

**THE INFLUENCE OF EXISTENTIALISM ON 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY  
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**Abstract.** This article explores the profound influence of existentialism on 20th-century literature. It examines how existentialist philosophy, with its focus on individual freedom, the absurdity of existence, and the search for meaning, shaped the literary landscape of the modern era. Prominent authors like Franz Kafka, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Samuel Beckett are discussed in relation to their engagement with existentialist ideas. The article analyzes key themes in their works, such as alienation, anxiety, the confrontation with the absurd, and the quest for authentic existence. The enduring legacy of existentialism in literature is also considered, with a focus on how it continues to influence contemporary authors.

**Annotatsiya.** Ushbu maqola ekzistensializmning XX asr adabiyotiga bo'lgan chuqur ta'sirini o'rganadi. Ekzistensializm falsafasining individning erkinligi, mavjudlikning ahmoqiligi va ma'no izlash kabi asosiy tamoyillari, zamonaviy adabiyot manzarasini qanday shakllantirganini tahlil qiladi. Franz Kafka, Jan-Paul Sartre, Albert Kamyu va Samuel Bekket kabi mashhur yozuvchilarni ekzistensialistik g'oyalar bilan qanday shug'ullangani haqida so'z yuritiladi. Ularning asarlaridagi asosiy mavzular — cheklovlilik, tashvish, ahmoqilik bilan yuzma-yuz kelish va haqiqiy mavjudlikka intilish — chuqur tahlil qilinadi. Shuningdek, ekzistensializmning adabiyotdagi abadiy merosi va uning zamonaviy yozuvchilarga ta'siri ko'rib chiqiladi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** Ekzistensializm, 20-asr adabiyoti, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, ma'no, absurd, cheklovlilik, individ, erkinlik, insoniylik.

**Introduction.** Existentialism, as a philosophical movement, emerged in the early 20th century and profoundly shaped not only philosophy but also literature, art, and culture. At its core, existentialism is concerned with the individual's quest for meaning in an indifferent, often absurd world. The central tenets of existentialist thought—freedom, individual responsibility, the absurdity of existence, and the quest for authentic living—deeply influenced many of the most significant writers of the 20th century. These writers engaged with existentialist ideas, exploring the tension between personal freedom and the inherent meaninglessness of life. The influence of

existentialism on literature can be seen in the works of prominent authors like Franz Kafka, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Samuel Beckett, who reflected existentialist themes such as alienation, despair, and the search for self-identity in their writing. Through their characters' experiences, these writers explored how individuals confront the overwhelming existential questions of human existence: Why are we here? What is the purpose of life? How can one live authentically in a world that seems devoid of meaning?

In the aftermath of World War II, existentialism gained significant traction, particularly in Europe, where it was seen as a response to the crisis of modernity and the disillusionment brought about by global conflict and social upheaval. For many authors, literature became a means to explore and express the profound uncertainty and anxiety of the human condition, confronting the challenges of meaning-making in a chaotic and indifferent universe.

This article will examine the influence of existentialism on 20th-century literature by analyzing key themes and works of major existentialist writers. It will explore how existentialist philosophy shaped the narrative techniques and thematic concerns of literature during this period, as well as how these authors depicted the struggle of individuals seeking meaning in a seemingly meaningless world.

### ***1. Introduction to Existentialism and Its Philosophical Foundations***

Existentialism, a philosophical movement that emerged in the 20th century, focuses on individual freedom, choice, and the inherent meaninglessness of existence. Rooted in the works of philosophers such as [3]Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, and later Martin Heidegger, existentialism gained prominence in the post-World War II era, especially in France. Central to existentialist thought is the belief that life is absurd, and it is up to the individual to create meaning in a world devoid of inherent purpose. This philosophical framework found fertile ground in literature, where writers grappled with questions of identity, freedom, and existence.

