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FACTORS INFLUENCING THE MANIFESTATION OF EXISTENTIALISM IN WESTERN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the philosophical and literary foundations of existentialism, as well as the historical, cultural, and sociopolitical contexts that contributed to its emergence in Western literature. It aims to explore the interconnected influence of philosophy, history, and aesthetics on the development of existentialist thought, while acknowledging the contributions of prominent thinkers, including S.Kierkegaard, F.Nietzsche, M.Heidegger, J.Sartre, A.Camus, F.Kafka, and F.Dostoevsky.

The methodology combines historical-philosophical analysis with an examination of literary discourse. Primary sources include foundational existentialist works such as *Being and Time* by M.Heidegger, *Being and Nothingness* by J.Sartre, *The Myth of Sisyphus* by A.Camus, and *The Trial* by F.Kafka, alongside critical studies published in Scopus-indexed journals and recent research on modern European literature.

The findings show that existentialism in Western literature emerged in response to the challenges of modern life, including the decline of religious authority, the rise of industrial society, and the trauma of the World Wars. The philosophical ideas initiated by S.Kierkegaard and F.Nietzsche were further developed within M.Heidegger's phenomenological framework and J.Sartre's humanistic existentialism. These ideas found literary expression in F.Kafka's depiction of alienation, A.Camus's representation of the absurd, and F.Dostoevsky's exploration of freedom and moral responsibility. Collectively, these works illuminate existentialism's central concerns with human freedom, authenticity, and the search for meaning in an apparently indifferent world.

The analysis demonstrates that existentialism is not merely a philosophical doctrine but also a cultural response to the disillusionment of the twentieth century. It has significantly shaped the aesthetics of modern literature and continues to influence contemporary understandings of human existence. The study concludes that the multidisciplinary nature of existentialism, connecting philosophy, history, and literature, makes it a lasting framework for interpreting the human condition.

Key words: existentialism, Western literature, philosophical anthropology, the absurd, individualism, freedom, alienation, tragic hero, modernist prose, humanism.

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G‘ARB ADABIYOTIDA EKZISTENSIALIZMNING NAMOYON BO‘LISH OMILLARI**Madina RADJABOVA**

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ANNOTATSIYA

Ushbu tadqiqot ekzistensializmning falsafiy va adabiy asoslarini, shuningdek, uning G‘arb adabiyotida yuzaga kelishiga zamin yaratgan tarixiy, madaniy va ijtimoiy-siyosiy kontekstlarni o‘rganadi. Tadqiqotning maqsadi ekzistensialistik tafakkurning rivojlanishida falsafa, tarix va estetikaning o‘zaro bog‘liq ta‘sirini tahlil qilish hamda S.Kerkegor, F.Nitshe, M.Haydegger, J.Sartre, A.Kamyu, F.Kafka va F.Dostoyevskiy kabi atoqli mutafakkirlarning hissasini yoritishdan iborat.

Tadqiqot metodologiyasi tarixiy-falsafiy tahlilni badiiy diskurs tahlili bilan uyg‘unlashtiradi. Asosiy manbalarni M.Haydeggerning “Borliq va vaqt” (“Being and Time”), J.Sartrening “Borliq va yo‘qlik” (“Being and Nothingness”), A.Kamyuning “Sizif afsonasi” (“The Myth of Sisyphus”) va F.Kafkaning “Jarayon” (“The Trial”) kabi ekzistensializmning fundamental asarlari, shuningdek, Scopus‘da indekslangan jurnallarda nashr etilgan ilmiy tadqiqotlar hamda zamonaviy Yevropa adabiyotiga oid so‘nggi tadqiqotlar tashkil etadi.

