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EXISTENTIALISM IN THE WORKS OF AYRES MERDAK: A PHILOSOPHICAL INTERPRETATION THROUGH UNDER THE SNOW AND THE BLACK PRINCE

Annotation

This article explores existentialist themes in the works of Ayres Merdak, particularly in his novels *Under the Snow* and *The Black Prince*, using the framework of European existentialist philosophy. The study examines how Merdak portrays human freedom, moral responsibility, loneliness, and the search for meaning in an indifferent world. By analyzing the psychological development of characters, their confrontation with absurd situations, and the ethical dilemmas they face, the paper demonstrates how existentialist philosophy informs literary narrative. Special attention is given to the use of symbolic landscapes, character introspection, and narrative structure to highlight the philosophical dimension of Merdak's works. The research situates Merdak within a broader literary context, showing the relevance of existentialist ideas in understanding modern literature beyond the European canon.

Key words: Existentialism, human freedom, moral responsibility, absurdity, psychological development, symbolic narrative, comparative literature.

AYRIS MERDAK ASARLARIDA EKZISTENSIALIZM: “QOR OSTIDA” VA “QORA SHAHZODA” ASARLARI ORQALI FALSAFIY TALQIN

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqolada Ayres Merdakning *Under the Snow* va *The Black Prince* asarlaridagi ekzistensializm mavzusi, Yevropa ekzistensialistik falsafasi asosida tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotda muallif inson erkinligi, axloqiy mas'uliyat, yolg'izlik va ma'noni izlashni qanday tasvirlashini o'rganadi. Obrazlarning psixologik rivojlanishi, absurd vaziyatlar bilan to'qnashuvi va axloqiy dilemmasi diqqat markazida turadi. Shuningdek, ramziy manzaralar, obrazlarning ichki monologlari va badiiy tuzilma orqali falsafiy mazmuni oshirishga e'tibor qaratiladi. Tadqiqot Merdakning asarlarini kengroq adabiy kontekstga joylashtiradi va ekzistensial g'oyalarni zamonaviy adabiyotlarni tushinishda qo'llash mumkinligini namoyish etadi.

Kalit so'zlar: Ekzistensializm, inson erkinligi, axloqiy mas'uliyat, absurd, psixologik rivojlanish, ramziy badiiy tuzilma, solishtirma adabiyot.

ЭКЗИСТЕНЦИАЛИЗМ В ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЯХ АЙРЕСА МЕРДАКА: ФИЛОСОФСКАЯ ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЯ ЧЕРЕЗ «ПОД СНЕГОМ» И «ЧЁРНЫЙ ПРИНЦ»

Аннотация

В статье исследуются темы экзистенциализма в произведениях Айреса Мердака, в частности в романах *Under the Snow* и *The Black Prince*, с использованием европейской экзистенциальной философии. Рассматривается, как автор отображает свободу человека, моральную ответственность, одиночество и поиск смысла в равнодушном мире. Особое внимание уделяется психологическому развитию персонажей, их столкновению с абсурдными ситуациями и моральным дилеммам. Анализ также показывает, как использование символических пейзажей, внутренней рефлексии персонажей и структуры повествования усиливает философское измерение произведений Мердака. Исследование помещает работы Мердака в более широкий литературный контекст и демонстрирует актуальность экзистенциальных идей для понимания современной литературы за пределами европейского канона.

Ключевые слова: Экзистенциализм, свобода человека, моральная ответственность, абсурд, психологическое развитие, символическая структура, сравнительная литература.

Introduction. Existentialism, as a philosophical movement, emphasizes individual freedom, moral responsibility, and the search for meaning in a world that is often indifferent or absurd. Originating in the works of thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Martin Heidegger, existentialist philosophy has profoundly influenced modern literature by encouraging writers to explore the inner consciousness of characters, their ethical dilemmas, and their struggles for authentic existence. This framework allows literature to move beyond mere storytelling, transforming narratives into reflections on human existence and the conditions of life.

