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Review Paper

In Pursuit of Meaning in Persian and English Novels: An Existential Approach to *The Scorched Earth* and *The Neighbor* Versus *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Sun Also Rises*

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Abstract

This comparative study examines the works of two prominent novelists, Ernest Hemingway and Ahmad Mahmoud, through the lens of Existentialism. Both authors are renowned for their unique styles and themes that probe the human condition and the quest for meaning in life. This research compares their works: *A Farewell to Arms*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *The Neighbors* and *The Scorched Earth*, in order to explore the similarities and differences in their approaches to Existentialism. Based on an existential perspective, the study aims to examine how characters in the novels of Hemingway and Mahmoud grapple with existential crises, confront the absurdity of life, navigate concepts of freedom and authenticity, and cope with existential anxiety. Results show that while Hemingway's characters often exhibit a stoic acceptance of the absurdity of life and adopt a sense of freedom in their choices, Mahmoud's characters tend to struggle more intensely with existential anxiety and undergo profound existential crises as they confront the complexities of their existence. Moreover, Hemingway's characters typically fail to stick to their true selves and what they believe in, while Mahmoud's characters might struggle more with being true to themselves and finding their own identity.

Keywords: Authenticity; Existentialism; Identity; Responsibility; War

در جستجوی معنا در رمان‌های فارسی و انگلیسی: رویکردی اگزیستانسیالیستی به "زمین سوخته" و "همسایه‌ها" در مقابل "وداع با اسلحه" و "خورشید هم طلوع می‌کند"

این مطالعه تطبیقی آثار دو رمان‌نویس برجسته، ارنست همینگوی و احمد محمود، را از دیدگاه اگزیستانسیالیسم بررسی می‌کند. هر دو نویسنده به خاطر سبک‌های منحصر به فرد و مضامینی که وضعیت انسان و جستجوی معنا در زندگی را کاوش می‌کنند، شهرت دارند. این پژوهش آثار آنها را مقایسه می‌کند: "وداع با اسلحه"، "خورشید هم طلوع می‌کند"، "همسایه‌ها" و "زمین سوخته"، تا شباهت‌ها و تفاوت‌های رویکرد آنها به اگزیستانسیالیسم را بررسی کند. بر اساس دیدگاه اگزیستانسیالیستی، این مطالعه قصد دارد بررسی کند که چگونه شخصیت‌های رمان‌های همینگوی و محمود با بحران‌های وجودی دست و پنجه نرم می‌کنند، با پوچی زندگی مواجه می‌شوند، مفاهیم آزادی و اصالت را درک می‌کنند و با اضطراب وجودی کنار می‌آیند. نتایج نشان می‌دهد که در حالی که شخصیت‌های همینگوی اغلب پذیرش استوارانه‌ای از پوچی زندگی نشان می‌دهند و حسی از آزادی را در انتخاب‌هایشان اتخاذ می‌کنند، شخصیت‌های محمود تمایل دارند با شدت بیشتری با اضطراب وجودی دست و پنجه نرم کنند و بحران‌های وجودی عمیقی را هنگام مواجهه با پیچیدگی‌های هستی خود تجربه کنند. علاوه بر این، شخصیت‌های همینگوی معمولاً در پایبندی به خود واقعی و آنچه به آن باور دارند شکست می‌خورند، در حالی که شخصیت‌های محمود ممکن است بیشتر با صادق بودن با خود و یافتن هویت خویش مبارزه کنند.

واژگان کلیدی: اگزیستانسیالیسم، هویت، مسئولیت‌پذیری، جنگ، اصالت



Introduction

War literature can serve as a powerful tool for understanding the human experience of war and its lasting impact on individuals and societies. War is a central organizing principle in the fiction of Ahmad Mahmoud and Ernest Hemingway with respect to their attempts to establish human identity during wartime. They are representatives of most significant contemporaneous English and Persian novelists, and their works are characterized by a variety of themes, covering mostly problems of modern men, violence of war, psycho-analysis, and mysticism (Ryan, 38). The common ground for these successful writers is their epistemological concern for the meaning of life in the modern world, and offering an analysis of what life could be like. The study seeks to investigate these writers' portrayal of men in war in different phases of their characters' development through different stages of war and the quest for meaning.

