It remains a poignant and challenging exploration of the human condition amid a turbulent social landscape.

Key Aspects of *Let It Come Down*'s Legacy

- Influence on expatriate and postcolonial literature
- Contribution to existentialist fiction
- Insight into mid-20th-century Moroccan society
- Exploration of moral ambiguity and human psychology
- Enduring relevance to themes of alienation and cultural dislocation

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main theme of Paul Bowles' novel 'Let It Come Down'?

The main theme of 'Let It Come Down' is existential despair and moral disintegration, exploring the alienation and chaos experienced by the protagonist in a foreign culture.

Who is the protagonist in 'Let It Come Down' by Paul Bowles?

The protagonist of 'Let It Come Down' is Nelson Dyar, a young American who moves to Tangier and becomes embroiled in the city's underworld.

How does Paul Bowles depict Tangier in 'Let It Come Down'?

Paul Bowles depicts Tangier as a mysterious, exotic, and sometimes dangerous place, highlighting its cultural clashes and the city's atmosphere of decadence and moral ambiguity.

What literary style is used in 'Let It Come Down'?

Paul Bowles employs a sparse, detached narrative style with vivid descriptions and psychological depth, characteristic of mid-20th-century existential literature.

When was 'Let It Come Down' published?

'Let It Come Down' was published in 1952.

How does 'Let It Come Down' reflect Paul Bowles' own experiences?

The novel reflects Bowles' own experiences living in Tangier, capturing the city's unique cultural milieu and his interest in themes of existentialism and human alienation.

What role does the setting of Tangier play in the novel?

Tangier serves as more than just a backdrop; it is a character in itself, embodying chaos, cultural conflict, and a sense of disorientation that mirrors Nelson Dyar's psychological unraveling.

Are there any significant symbols in 'Let It Come

Down' ?

Yes, symbols such as the labyrinthine cityscape of Tangier, the sea, and drug use represent confusion, escape, and moral decay throughout the novel.

How was 'Let It Come Down' received by critics upon its release?

The novel received mixed reviews initially but was praised for its atmospheric writing and exploration of existential themes, eventually gaining recognition as a significant work in post-war American literature.

Additional Resources

1. *The Sheltering Sky* by Paul Bowles

This novel, also by Paul Bowles, explores the existential journey of an American couple traveling through the North African desert. It delves into themes of alienation, cultural clash, and the search for meaning in an indifferent world. Much like **Let It Come Down**, it captures the disorienting experience of being a foreigner in an unfamiliar land.

2. *The Magus* by John Fowles

Set on a Greek island, this psychological novel follows a young Englishman drawn into a mysterious and manipulative world. The book explores themes of identity, power, and existential uncertainty, echoing the psychological tension and moral ambiguity present in **Let It Come Down**. Fowles's rich prose and intricate narrative structure create a haunting atmosphere.

3. *The Stranger* by Albert Camus

This classic existential novel centers on Meursault, an indifferent French Algerian who commits an inexplicable murder. The book's exploration of absurdity, alienation, and moral ambiguity resonates strongly with the themes in **Let It Come Down**, particularly the disconnection from societal norms and the search for meaning in a chaotic world.

4. *The Quiet American* by Graham Greene

Set in Vietnam during the early 1950s, this novel explores political intrigue and personal betrayal. Greene's portrayal of cultural conflict and moral complexity complements the atmosphere of tension and uncertainty found in Bowles's work. The narrative examines the clash between innocence and experience against a backdrop of colonialism.

5. *Journey to the End of the Night* by Louis-Ferdinand Céline

This darkly satirical novel follows a cynical protagonist through war, colonial Africa, and the underbelly of Parisian life. Its raw depiction of human despair and disillusionment parallels the existential themes and grim tone in **Let It Come Down**. Céline's innovative style and bleak worldview have influenced many subsequent writers.

6. *The Painted Bird* by Jerzy Kosiński

A harrowing tale of a boy wandering through Eastern Europe during World War II, this novel explores themes of violence, isolation, and survival. Like **Let It Come Down**, it portrays a protagonist deeply alienated from society and struggling with the darkness of human nature. The narrative is both brutal and poetic, challenging the reader's sensibilities.

7. *Under the Volcano* by Malcolm Lowry

Set in Mexico on the Day of the Dead, this novel chronicles the final day of a British consul battling alcoholism and despair. Its intense psychological insight and vivid setting evoke the existential crisis and cultural dislocation present in Bowles's work. Lowry's richly symbolic prose creates a haunting meditation on self-destruction.

8. *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys

A prequel to **Jane Eyre**, this novel gives voice to Bertha Mason, the "madwoman in the attic," exploring themes of colonialism, identity, and madness in the Caribbean. The book's exploration of cultural displacement and psychological turmoil complements the themes of alienation and existential dread in **Let It Come Down**.

9. *Waiting for the Barbarians* by J.M. Coetzee

This allegorical novel examines the moral and political implications of imperialism through the eyes of a colonial magistrate. Its exploration of power, complicity, and ethical ambiguity resonates with the darker themes of **Let It Come Down**. Coetzee's spare prose and philosophical depth invite reflection on human nature and societal decay.

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