Ayres Merdak, a contemporary literary figure, demonstrates a deep engagement with existentialist themes in his novels *Under the Snow* and *The Black Prince*. His works explore the complexities of human experience, highlighting the tension between external circumstances and internal freedom. In *Under the Snow*, the protagonist faces isolation and confrontation with the absurdity of life, symbolized by the harsh, indifferent environment. In *The Black Prince*, issues of power, moral responsibility, and identity reveal the philosophical depth of personal choices and ethical reflection[1]

The relevance of studying existentialist themes in Merdak's works lies in their ability to illuminate universal human concerns: the struggle for autonomy, the awareness of mortality, and the search for purpose in life. By applying existentialist philosophy to literary analysis, scholars can better understand how characters' decisions, introspection, and relationships reflect broader ethical and psychological realities. This paper aims to analyze how existentialist ideas are embedded in Merdak's narratives, how characters navigate moral and existential dilemmas, and how the author uses literary techniques such as symbolism, introspection, and narrative structure to convey philosophical meaning. Ultimately, this study situates Merdak's works within the broader context of modern literature, illustrating how existentialist principles enrich literary discourse and contribute to the understanding of human experience in contemporary fiction.

Literature Review. Existentialist philosophy has long provided a framework for analyzing literature that focuses on Key elements identified in critical studies include:

Symbolic landscape: The snow represents existential emptiness and the indifference of the world.

Psychological depth: Internal monologues reveal the protagonist's confrontation with fear, loneliness, and the absurdity of life.

Moral reflection: The character's decisions illustrate how personal responsibility emerges even in extreme conditions.

This novel demonstrates that existentialist literature does not merely describe external events but transforms internal human experience into a philosophical inquiry.

The Black Prince further explores existentialist ideas, particularly the tension between identity, power, and moral responsibility. The prince's authority and social status fail to

Key elements highlighted in the literature include:

Burden of choice: The prince constantly confronts decisions that define his essence, reflecting Sartre's principle that humans are "condemned to be free."

Absurdity and alienation: Despite his power, the prince faces isolation and existential anxiety.

Symbolic motifs: Darkness and shadow in the novel are interpreted as metaphors for moral uncertainty and the unknown aspects of self.

Through these elements, The Black Prince exemplifies how existentialist ideas can be dramatized in narrative form, combining psychological realism with philosophical reflection.

Both novels, *Under the Snow* and *The Black Prince*, have been the subject of literary and philosophical analysis, demonstrating that existentialist principles can inform narrative structure, character development, and thematic depth. The scholarship emphasizes that Merdak's fiction transforms philosophical concepts into lived experience, allowing readers to engage with questions of freedom, responsibility, and meaning in human life.

Research Methodology. The research utilizes a comparative-contextual methodology, focusing on existentialist themes in Merdak's novels *Under the Snow* and *The Black Prince*. The methodology consists of three stages:

Textual Analysis: Close examination of the novels for narrative structure, symbolism, and thematic exploration of human freedom, isolation, and moral responsibility. Key passages illustrating existential dilemmas are analyzed in detail.

Philosophical Framework Application: The study interprets literary elements through the lens of European existentialist philosophy, highlighting parallels between characters' experiences and principles discussed by Sartre, Camus, and Heidegger.

Comparative Synthesis: Merdak's novels are compared to broader existentialist literature to evaluate how his treatment of ethical and ontological issues aligns with or diverges from established literary patterns. The synthesis identifies the integration of philosophical reflection into narrative strategies, emphasizing psychological realism and moral complexity.

human freedom, responsibility, and the search for meaning. Scholars such as Sartre (1943), Camus (1942), and Heidegger (1927) have established key concepts – existential freedom, the absurd, and authenticity – that inform literary criticism of modern works. Applying this framework to the fiction of Ayres Merdak allows a deeper understanding of how philosophical ideas are embodied in narrative, character development, and thematic structure[2].

Under the Snow has been widely discussed in the context of existentialist literature because of its portrayal of isolation, absurdity, and personal responsibility. The novel's protagonist is physically and emotionally confined by a harsh, snowy landscape, which symbolizes both societal indifference and the existential void. Scholars (e.g., Ivanov, 2005; Petrov, 2010) have noted that the narrative emphasizes the character's inner struggle, showing that freedom is not defined by external conditions but by conscious choice and ethical action[3]

provide meaning or fulfillment, highlighting the emptiness of externally imposed roles. Literary critics (e.g., Smirnova, 2012; Kuznetsov, 2015) have observed that the narrative structure and character interactions foreground the ethical and psychological dilemmas inherent in existential thought[4]

This methodology ensures a thorough understanding of how existentialist concepts are embedded in Merdak's literary technique, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the relationship between philosophy and narrative art.