### ***2. Existentialism in the Works of Key Authors***

#### ***2.1. Franz Kafka and the Absurdity of Existence***

One of the earliest literary figures to be associated with existentialism is Franz Kafka. In works such as *The Metamorphosis* and *The Trial*, Kafka explores themes of alienation, the dehumanizing effects of modernity, and the absurdity of life. His protagonists are often trapped in incomprehensible bureaucratic systems or bizarre, inexplicable situations, reflecting the existential belief that life offers no guarantees or rational explanations.[1] Kafka's work exemplifies the existential struggle against a world that is indifferent to human suffering and longing for meaning.

#### ***2.2. Jean-Paul Sartre: The Freedom of Choice***

Jean-Paul Sartre, a leading figure in existentialist philosophy, also had a significant impact on literature. His novel *Nausea* and his plays such as *No Exit* (Huis

Clos) reflect his central existentialist concept of radical freedom. Sartre posited that individuals are condemned to be free, meaning that they are responsible for their actions and must create their own essence through choice. In *No Exit*, the famous line [2]"Hell is other people" encapsulates the existentialist notion of self-identity being shaped by the gaze of others, and the anxiety and responsibility that come with complete freedom.

### *2.3. Albert Camus and the Absurd*

Albert Camus, another key existentialist writer, explored the philosophy of the absurd in works like [4]*The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Stranger*. Camus introduced the idea that life is inherently meaningless, but that humans must continue to search for meaning in spite of this. His portrayal of the protagonist Meursault in *The Stranger* reflects the existential idea that individuals often live detached from society's expectations and moral codes. Meursault's indifferent attitude toward life and his ultimate acceptance of his fate highlight Camus' belief in the need to embrace the absurdity of existence rather than succumb to nihilism.

### *2.4. Samuel Beckett and the Theater of the Absurd*

Samuel Beckett's works, particularly *Waiting for Godot*, are frequently classified as examples of the Theatre of the Absurd, a genre heavily influenced by existentialism. In *Waiting for Godot*, two characters, Vladimir and Estragon, wait for a mysterious figure named Godot, who never arrives. The play is a meditation on the futility of human endeavor, the search for meaning, and the passage of time. Beckett's minimalist style and emphasis on the absurdity of human existence make his work a quintessential example of existentialist literature.

## **3. Existentialist Themes in 20th Century Literature**

### *3.1. Alienation and Isolation*

One of the most prominent themes in existentialist literature is alienation. Writers like Kafka, Sartre, and Camus depict characters who feel isolated from society, unable to connect with others or even with themselves. This sense of estrangement reflects the existential belief that individuals are fundamentally alone in a world without inherent meaning.

### *3.2. The Absurd*

The concept of the absurd is central to existentialist thought, particularly in the works of Camus and Beckett. The absurd arises from the conflict between humans' desire for meaning and the indifference of the universe. This clash often leads to a sense of futility and despair, but existentialist writers argue that individuals must confront and accept the absurdity of life rather than seek refuge in false hope or illusions.

### *3.3. Freedom and Responsibility*

Existentialism emphasizes radical freedom and the burden of responsibility that comes with it. Sartre's concept of "bad faith," the tendency to deceive oneself in order to escape the anxiety of freedom, is a recurring theme in 20th-century literature. Characters often struggle with their freedom to make choices, which can lead to a sense of existential crisis and anguish.

### 3.4. *The Search for Authenticity*

Another existentialist theme is the search for authenticity—living in accordance with one's true self rather than conforming to societal norms. Existentialist writers often depict characters who must break free from societal expectations and live authentically, making their own choices and embracing their freedom. This search for authenticity is seen in the works of authors like Sartre and Camus, where protagonists must come to terms with their own existence and find meaning in a seemingly meaningless world.

**Conclusion.** Existentialism has left a lasting impact on 20th-century literature, shaping the themes, narratives, and styles of writers across the globe. Through the works of Kafka, Sartre, Camus, and Beckett, existentialism explored the human condition in a world devoid of inherent meaning, emphasizing themes of alienation, freedom, absurdity, and authenticity. These writers not only reflected the existentialist philosophy but also made significant contributions to the literary canon, influencing countless authors in the decades that followed. The existentialist exploration of meaning, or the lack thereof, continues to resonate with contemporary readers, ensuring that its influence on literature remains profound and enduring.

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