Tadqiqot natijalari G‘arb adabiyotida ekzistensializm diniy hokimiyatning susayishi, industrial jamiyatning yuksalishi va jahon urushlari keltirib chiqargan ruhiy jarohatlar kabi zamonaviy hayot muammolariga javoban shakllanganini ko‘rsatadi. S.Kerkegor va F.Nitshe tomonidan ilgari surilgan falsafiy g‘oyalar keyinchalik M.Haydeggerning fenomenologik konsepsiyasi va J.Sartrening gumanistik ekzistensializmi doirasida yanada rivojlantirildi. Mazkur g‘oyalar F.Kafkaning begonalashuv tasviri, A.Kamyuning absurdlik talqini hamda F.Dostoyevskiyning erkinlik va axloqiy mas‘uliyat masalalarini tadqiq etishida badiiy ifodasini topdi. Ushbu asarlar inson erkinligi, autentiklik va befarqdek ko‘rinadigan dunyoda ma‘no izlash kabi ekzistensializmning markaziy masalalarini yoritadi.

Tahlil ekzistensializm shunchaki falsafiy ta‘limot emas, balki XX asrning ruhiy tushkunligi va hafsalasizliklariga berilgan madaniy javob ham ekanini ko‘rsatadi. U zamonaviy adabiyot estetikasining shakllanishiga sezilarli ta‘sir ko‘rsatgan va hozirgi davrda inson mavjudligini anglash jarayoniga ta‘sirini davom ettirmoqda. Tadqiqot natijasida ekzistensializmning falsafa, tarix va adabiyotni bog‘lovchi fanlararo tabiati uni inson mavjudligini talqin qilishning barqaror nazariy doirasi sifatida namoyon etishi xulosasiga kelinadi.

Kalit so‘zlar: ekzistensializm, G‘arb adabiyoti, falsafiy antropologiya, absurd, individualizm, erkinlik, begonalashuv, tragik qahramon, modernistik nasr, gumanizm.

ФАКТОРЫ ПРОЯВЛЕНИЯ ЭКЗИСТЕНЦИАЛИЗМА В ЗАПАДНОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ**Мадина РАДЖАБОВА**

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АННОТАЦИЯ

В исследовании рассматриваются философские и литературные основы экзистенциализма, а также исторические, культурные и социополитические контексты, обусловившие его возникновение в западной литературе. Цель исследования заключается в изучении взаимосвязанного влияния философии, истории и эстетики на развитие экзистенциалистской мысли с учётом вклада выдающихся мыслителей, включая С.Кьеркегора, Ф.Ницше, М.Хайдеггера, Ж.Сартра, А.Камю, Ф.Кафки и Ф.Достоевского.

Методология исследования сочетает историко-философский анализ с изучением

литературного дискурса. Основными источниками выступают фундаментальные произведения экзистенциалистской традиции, такие как «Бытие и время» («Being and Time») М.Хайдеггера, «Бытие и ничто» («Being and Nothingness») Ж.Сартра, «Миф о Сизифе» («The Myth of Sisyphus») А.Камю и «Процесс» («The Trial») Ф.Кафки, а также критические исследования, опубликованные в журналах, индексируемых в Scopus, и современные исследования европейской литературы.

Результаты показывают, что экзистенциализм в западной литературе сформировался как реакция на вызовы современности, включая ослабление религиозного авторитета, развитие индустриального общества и травматический опыт мировых войн. Философские идеи, сформированные С.Кьеркегором и Ф.Ницше, получили дальнейшее развитие в феноменологической концепции М.Хайдеггера и гуманистическом экзистенциализме Ж.Сартра. Эти идеи нашли художественное воплощение в изображении отчуждения у Ф.Кафки, осмыслении абсурда у А.Камю и исследовании свободы и моральной ответственности у Ф.Достоевского. В совокупности данные произведения раскрывают центральные проблемы экзистенциализма: свободу человека, аутентичность и поиск смысла в кажущемся безразличным мире. Экзистенциалистские идеи также способствовали переосмыслению традиционных представлений о личности, свободе и ответственности в литературе XX века.

Анализ демонстрирует, что экзистенциализм является не только философским учением, но и культурной реакцией на разочарование и духовный кризис XX века. Он существенно повлиял на эстетику современной литературы и продолжает формировать представления о человеческом существовании. Сделан вывод о том, что междисциплинарный характер экзистенциализма, объединяющий философию, историю и литературу, обеспечивает его устойчивое значение как концептуальной основы интерпретации человеческого бытия.