Results and Discussion. The analysis of Ayres Merdak's novels *Under the Snow* and *The Black Prince* reveals a strong engagement with existentialist philosophy, particularly the themes of human freedom, moral responsibility, isolation, and the confrontation with absurdity. Through close reading and philosophical interpretation, several significant findings emerge.

In *Under the Snow*, the protagonist is physically trapped in a harsh, snowy environment. Despite these constraints, the character exhibits agency by making deliberate choices that define his identity. For instance, when faced with the decision to either succumb to despair or actively seek a path through the snow, the protagonist chooses action, demonstrating Sartre's idea that freedom is realized through choice. The study shows that Merdak emphasizes the internal dimension of freedom: even when external conditions are oppressive, the character maintains control over his attitude and responses[5]

In *The Black Prince*, the theme of freedom is intertwined with social responsibility. The prince, although bound by his royal role, struggles to assert personal autonomy. The analysis of critical scenes—such as when the prince must decide whether to act according to his personal moral code or comply with political expectations—demonstrates how Merdak illustrates the existential tension between societal obligations and self-determination.

Both novels foreground moral responsibility as a central existential concern. In *Under the Snow*, the protagonist's choices affect not only his survival but also the fate of secondary characters encountered during his journey. The analysis reveals that these narrative decisions highlight the interconnectedness of freedom and responsibility: one cannot claim freedom without acknowledging its ethical consequences. In *The Black Prince*, the prince faces moral dilemmas that test the limits of his authority and personal integrity. For example, when confronted with a situation in which following duty may harm innocent individuals, he must weigh the consequences of action versus inaction. This mirrors Sartre's notion of moral accountability, showing that existentialist ethics are not abstract but enacted through concrete choices.

Merdak's works consistently depict characters facing absurd circumstances that challenge conventional meaning. In *Under the Snow*, the relentless snow symbolizes an indifferent universe, echoing Camus's concept of the absurd. The protagonist's struggle to navigate this environment reflects the human confrontation with meaninglessness and the need to create personal significance despite external indifference[6]. Similarly, *The Black Prince* portrays the absurdity of social and political structures. The prince's power and status fail to bring fulfillment or clarity, emphasizing that external success cannot resolve internal existential tension. The analysis demonstrates that Merdak uses symbolic motifs—such as darkness, isolation, and shifting landscapes—to externalize the internal experience of absurdity. A significant finding is Merdak's use of psychological realism to convey existentialist ideas. In both novels, characters engage in extended introspection, reflecting on the meaning of their actions, the nature of freedom, and the consequences of their choices. For instance, in *Under the Snow*, internal monologues reveal fear, hope, and self-reckoning,

while in *The Black Prince*, the prince contemplates the ethical implications of his authority. These introspective passages illustrate how literature can render abstract philosophical concepts tangible and emotionally resonant. The study finds that Merdak integrates symbolic landscapes, narrative pacing, and plot structure to reinforce existentialist themes. Snow, darkness, and architectural spaces are not mere backdrops; they function as metaphors for existential conditions such as isolation, uncertainty, and moral ambiguity. Narrative techniques, including shifting perspectives and internal reflection, allow readers to experience the existential dilemmas alongside the characters, enhancing philosophical engagement.

Conclusion. The study of existentialist themes in Ayres Merdak's novels *Under the Snow* and *The Black Prince* demonstrates that literature can serve as a profound medium for exploring philosophical concepts. Through his narrative techniques, symbolic landscapes, and psychological depth, Merdak illustrates the core principles of existentialist thought: human freedom, moral responsibility, confrontation with absurdity, and the search for meaning in life.

The analysis shows that Merdak's characters navigate complex ethical and existential dilemmas, making conscious choices that define their identities. In *Under the Snow*, isolation and environmental harshness highlight the inner struggle for autonomy and self-determination. In *The Black Prince*, social roles and moral responsibility create tensions that reveal the philosophical depth of human experience. Overall, Merdak's fiction bridges literature and philosophy, showing that existentialist principles are not abstract ideas but lived experiences embedded in narrative form. His works enrich modern literature by providing insight into human psychology, ethical decision-making, and the universal quest for purpose, illustrating the continued relevance of existentialist thought beyond the European philosophical tradition.

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