Hemingway and Ahmad Mahmoud can be considered as two literary existentialists because their works explore the human condition and the search for meaning in life. They both encourage their readers to confront the absurdity of existence and to create their authentic individual morality. The assumption behind bringing together these two Persian and American novelists is that war-fiction is to promote empathy and understanding between people from different cultures and backgrounds. It is implied here that war is an expressive metaphor for the American and Persian experience because war is a central element in national identities of the two countries, though the essence and nature of war differ significantly in each context (Gurko, 17). Since preoccupation with war and violence is common to the literature of both authors, the essence of war and its effects on human identity, in the form of the search for meaning in life, is closely examined in this research effort.

Existentialism

Existentialism in its modern sense is the name of a philosophical tendency or attitude which manifested itself in Germany a few years after World War I and later spread to France and to Italy so that immediately after World War II it was not only influential in academic circle there but was widely talked about in literary cafes and the semi-popular press. Since Existentialism is a tendency or attitude rather than a philosophical school, there are few doctrines common to all exponents of it. But it may be generally characterized as a protest against views of the world and policies of action in which individual human beings are regarded as helpless playthings of historical forces or as wholly determined by the regular operation of natural processes. All existentialist writers seek to justify in some way the freedom and importance of human personality. They all emphasize, too, the place of will in human nature by contrast to reason. A consequence of this is that some of them have spread their views by means of novels and plays as well as by the more ordinary methods (Solomon, 87).

Existence is the key concept in Existentialism. It is used in this philosophy in a very special sense. The existentialist uses existence to refer specifically to human existence. There is a common belief that only a concrete thing can exist. Existentialists also support this view and describe man as a concrete individual capable of being an existent. The existentialist considers that to be an existent one has to be capable of being conscious that one exists. In existentialism, man is known as a self-conscious subject, dealing with his or her own existence. Believed to be thrown in the irrational world, man tries to deal with the meaningless and purposeless world around and asks a question of why? Man is thus faced with the nothingness and meaninglessness of his/her existence, the anxiety and despair that result from this realization –that at last lead him/her to accept this reality-, the responsibility of providing an answer to the question by himself/herself, all lead the man to be regarded as a free existence having the freedom to choose.



Sartre's Existentialism is based on human freedom. Freedom for man exists in two paradoxical forms namely 'freedom of choice' and 'choice of freedom'. Accordingly, if man is free, he must be free to choose, but he can either make a right choice which really sets him free or a wrong choice which enslaves him again. Therefore, human being's role in the world is not predetermined and every person is compelled to make a choice. Thus, choice is the ultimate evaluator and the exercise of choice is the core of authentic human existence in which man becomes intensely aware of his own personal existence (Gordon, 26).

We are aware to some extent of our freedom, and the responsibility that comes with it, but we try to hide this from ourselves. We are aware, claims Sartre, that the pressures and demands that the world presents to us are the result of the ways in which we see and engage with things, and that this in turn is the result of our changeable characters rather than any fixed natures. But explicitly thinking about this induces in us a feeling of anguish. In order to avoid this, we try to deny this responsibility for the way we are and the ways in which we behave (Webber, 2009). But explicitly thinking about this induces in us a feeling of anguish. In order to avoid this, we try to deny this responsibility for the way we are and the ways in which we behave. This is what Sartre calls "bad faith". To be more precise, he uses this term in more than one way. In its most general sense, it labels the attempt to deny the basic structure of human being, that the way an individual sees the world is determined by that individual's character, which in turn can be changed by that individual. We deny this by pretending that our characters are fixed and unchangeable (Webber, 89).

Sartre observes that in choosing and committing himself to it, man gets committed not only to himself but also to the humanity as a whole, and so he says, "In fashioning myself I fashion man." This leads to a state of anxiety or anguish that descends upon man as he realizes that through his choice he is acting as a legislator deciding for the whole of mankind. The realization of a profound responsibility gives rise to anguish, which is a part and parcel of authentic human existence (Panza, 208). Here, there is a self-and-world understanding that emerges in anxiety called nothingness. Human existence, thus, appears as the nothingness of being, as a negation of every reality. Existential philosophy that deals with the nature of existence, in fact, fluctuates between being and nothingness and concludes by regarding nothingness as the only possible revelation of being. Therefore, in place of God there is nothing and it is this nothingness, the central experience into which man plunges himself and where he truly seems to face the core of his being.