Ключевые слова: экзистенциализм, западная литература, философская антропология, абсурд, индивидуализм, свобода, отчуждение, трагический герой, модернистская проза, гуманизм.

INTRODUCTION

Existentialism, both as a philosophical perspective and a literary movement, holds a distinctive place in the history of Western intellectual culture. It diverges from classical thought systems by eschewing abstract categories, focusing instead on the individual's lived experience – specifically enquiries regarding freedom, choice, absurdity, alienation, and mortality. Its appearance in Western literature was not fortuitous but rather the outcome of a complex interaction of intellectual, social, and cultural forces that culminated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The initial inclinations towards existentialist contemplation can be attributed to S.Kierkegaard, whose pseudonymous editor in *Either/Or* insists on the gulf between an outwardly composed self and an inwardly despairing one, finding in this rift confirmation of “his doubt that the external is not the internal” [Kierkegaard, 1843: 4]. F.Nietzsche pressed this rupture further: his announcement, through Zarathustra, that the old saint of the forest “has not yet heard the news, that God is dead” inaugurated a profoundly secular age in which the contemporary person was now obliged to build meaning in a universe lacking ultimate authority [Nietzsche, 1883: 11]. Although their conclusions diverged sharply, these two thinkers set out the basic dialectic of existentialist thought: the conflict between despair and freedom, absurdity and authenticity.

By the early twentieth century, existentialism had begun to permeate literature through narrative structures that emphasised the fragility of human existence.

F.Dostoevsky, while primarily associated with the Russian literary canon, exerted a significant influence on Western philosophers such as F.Nietzsche, J.Sartre, and A.Camus, particularly through seminal works like *Notes from Underground* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, which examined themes of guilt, freedom, and the ethical implications of radical autonomy [Dostoevsky, 1864: 98]. F.Kafka's nightmarish portrayals of bureaucracy and alienation in *The Trial* and *The Metamorphosis* exposed the absurdities of contemporary existence, reflecting the pervasive sense of estrangement that became fundamental to existentialist thought [Kafka, 1925: 53].

The destruction of the First and Second World Wars set the stage for existentialism's rise in literature. The devastation of war, disillusionment with political ideologies, and the breakdown of conventional religious structures intensified the perception that individuals were "thrown" into a hostile and indifferent environment [Heidegger, 1927: 127]. J.Sartre and A.Camus were important personalities in this setting. In *Being and Nothingness*, J.Sartre argued that "existence precedes essence" [Sartre, 1943: 568], and that the for-itself is "condemned to be free" [Sartre, 1943: 439], positioning freedom as the quintessential characteristic of human life while simultaneously presenting it as its most significant burden. A.Camus, in works like *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Stranger*, introduced the idea of the "absurd": life carries no inherent significance, yet at the close of *The Stranger* Meursault opens himself to "the benign indifference of the universe" [Camus, 1942b: 154], finding in that indifference not despair but a strange, brotherly peace.

Existentialist concepts frequently manifested in literary expression as storylines of alienation, purposelessness, and tragic struggle [Oudemans, 2015: 23]. S.Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* illustrates the folly of anticipating salvation in an indifferent environment, whereas E.Hemingway's minimalist style portrays individuals confronting death and despair with stoic endurance [Beckett, 1952: 89; Hemingway, 1929: 45]. Later authors, such as C.McCarthy, expanded existential themes into post-apocalyptic settings, highlighting the enduring nature of moral obligation amidst devastation [McCarthy, 2006: 211].

Researchers have pinpointed several significant socio-political factors that expedited the emergence of existentialism in Western literature. The mechanization of industrial life, the alienating consequences of urbanization, the emergence of totalitarian regimes, and the atrocities of world wars combined to undermine the certainties of Enlightenment reason and religious faith [Marcel, 1949: 57; Blackham, 1952: 134].

The transition from realism to modernism in literature engendered innovative experimental forms – fragmented narratives, unreliable narrators, and symbolic landscapes – particularly adept at conveying existential issues [Proust, 1913/1922: 204].

