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**GHUFRAN ABD HUSSEIN**

*The Existential Authenticity  
in Ernest Hemingway's Fiction*



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## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

I come from Baghdad – *Madinat al-Salaam*, the City of Peace – and the rationale underlying my decision to approach Hemingway’s work from an existential perspective is bi-dimensional: First, the preoccupation of the Iraqi people, to whom I belong, with the hardships of life in a country devastated by wars: for them, love and hate, life and death are part of their everyday existence. Secondly, the reception of Hemingway’s work in the Arab cultural space is impressive: I identified 14 different translations of only the novel *The Old Man and the Sea*, plus at least 14 other translations of other nine books written by the American writer. All these demonstrate the particular appeal of Hemingway’s work to an Arabic readership. My PhD thesis, titled *The Existential Authenticity in Ernest Hemingway’s Fiction*, is a contribution to the study of American literature and addresses not only the specialists – scholars and students of American literature in Iraqi and other Arab universities – but also a wider audience interested in the work of Hemingway, which explains the detailed endnotes meant for a more general readership.



## FOREWORD

One of the key themes in the ethical issues of existential philosophy—man defending his dignity in conditions that would seem to completely exclude him—is also one of the keys to Hemingway’s fiction. The crisis of bourgeois liberalism with its superficially optimistic world view, and its belief in the progressive development of society, was caused by the turbulent events of the century and was reflected in existentialism. The philosophy of existence arose as a pessimistic world view that posed the question: how should a person who has lost his liberal-progressive illusions live in the face of historical disasters? Existentialism is a reaction to the rationalism of the Enlightenment in German classical philosophy, as well as to Kantian-positivist philosophy, which became widespread in the late XIX–early XX century. For the 20th century, existentialism became a philosophy not of individual thinkers and not just one of the currents of European philosophy, but a mirror adequately reflecting the human situation in the Western world; The philosophy of existence revealed sharp questions in all spheres of life and served as a response to the fundamental question about the meaning of human life. From this point of view, one can challenge the opinions that denies the connection of the early hero Hemingway to the philosophy of existentialism on the grounds that his characters respond to the inquiries of their time with their feelings and emotions, while the existential hero is closed in himself, protected from the influence of social life. In fact, existentialism expressed the deepest upheavals of the first half of the 20th century, and Hemingway’s hero in the 1920s was formed under their influence.

In his *Discourse on Method*, Descartes delineates his way of discerning truths. By deconstructing a subject into its most basic components and examining each closely, we should be able to attain full knowledge of the subject and thus come to a conclusion of sorts. Camus follows this method in his essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and shares the insight he discovers by examining the “data of experience” (Camus 1975: 34). In this essay, Camus focuses on authenticity, suggesting that we are not

really living until we discover and acknowledge the absurdity of our situation in relation to the world into which we have been thrown. He discusses the lack of clear purpose in the universe, using an observations-based approach to illustrate the impossibility of gaining full knowledge, and to prove that deeper thought on a subject always leads to the discovery of the absurd. Upon encountering the absurd, one may choose to acknowledge its existence and live a life in constant battle against the meaninglessness of life, or one can choose to escape confrontation by choosing to remain ignorant and by practicing bad faith.

This expression has a lot to do with the existential philosophy but it does not constitute a constant neither in the work nor in the life of Hemingway. His hobby was not philosophy but weapons, although in a story like “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” he distorts the “Our Father” prayer into a prayer to nothing when he says: “Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name thy kingdom nada thy will be nada in nada as it is in nada. Give us this nada our daily nada and nada us our nada as we nada our nadas and nada us not into nada but deliver us from nada; pues nada. Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee” (Hemingway 1987: 291). But it happens that this nothing (laugh) is not the existentialist nothingness (Néant), because what the North American writers deny is not the subject but the object, a sensible data, that is, the material world. Existentialism as a philosophy of man conceives the Nothing (Néant) in relation to the subject, all because human consciousness is nothing but a denial that as soon as it is denied is affirmed. Man, says Sartre, is the being by which Nothing comes into the world, it is a Being-Nothing duality, in which the second term is worth as much as the first.