The acceptance of nothingness leads to the concept of the absurd which becomes a leitmotif in Sartre's opinion of Existentialism. Absurd is basically a state of alienation from the world. Accordingly, to become fully aware of the absurdity of life is for existentialists, a way of experiencing it most meaningfully. The awareness of the absurdity of existence enables to transcend all superficial thought and discover the inner reality. But once the transcendental is dismissed altogether, the absurd becomes the final objective, and there is no further attempt to make it meaningful.

Using the existential concepts of absurdity, nothingness, and anxiety, the present study analyzes the search for meaning as an indication of human identity in the selected novels of Mahmoud and Hemingway.

Ernest Hemingway

For Ernest Hemingway and many other writers of the early 20th century, World War I was the symbol of the lost meaning in the world. Machine guns, poison gas and mass killings all shattered any meaning of civilization and brought about a sort of nothingness that was the underlying



human existence and challenged all meanings behind it. Hemingway himself suffered a lot from the wars, both physically and psychologically. All the pains helped in the formation of his viewpoints about the war, as well as his senses of death and humanism. Surely, he poured these senses into his fictions. From his works we see like Hemingway himself, the protagonists usually suffered both physical and psychological pains. They always lived in a violent world, wounded in the war and endured psychological ravages, such as insomnia, and frustration. Under the conditions of the First World War, Hemingway's heroes struggle not with one or opponent or another, but with the world order as a whole. The image of war finds the metaphorical embodiment of the cruelty of modernity. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Ernest Hemingway presents a profound existentialist analysis through the journey of the protagonist, Frederic Henry, amidst the chaos of World War I. *The Sun Also Rises* is also a repercussion of human collapse. The novel's characters, which themselves represent new ideals and motives, experience mental anguish and despair, and only worsen their state through the self-defeating sins of addiction and vice. These two novels are analyzed from existential lens from different angles as outlined below.

Existential Identity

Hemingway was not an existentialist, but his characters clearly exhibit a great deal of alienation from each other. They cope with their situation of doubt in society by developing an acute personal meaning. In his works, we see in flesh and blood a portrayal of the existential condition. A world where the rational has been penetrated by the nonrational, by death and nothingness. The world which Hemingway depicts is one filled with death and loneliness; one in which human beings must use every ounce of courage to keep emotionally alive while uncertain into an uncertain future. Hemingway's heroes possess existential identity like any other fictional character, yet they are often faced with the harsh realities of life, such as war, death and loss, factors that mold and shape their individual identity and alienate them from society.

From the very beginning of the story, the atmosphere of existential nothingness is prevalent in the novel. *A Farewell to Arms* is based on the writer's own experience as a participant in World War I. This novel remarkably reflects his attitudes towards war. In this novel, Hemingway shows the world of war with all its ugliness, violence, insanity, and irrationality. Besides giving an accurate account of the war, Hemingway has given an insightful description of the psychology of the soldiers. Being tired with war and its irrational pogrom, the soldiers started to look for peace. Hemingway uses individualism and identity to show the growth of his characters and uses romanticism and war to give his novel background theme to catch the reader's attention. His characters are very self-standing individuals.

Most of the characters in the novel *A Farewell to Arms* are tired of war. As a result, they turn away from group identities that are found in things such as tradition, patriotism, glory, and sacrifice. Fredrick says: "I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates" (*Farewell*, 195). They are lost in life and feel no responsibility to make their own life and help other do it. This sense of irresponsibility towards others, as entailed in the philosophy of Existentialism, is seen in many occasions in the novel in which Fredrick has no human responsibility towards Catherine and only mingles with her to pass time and enjoy himself, though he later develops a sincere love for her. "I did not care what I was getting into. This was better than going every evening to the house for officers where the girls climbed all



over you and put your cap on backward as a sign of affection between their trips upstairs with brother officers (*Farewell*, 37).