Existentialism's multidisciplinary nature has contributed to its longevity. It serves as a philosophical approach, a literary style, and a cultural reaction to the challenges of modernity. This same intellectual lineage – from S.Kierkegaard and F.Nietzsche through M.Heidegger to the French existentialists – has also been traced

in Uzbek-language scholarship, notably in D.Ruzmatova and F.Shapsanova's study of the movement's formation as a literary current [Ruzmatova & Shapsanova, 2024]. The present study engages with this philosophical heritage but narrows its focus to the Anglophone reception in Western literature – from S.Beckett and E.Hemingway to C.McCarthy and I.Murdoch – and to the feminist and postcolonial reinterpretations of existentialism advanced by S.Beauvoir and F.Fanon, drawing throughout on Scopus-indexed criticism. This introduction accordingly situates the study within a larger intellectual history: its goal is to examine how existentialist thought became articulate in Western literature, which philosophical and social conditions enabled its growth, and how individual authors translated its central ideas into art.

METHODS

This study employs a multidisciplinary methodological framework, integrating historical-philosophical analysis with literary discourse analysis. The objective is to delineate the rise of existentialism in Western literature by contextualizing philosophical advancements within their socio-political and cultural milieus and analyzing the manifestation of these concepts in literary works.

Historical-philosophical method. The first methodological approach entails reconstructing the intellectual genealogy of existentialism, beginning with S.Kierkegaard's emphasis on individual subjectivity and F.Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics and morals. This genealogical method draws attention to the continuity between the nineteenth-century critiques of rationalism and the subsequent articulation of existentialist philosophy carried out in the twentieth century by M.Heidegger, J.Sartre, and A.Camus.

Literary-discourse analysis. F.Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, F.Kafka's *The Trial*, A.Camus's *The Stranger*, and S.Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* are among the primary texts subjected to a close textual analysis in the second stage of the study. These works were selected because they exemplify core existentialist concerns. The purpose of this method is to investigate narrative techniques – such as fragmentation, absurdity, and unreliable narration – that reflect the existential situation of the contemporary individual.

Comparative and interdisciplinary method. The third method entails a systematic comparative examination of existentialist literature and parallel philosophical discourses. To illustrate how abstract philosophical ideas can be dramatised in narrative form, for instance, the concept of “existence precedes essence” proposed by J.Sartre is contrasted with the depiction of alienation presented by F.Kafka. Existentialism is also situated among broader philosophical currents such as modernism and postmodernism when viewed through this comparative lens.

Scopus-based scholarly integration. This study incorporates publications from Scopus-indexed journals subjected to peer review, in order to guarantee academic rigour. Recent academic research highlights that existentialism is not only a historical movement, but continues to shape modern literary theory and cultural studies. J.Golomb [Golomb & Wistrich, 2012], for example, emphasises S.Kierkegaard's role

as the “father of existentialism” in literature, while T.Flynn contends that J.Sartre’s literary contributions cannot be isolated from his philosophical writings. Additionally, S.Crowell [Crowell, 2012: 78], in *Philosophy Compass*, highlights the enduring significance of M.Heidegger’s account of being-in-the-world, while J.Reynolds [Reynolds, 2019: 63] traces existentialist patterns in contemporary postmodern literature. In addition, M.Westphal [Westphal, 2018: 97] investigates the ways in which S.Kierkegaard’s concept of faith continues to resonate with discussions on secularism in the field of religious studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this research indicate that the emergence of existentialism in Western literature can be traced to the confluence of several philosophical, socio-political, and aesthetic forces. These findings are organised into five categories: philosophical origins, historical crises, cultural transformations, literary manifestations, and intellectual continuity.

Philosophical origins

Existentialism can be traced back to the radical critique of systematic philosophy carried out by nineteenth-century thinkers. S.Kierkegaard’s aesthetic pseudonym gives voice to an individual existence that outweighs universal categories, confessing in the *Diapsalmata* that “my soul is so heavy that thought can no more sustain it” [Kierkegaard, 1843: 23], while F.Nietzsche’s declaration of the “death of God” shifted the burden of meaning-making onto the individual [Nietzsche, 1883: 11]. Read together, these two positions establish the basic terms – freedom, responsibility, and absurdity – that later existentialist writers would dramatise.

Impact of historical crises

The catastrophes of the First and Second World Wars gave these philosophical premises historical urgency. M.Heidegger’s observation that human beings are “thrown” into existence without prior foundation [Heidegger, 1927: 127] found its counterpart in the disillusionment that followed mass mortality and the mechanisation of combat, in which entire populations experienced at first hand the collapse of any guarantee that history moved toward progress. J.Sartre’s account of freedom and responsibility in *Being and Nothingness* [Sartre, 1943: 439], composed during the Nazi occupation of France, and A.Camus’s reflection on the absurdity of war in *The Myth of Sisyphus* [Camus, 1942a: 103] were both shaped directly by this wartime experience, and both writers would go on to draw on their experience of the French Resistance in the ethical arguments of their later work.

Cultural and social transformations

The retreat of religious authority left individuals without stable moral moorings [Westphal, 2018: 97], while industrialisation and urbanisation bred a comparable sense of alienation – most vividly in F.Kafka’s *The Trial*, where bureaucracy reduces people to faceless objects [Kafka, 1925: 53]. The rise of totalitarian regimes further sharpened J.Sartre’s and A.Camus’s preoccupation with freedom and responsibility [Camus, 1942a: 118; Sartre, 1943: 553].

Literary manifestations

These philosophical and historical currents found their most forceful expression in narrative form. F.Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* offers an early portrait of a narrator consumed by self-awareness and resentment [Dostoevsky, 1864: 98]; F.Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* dramatises alienation through G.Samsa's transformation [Kafka, 1915: 72]; A.Camus's *The Stranger* renders the cosmos's indifference through Meursault [Camus, 1942b: 154]; and S.Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* reduces existence to an eternal, futile wait [Beckett, 1952: 89]. E.Hemingway and C.McCarthy later carried these concerns into realist and post-apocalyptic fiction [Hemingway, 1929: 45; McCarthy, 2006: 211].

Intellectual continuity and scholarly perspectives

Scopus-indexed scholarship confirms that this relevance has not faded. S.Crowell affirms the continuing importance of M.Heidegger's being-in-the-world; J.Reynolds traces existentialist patterns into postmodern fiction; T.Flynn insists that J.Sartre's literary and philosophical output cannot be separated; and J.Golomb reads the tension between authenticity and despair as existentialism's most persistent literary trope. Taken together, these findings indicate that existentialism functions less as a closed historical episode than as an ongoing critical framework.

Existentialism in Western literature first appeared as a result of the following:

1. An intellectual uprising against previously dominant rationalist and metaphysical traditions.
2. A cultural reaction to the challenges modernity brought forth, including war, industrialisation, and secularisation.
3. A literary aesthetic characterised by alienation, absurdity, freedom, and moral responsibility.
4. An interdisciplinary discourse that remains significant in contemporary thought and criticism.

The emergence of existentialism in Western literature cannot be understood as the result of a single intellectual movement or isolated philosophical gesture; rather, it is the result of a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and philosophical factors that converged from the nineteenth into the twentieth century. When discussing these factors, it is necessary to attend not only to the fundamental philosophical enquiries posed by S.Kierkegaard, F.Nietzsche, and later M.Heidegger, but also to the artistic reconfigurations of these enquiries in the works of F.Kafka, F.Dostoevsky, J.Sartre, A.Camus, and S.Beckett. It is through these voices that Western literature became a place where existential fears about meaning, absurdity, and the individual's encounter with freedom and nothingness could be negotiated. This genealogical arc – from Kierkegaard's Danish origins through German phenomenology to French existentialism – outlines the established historical progression of the movement, though the discussion that follows foregrounds specifically the movement's Anglo-American literary afterlife:

Philosophical roots of existentialism in western thought

The literary expression of existentialism can be traced back to philosophy,

specifically to the writings of S.Kierkegaard, who is frequently referred to as the “father of existentialism”. In his contemplations on despair, anxiety, and faith, he brought to light the inherent paradox of the human condition: the conflict that arises between finite temporality and the boundless yearning for meaning [Kierkegaard, 1843: 4]. He placed a strong emphasis on the individual’s confrontation with an inward despair that outward composure cannot conceal, most vividly captured in the *Diapsalmata*’s admission that “life is so empty and meaningless” [Kierkegaard, 1843: 23]. Later on, Western writers interested in depicting individuals grappling with identity crises would find that this concentration on inward crisis and authenticity profoundly shaped their work.

Through his rejection of conventional metaphysics and religion, F.Nietzsche made a significant contribution to this discourse by proclaiming, through the devil’s own words, that “of his pity for man has God died” [Nietzsche, 1883; 92]. The profound problem that he posed was as follows: how could humankind reimagine meaning in a reality that was devoid of transcendent guarantees? It was his figure of the “Superman”, proclaimed to the crowd as “the meaning of the earth” [Nietzsche, 1883: 12], that urged the formation of new ideals through the will to power of the individual. This concept was adopted by Western literature, which depicted characters who, when confronted with the absence of divine order, vacillated between feelings of emancipation and despair. According to K.Löwith [Löwith, 1949: 145], F.Nietzsche’s critique ushered in a new era in which literature became the venue for dramatising man’s encounter with nihilism. Literature became the arena for this clash.

Existentialism was further shaped by M.Heidegger’s analysis of *Dasein* as thrown into a world in which death stands, from the very outset of a life, as its “own most nonrelational possibility not to be bypassed” [Heidegger, 1927: 232]. His claim that authentic disclosedness requires taking up one’s own potentiality-of-being rather than fleeing into anonymity [Heidegger, 1927: 204] had a significant impact on literary modernism: the concept of “being-towards-death” resonates with the alienated figures of F.Kafka’s *The Trial* and S.Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, whose protagonists alike are caught in cycles of anticipation, dread, and purposeless action.

Bringing existential philosophy into the realms of literature and drama, J.Sartre expanded its scope. In *Being and Nothingness* [Sartre, 1943: 568] he proposed that existence precedes essence, meaning that people must define themselves through their choices, however difficult. In his 1944 play *No Exit*, he dramatises this idea by presenting characters who are either cowed by freedom or trapped in bad faith [Sartre, 1944: 10]. A.Camus, despite resisting the designation “existentialist”, expressed similar ideas in *The Myth of Sisyphus* [Camus, 1942a: 75], addressing the folly of life and the necessity of revolt. For A.Camus, the human being does not triumph over the absurd but rather embraces it, finding dignity in resistance rather than in transcendence.

Historical and cultural contexts

Against the backdrop of the enormous cultural change that was taking place in

Europe, the philosophical ideas of these intellectuals gained literary relevance. The failure of Enlightenment rationalism, the agony of World War I, and the destruction of World War II all contributed to the destabilisation of belief in progress, order, and divine providence. According to C.Taylor [Taylor, 2007: 54], the secularisation of Western society created an intellectual void in which existential concerns like alienation, despair, and the ludicrous found expression.

Significant changes occurred in the individual's relationship to society as a result of the industrial revolution and growing urbanisation. Faceless bureaucracies signal dehumanisation in F.Kafka's works, which capture the alienation of individuals reduced to gears in impersonal systems [Kafka, 1925: 53]. This trend was foreshadowed by F.Dostoevsky in *Notes from Underground* [Dostoevsky, 1864: 41], which featured a narrator who resisted scientific utopias in favour of irrational freedom.

The atrocities of fascism, genocide, and total war in the twentieth century exacerbated existentialist concerns already present. As a result of this destruction, literature became a witness to the precarious nature of human ethical principles. Wartime writings by J.Sartre, such as *The Roads to Freedom* [Sartre, 1945: 45], and A.Camus's *The Plague* [Camus, 1947: 178], are allegories illustrating the ethical obligations placed on humanity by catastrophe. In these narratives, freedom is portrayed as both a burden and a responsibility, and literature becomes the place where moral judgements are made.