Hope and Death

War is a major cause of feelings of detachment and disappointment in many works of literature. *A Farewell to Arms* is a story about Frederick Henry's process by which he releases himself from war and leaves it behind. At one occasion, Rinaldi shows a great sense of sorrow and depression when he says that "This war is killing me, I am very depressed by it" (*Farewell*, 178). Maybe, the most important existential scene that represents the idea behind the novel is when Fredrick talks to his stillborn baby, showing that life is hopeless and people are cast into this world with no intention: "Poor little kid. I wished the hell I'd been choked like that. No, I didn't. Still there would not be all this dying to go through. Now Catherine would die. That was what you did. You died. You did not know what it was about. You never had time to learn. They threw you in and told you the rules and the first time they caught you off base they killed you" (*Farewell*, 344).

Existential freedom is anguished freedom because of the realization that one's freedom and values depend solely on oneself and there is absolutely nothing which guarantees the validity of these values or the continuance of freedom. Consequently, a man may try to escape from this freedom because he cannot endure the anguish of free choice. It is the courageous acceptance of freedom rather than its rejection that separates the existential hero from other men. It is in this regard that we analyze Fredrick. Although he is set free via his confrontation with death, he doesn't assert this freedom to create an authentic life. Consequently, in *A Farewell to Arms*, we are left with a nihilistic hero who fails to assert his free choice and stick to his principles of human responsibility. At the end of the novel, he is a helpless creature that seems to surrender to his destiny just like many other people in the novel.

For Hemingway and existentialist writers, death is not considered an abstract idea that denotes something happening in the future, something concrete referring to some future event, rather it serves as a catalyst by which humans experience the possibility of non-being. When an individual realizes the threat of non-being and the possibility of death, he comes to an understanding of his existence and learns that existence is not reasonable and may never entail a meaning in itself. Accordingly, death and nothingness turn to be the most essential principal in existential philosophy.

Absurdity of Living

The Sun Also Rises portrays characters who face dilemmas and situations that relate to Existentialism. The protagonist, Robert Cohn, is completely trapped in an absurd loop of getting Lady Brett to love him, which leads to aggressive behavior and resentment from his peers. He represents all the oddities that Hemingway attributed to Modernity: damn depressing, damn nuisance, never belonging anywhere, queer, and non- producer. Major characters in the novel live a pointless life and are well aware of the fact that their lifestyle is an absurd struggle for nothingness, as Cohn comes to realize in the middle of the story: "I can't stand to think my life is going so fast and I'm not really living it. Nobody ever lives their life all the way up except bull-fighters" (*The Sun*, 9). Later, he develops an interest in writing a journal which is another symbol of existential absurdity in which art is introduced as a notion to escape death.

Loss of Humanity

Hemingway's fiction often portrays a loss of traditional values and the decline of humanity in the modern world. *The Sun Also Rises* is about idealism versus reality in the age of reason when

everything is defined by its relation with other things and everything is meaningful only in relation to its position in the cosmos. It is about people overcoming fears and facing the truth. It is about people accepting themselves and learning how to deal with their problems. However, these obstacles are not so easy to overcome. Because of war experiences and personal weaknesses, the characters in this novel feel as though their lives have been ruined (Cornwell, 204).

The satirical portrayal of Robert Cohn, the last chivalric hero and defender of an outworn faith, and his absurd willingness to endure public humiliation for Lady Brett Ashley's unforthcoming affection, served only to reinforce the modern belief that love died in WWI, as did all the other pre-war values that Cohn unwaveringly stood for. While tragic in that the source of Cohn's persecution came exclusively from those who simply could not understand his obstinately idealistic outlook, the fact that his mere existence was nonetheless a painful reminder to the expatriates of America's betrayal was enough to justify their racist and spiteful actions (Graudateway, 102)

In *The Sun Also Rises*, people can hardly be considered religious as they have no strong faith in God neither do they show any other form of attachment to a divine being. Jake tries to rediscover his moral standards through his visits to different places and seeks to establish fresh values for himself. This is coupled with Brett's moral redemption at the end of the novel which show how people in Europe of the time felt desperate about their life and were hopeless about regaining their lost norms shattered by the world war. Unlike his passive companions, Jake has no belief in God and shows unwillingness to accept his disconnection from God: "I was a little ashamed, and regretted that I was such a rotten Catholic, but realized there was nothing I could do about it, at least for a while. I only wished I felt religious and maybe I would the next time" (*The Sun*, 4).