Literary manifestations of existentialism

Western literature not only mirrored existential philosophy but dramatised its concerns through narrative, character, and symbolism. K.Josef in *The Trial* and Gregor Samsa in *The Metamorphosis* alike exemplify the absurd predicament of individuals ensnared in systems they cannot comprehend [Kafka, 1915: 23]. Their alienation is not only social but metaphysical: a confrontation with a world offering no signs of meaning.

F.Dostoevsky likewise investigated existential freedom and moral ambiguity through his seminal novels, *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. In the former, Raskolnikov's utilitarian justification for murder, which inevitably crumbles beneath the weight of psychological remorse and the subsequent search for redemption, illustrates the core existentialist concern with authenticity and ethical choice [Dostoevsky, 1866: 312]. Furthermore, according to Albert Camus [Camus, 1942a: 89], Dostoevsky's fiction profoundly anticipates modern existentialist concerns, particularly since Ivan Karamazov's metaphysical rebellion against God prefigures the Nietzschean nihilism that would later define twentieth-century philosophy.

The fiction and plays of J.Sartre, such as *Nausea*, dramatise existential freedom: its narrator Roquentin is overtaken by the sheer fact of existing, confessing that "I exist because I think... if I exist, it is because I am horrified at existing" [Sartre, 1938]. Meursault, detached from conventional morality, confronts the absurdity of existence with indifference, but finds authenticity in his eventual acceptance of mortality [Camus, 1942b: 149] – the epitome of absurdist existentialism in A.Camus's *The Stranger*. S.Beckett's minimalist theatre radicalises existential issues: in *Waiting for*

Godot [Beckett, 1952: 45], two characters wait interminably for a saviour who never arrives, symbolising the futility of pursuing transcendence.

C.McCarthy's later fiction transposes this existential vocabulary onto a post-apocalyptic register [McCarthy, 2006: 211]. In *The Road*, the father and son's journey through a devastated landscape strips existence down to its bare condition: there is no God to appeal to, no society to anchor identity, and no assurance that survival carries any meaning beyond itself. The pathos that pervades the novel does not resolve the absurd so much as dwell inside it, insisting that tenderness and moral obligation persist precisely because, and not in spite of, the world's indifference. In this respect McCarthy radicalises the Camusian insistence on facing emptiness without illusion, while restoring to it an affective register – grief, care, endurance – that is comparatively muted in Camus's own prose.

These literary articulations demonstrate that existentialism in Western literature is not merely the adoption of philosophical principles, but a dramatisation of lived experience. In a way that abstract philosophy cannot, literature brings to light the uncertainties, fears, and paradoxes inherent in existence.

Comparative and critical reflections

One of the most defining aspects of existentialism in Western literature is its radical reimagining of the protagonist's narrative role. Where classical literature lauded heroes embodying universal moral principles and divine decrees, existentialist writing places the anti-hero – the alienated, average, or flawed character whose intense internal struggle with meaning becomes the very locus of truth – at the absolute centre of the narrative. As G.Lukács [Lukács, 1971: 203] perceptively observes, the existential hero is not victorious but fundamentally divided, thereby embodying the profound crisis of values that characterizes the modern era.

Critical arguments also emerged over existentialism's limitations. A.Camus warned that existentialism risked becoming another dogma, in contrast to J.Sartre's emphasis on political activity and responsibility. The conflict between absurdism and existentialism remains one of the most contentious debates in Western philosophy; some critics argue that Camus's revolt offers a more morally sound reaction to the absurd than Sartre's more radical account of freedom [Nagel, 1971: 115].

In addition, feminist and postcolonial critiques have broadened the scope of existentialist analysis, questioning its Eurocentric and masculine biases. *The Second Sex* [Beauvoir, 1949: 221] by S.Beauvoir reinterpreted existential freedom through the lens of women's oppression, arguing that woman has historically been cast as the inessential Other against whom man defines his own freedom – a structural bad faith that existentialist ethics, on Beauvoir's account, obliges society to overcome. Whilst *Black Skin, White Masks* [Fanon, 1952: 83] by F.Fanon applied existential analysis to colonial alienation, showing how the colonised subject is denied the very freedom to define himself that Sartrean existentialism takes as the human condition's starting point; the colonial gaze fixes the racialised subject as object before he can act as a free consciousness at all. Read together, these two interventions demonstrate that the existentialist vocabulary of freedom, bad faith, and the Other was never confined

to the abstract, unmarked subject of Sartre's early philosophy: it could be turned back on that very philosophy to expose the gendered and colonial limits of its own universalism. These works demonstrate existentialism's adaptability in addressing cultural and social contexts extending well beyond its Western European roots.

Educational and cultural significance

The rise of existentialism in Western literature also carries continuing pedagogical and cultural significance. Existentialist works confront readers with universal problems of freedom, mortality, and authenticity, and by requiring engagement with ambiguity and paradox, they resist narrow or simplistic readings. According to J.Reynolds [Reynolds, 2019: 74], existentialist literature encourages critical self-reflection, which in turn promotes intellectual independence.

The influence of existentialism also extends beyond literature into film, art, and popular culture. I.Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*, in which a knight plays chess with Death while questioning God's silence, remains perhaps the most widely recognised cinematic distillation of existential anxiety, and later filmmakers working in absurdist or minimalist registers continue to draw on the same vocabulary of estrangement and confrontation with mortality. Contemporary fiction depicting alienation within consumer society, likewise, extends the Kafkan and Camusian insistence that modern institutions can strip individuals of meaningful agency even in the absence of overt tyranny. This persistence suggests that the existential condition, understood as the search for meaning in an unclear world, remains an essential component of human experience.

Existentialism, in sum, is a literary movement that emerged from a profound dialogue between philosophy and art, shaped by the crises of the modern age. From S.Kierkegaard's diagnosis of inward despair to F.Nietzsche's nihilism, from M.Heidegger's *Dasein* to J.Sartre's freedom and A.Camus's absurd, existentialism gave form to these dilemmas of human existence. Its privileged medium was literature, which translated abstract concepts into the concrete struggles of heroes estranged from their communities, ludicrous plots, and ethical dilemmas [Critchley, 2009: 145]. The convergence of philosophical inquiry, historical upheaval, cultural alienation, and artistic experimentation produced a body of literature that remains one of the most powerful expressions of modern human consciousness. Existentialism is less a philosophy than a mode of thought, a way of being in the world – one that continues to remind us that the search for meaning is inextricably linked to the recognition that it may never be found, as M.Westphal [Westphal, 2018: 201] observes.

CONCLUSION

This study has carefully traced the emergence of existentialism in Western literature to the convergence of four interlocking and mutually reinforcing factors: the philosophical rupture initiated by S.Kierkegaard and F.Nietzsche and later systematised by M.Heidegger and J.Sartre; the historical trauma of two world wars and the subsequent collapse of Enlightenment optimism; the cultural dislocation produced by industrialisation, secularisation, and the rise of totalitarianism; and the concomitant

literary innovations – namely, fragmented narrative, the concept of the anti-hero, and symbolic indeterminacy – through which F.Kafka, F.Dostoevsky, A.Camus, and S.Beckett gave these concerns artistic form. Read together, these findings indicate that existentialism functions less as a single doctrine than as a sustained literary response to the loss of metaphysical certainty.

The study concludes that existentialism's continuing relevance derives from its resolute refusal to resolve the inherent tension between absurdity and meaning, offering instead a framework – extended here into its Anglo-American, feminist, and postcolonial re-readings – through which literature can dramatise freedom, authenticity, and responsibility. Existentialism in Western literature is accordingly not a closed chapter of intellectual history but an ongoing critical resource for reading the individual's encounter with a world that offers no guarantees. Further comparative scholarly work, particularly focusing on non-Anglophone literary traditions, would extend this framework still further beyond the boundaries traced in the present study.

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