Ahmad Mahmoud

Mahmoud's portrayal of the main protagonists of his stories who go through various stages of transformation, indeed reflects his own evolution and development. In other words, it is mostly contended that Mahmoud's literary output is essentially autobiographical (Dastgheyb, 114). In addition, Mahmoud's autobiographical fiction helps to shape and articulate his emerging role as a novelist as he strives to record decades of turbulent social and political upheaval and change in the post-1950s era, as the Iranian nation undergoes various stages of transformation and growth in search of a new identity and political autonomy (Ahmadipourani, 248). A close analysis of a select number of Mahmoud's novels reveals that the social and historical nature of this transformation of the author and shows that that from early on Mahmoud was determined to depict the linear socio-political movement that took place in the modern history of Iran in the character of his memorable heroes who appear in various guises and matures both as a person and a social entity from one novel to the next (Golestan, 157).

In Mahmoud's writings, in particular his trilogy *The Neighbors*, *The Scorched Earth*, and *The Tale of a City*, the author's concern with existential elements of being, empathy with the poor and the working class, his keen attention to the socio-political circumstances, and his love for his native Khuzestan are evident. He, like many other writers of his time, was highly influenced by the modernist movement in Persian literature and felt indebted to his people in portraying social phenomena (Mehrvar, 15). As Kamshad states, in this period, "deep-rooted political, social, and religious traditions were either being obliterated or else seen the shock of impact with modern Western institution and theories" (Kamshad 83). Novels primarily describing social conditions, influenced by the literary naturalism of European novelists, appeared in quick succession, with



woman and city as their two major themes. Human identity was also a recurrent theme in the fiction of the time that highlighted a juxtaposition of the city and the village as the stereotyped target by the forces of modernity that was influenced by existentialist concerns with the position of man in the transitional period from tradition to modernity (Talattof, 36).

Death and Nada

Mahmoud's *The Scorched Earth* celebrates an existentialist perspective on life in times of war and martyrdom by depicting death, devastation, and violence by outside forces along with the shameless exploitation of those in need by opportunists and selfish in the domestic context which reminds one of Brecht's *Mother Courage and her Children*. The novel describes internal problems such as high inflation, looting and rape in Khorramshahr as the catastrophic effects of war are amplified in war-torn areas. People are alienated from themselves and others in their lives, even those who used to formerly be an important part of their lives. The first lesson that the protagonist of the novel learns in the wartime is that "war has its own logic" (*The Earth*, 325).

A sense of the meaninglessness and absurdity of the world is observed all over the novel as the protagonist witnesses a series of upsetting events that teach us the temporality of everything and man's distinctive ability to turn into a cruel and ruthless creature. "Voices are rising like the sound of the sea before the storm breaks, a roar that sinks fear into your heart. Sometimes a resonating voice overtakes the noise and rises above it, drives toward the garrison, and echoes like a wounded bird hitting its flailing head against the wall" (*The Earth*, 184).

Depiction of death and the horror that it instigates in people is a major aspect of *The Scorched Earth*. There are many moving images of death and destruction. The narrator talks about the deaths of many citizens, whether strangers or acquaintances. In this way, the deaths of more than hundreds of people are talked about, showing their commitment to death and destruction. Depictions of the dead and abandoned buildings challenge the war propaganda that, as Solomon claims, the forefront is a sacred place for martyrdom and soul purification. This shows the opposition of novelists who deconstruct the spiritual image of the army disseminated by the central government. According to Solomon, discrimination works internally and is essentially linked to the power structure (Solomon, 268). Wherever there is a reference to religious and spiritual engagement in the novel, it is immediately interrupted by a moving depiction of death and despair.

Anxiety and Responsibility

Anxiety arises from freedom to choose, though in this novel no one chose to be in the middle of a devastating war. The citizens in the wartime can be categorized into two groups: those who choose to stay and fight and those who escape. Those who choose to stay always feel a gripping sense of anxiety that arises from free choice. The reader witnesses the devastating effect as ordinary people are forced to leave their homes and the dead bodies of innocent people, arms and legs cut off, are being dragged out from under the rubble. What is important is that the author makes a point in telling the reader that not everyone wanted to be a martyr, or to be involved in an unwanted war. *The Scorched Earth* offers the reader a humanitarian viewpoint, capturing many people from all walks of life who represent various social classes of a society which Mahmoud was very familiar with. From the poor, working class, to the white-collar employees and businesspersons, from the opportunist thieves who loot people's belonging while they struggle to seek refuge in the bomb shelters or in the neighboring cities, each one of these individuals and various social classes reveal their own traits in the most troublesome time of the war.



Existential Heroes

One key element of existential characters in the fiction of Mahmoud is the theme of freedom and escaping from the world they are cast into. In a considerable number of his stories, Mahmoud depicts characters running away from the boundaries of their life or other people that seek to impose a certain way of living on them. There are characters that are imprisoned for different charges but manage to escape to be free. In *The Scorched Earth*, the theme of freedom has a strong effect, though it has different manifestations in people with different ideas. A considerable number of people do not have the courage to stay and fight and run away. This is in no way an existential escape to find freedom, but rather a sense of cowardice and anguish that dominates the citizens and drives them out of their living places in search of a shelter from the threat of death.

Nevertheless, there are some characters that remain courageous and fight death face to face. The narrator and Nanneh Baran are two examples of those who find freedom in living a life of responsibility towards one's self and others. Like many of the residents, the narrator's extended family, his aging mother, his many brothers and sisters and their families, and some of the relatives, also spend many nights behind blanket-covered windows in the storage room, now turned into a shelter. As the situation worsens and Saddam's bombing intensifies rapidly, more and more residents are forced to leave town for the capital Tehran and other cities. Only the narrator and two of his brothers remain behind. That too changes as the narrator's brother, Khaled, gets killed by enemy bombings. Khaled's death, however, causes their younger brother, Shahed, severe depression and psychological imbalance. To help him alleviate the pain, he too is sent to live with the rest of the family, leaving the narrator as the last family member remaining in town. Finding himself utterly alone in a house with bitter memories, he decides to seek refuge at a neighbor's house, Nanneh Baran's house, located near the main town square.

Similarly, a considerable number of characters in *The Neighbors* are depicted with a sort of existential perspective on mind. Men are depicted as hardworking yet struggling working-class men who begin and end at nowhere, mostly with nothing. Some find the absurdity of life and seek to find a meaning for their existence. Against the backdrop of a turbulent time are the growing political factions, standing for various political ideals. Since Mahmoud's novels are known for their exploration of the human condition in a world that is constantly shifting and chaotic, one of the themes in Mahmoud is the dilemma that the characters encounter between responsibility towards self and the other. Characters like Khaled often struggle to define themselves in relation to others, though this causes conflict and tension for the character.

Khaled's father, Ussa Haddad, is an existential character who fulfills some measures of a responsible human that values freedom and human choice. He is shown as a good, hardworking man who rarely gives up hope even when he finds himself in dire situations. In his simplistic perspective, he continues to believe that "This world for the true believer is nothing but a prison" (*Neighbors*, 28). The narrator never criticizes Ussa Haddad's outlook and his naivete, but instead honors him by referring to him as father throughout the novel. In doing so, the narrator distinguishes him from other irresponsible characters who place no value on what they do and feel no responsibility for the consequence of their actions.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this comparative study:

RQ1. How do Hemingway and Mahmoud's characters confront existential crises and the absurdity of life?

RQ2. In what ways do the characters in the selected novels navigate concepts of freedom and authenticity?



RQ3. How do the protagonists cope with existential anxiety and the inevitability of death?

RQ4. What are the cultural and historical contexts that shape the characters' experiences of existentialism in the works of Hemingway and Mahmoud?

Discussion

This comparative study has provided a nuanced exploration of existential themes in the works of Ernest Hemingway and Ahmad Mahmoud, focusing on how their characters grapple with existential crises, confront the absurdity of life, navigate concepts of freedom and authenticity, and cope with existential anxiety. The analysis of "A Farewell to Arms" and "The Sun Also Rises" by Hemingway, alongside "The Neighbors" and "The Scorched Earth" by Mahmoud, has revealed both convergences and divergences in their existential narratives.

Confronting Existential Crises and Absurdity

Both Hemingway and Mahmoud depict characters who are deeply affected by the absurdity of life, particularly in the context of war. Hemingway's characters, such as Frederic Henry in "A Farewell to Arms," often exhibit a stoic acceptance of life's absurdity. They confront death and the meaninglessness of existence with a sense of courage and resignation. In contrast, Mahmoud's characters, like those in "The Scorched Earth," experience a more intense struggle with existential anxiety. The brutality of war and the devastation it brings amplify their sense of absurdity, leading to profound existential crises.

Navigating Freedom and Authenticity

The concept of freedom is central to existentialism, and both authors explore this theme through their characters. Hemingway's protagonists often seek individualistic pursuits and confrontations with death as a means to assert their freedom. However, they frequently fail to maintain authenticity, as seen in their struggles to stay true to their beliefs and values. Mahmoud's characters, on the other hand, navigate freedom within the context of societal and political upheaval. Their quest for authenticity is intertwined with their social responsibilities and the collective struggle for identity and autonomy.

Coping with Existential Anxiety and Death

The inevitability of death is a recurring theme in the works of both authors. Hemingway's characters, such as those in "The Sun Also Rises," often face death with a sense of disillusionment and despair. Their experiences in war lead them to question morality and the meaning of life. Mahmoud's characters, particularly in "The Scorched Earth," deal with the impact of war and death on ordinary civilians. Despite the overwhelming sense of absurdity, they find resilience and hope in their connections with others, highlighting a more communal approach to coping with existential anxiety.

Cultural and Historical Contexts

The cultural and historical contexts of the authors significantly shape their existential narratives. Hemingway's works are deeply influenced by the disillusionment following World War I, reflecting the lost generation's struggle with meaning and morality. In contrast, Mahmoud's novels are set against the backdrop of Iran's socio-political transformations, depicting the impact of war and oppression on marginalized communities. These differing contexts result in distinct approaches to existentialism, with Hemingway focusing on individualistic existential dilemmas and Mahmoud emphasizing collective struggles and resilience.



Conclusion

The present study was an analytical investigation of identity and search for meaning in terms of Sartre's Existentialism applied on characters of Ahmad Mahmoud and Ernest Hemingway. The study examined themes of existential quest for meaning and absurdity of life in the four novels by Hemingway and Mahmoud to show that both writers combined the existentialist themes about individual authentic sense of self, free choice and responsibility with those of patriotism and war. In all the novels under analysis, there was a strong sense of absurdity that arose from war and unstable social settings that made the world an absurd place to live in. The chaotic atmosphere of the novels contributed to making a desire to challenge individual existence of major characters and helped them find the truth behind what went on in the world around them.

Through a detailed analysis of the portrayal of existential themes such as freedom, authenticity, and existential crises, significant differences between Hemingway and Mahmoud's narratives were uncovered, shedding light on the cultural and historical contexts that shape characters' experiences of Existentialism. The absurdity of war and the inevitability of death profoundly shape the characters' perceptions of existence differently in the selected novels. While Hemingway's characters adopt a stoic acceptance of the absurdity of life and confront death with courage, Mahmoud's characters deal more intensely with existential anxiety and despair in the face of war's brutality and mortality.

Nevertheless, Hemingway and Mahmoud's novels differ in their portrayal of existential themes such as freedom, authenticity, and existential crises. While Hemingway's characters navigate existential dilemmas through individualistic pursuits and confrontations with death, Mahmoud's characters confront with similar themes within the context of societal and political upheaval, highlighting contrasting approaches to existentialism. Both writers address the concept of absurdity in their narratives by depicting the futility of human existence and the irrationality of life's circumstances. But, in Hemingway, this absurdity often leads to a sense of disillusionment and despair, that is why many of his characters are soldiers or veterans who have experienced the horror of war. They grapple with questions of morality and meaning in the face of death. In contrast, Mahmoud's work explores the impact of war and death on ordinary civilians, particularly those who are marginalized and socially oppressed, yet they find resilience and hope in their connections with others.

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