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The problem of human existence has always fascinated both philosophers, writers, poets, but also ordinary mortals. For centuries, philosophers have tried to answer the question of the meaning of human existence. It turned out that this is not an easy question because each of them paid attention to another aspect of human life. Human beings have always asked themselves where they come from, where they are heading, whether suffering and death must be inscribed in human fate. It is existential philosophy that may offer

the answers. This is an interesting, though difficult to accept concept of human fate and existence. It was initiated by Kierkegaard in the nineteenth century and after a hundred years it was resumed in Germany in 1930 by Heidegger. The subject of his reflections was the existence of man as a human being. The term also refers to the intellectual and artistic movement that developed in France in 1945-1955. It covers many areas of intellectual life and art, becoming a kind of intellectual fashion. On the other hand, literary existentialism did not create its own poetics, but it introduced a special atmosphere and a set of topics that were eagerly discussed by writers. The topics most often addressed by the creators of this trend include: loneliness of a man, attitude to other people, tragedy and absurdity of existence, anxiety. By undertaking philosophical problems, existentialist writers set the hero in situations of choice, sudden change, and deprived him of the past. Showing the absurdity of social existence, they expressed the desire for a new order. They were passionate about politics and morality. We distinguish two currents of this philosophy: Catholic and atheistic. The follower of the first was Søren Kierkegaard and the most prominent representatives of the atheist trend were Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus.

Human freedom has been debated by philosophers since the advent of philosophy. In the West, the theistic religious paradigm has profoundly influenced the conception of freedom (Thomas Aquinas). In the East, philosophers evolving outside the monotheism of the West, have developed explanations about being free in its relation to society and the natural world (see the “Conception of the world” in Confucianism, and Zen Buddhism). It was not until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that the problem of freedom was posed radically.

It is the refusal to belong to a school of thought, the repudiation of any system of beliefs and a break with traditional, academic philosophy, considered too far from life—which is at the heart of existentialism. “Man is condemned to be free”—this famous statement of Sartre, which is at the heart of his major philosophical work, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (1943) and his famous speech “Existentialism is a humanism” (1946), concerns all aspects of human existence: free will

and the determinism; moral values, the notion of God and intersubjectivity, or relationship to others.

Sartre believed that everyone is different and there is no concept of human nature common to all. The human being appears as an object for other people, but as an entity for himself. It strives towards the goals set for itself, and by making choices, it creates itself. Man, however, cannot imagine that he could realize his dreams and ideals, and that is why he created for himself an ideal God, on whom he transfers responsibility for his own actions. According to Sartre, in this way God makes man inauthentic. Man is completely responsible for his actions and he makes choices without anyone's help, he is absolutely free. The price of freedom, however, is loneliness, anxiety, a sense of absurdity of life. Choices made in the life of a man are difficult because that there are no rules or rules according to which he should act and he must bear all the consequences of his decisions. The historical or sociological approach to human existence is also irrelevant, because thoughts and actions are independent of them. The surrounding world is unknowable, while the man living in it must try to find the rules governing the world, but before he does, he should realize that the patterns of life and the way of seeing the world are completely arbitrary.

When man understands that everyday life, with its habits and repetitive gestures, is meaningless, existential choices are presented. In the face of the irrational character of the world, one must first choose to be or no longer to be. According to Camus, "judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy" (Camus 1976: 11). After such self-awareness, the right choice according to Camusian philosophy is to accept absurdity. The goal is to finally overcome the absurd and revolt against nonsense and "that strangeness of the world [that is] is the absurd" (*idem* 20). Camus emphasizes that it is not the discoveries associated with this awareness that are important; they are "their consequences" that have value. This means that the decisions that are made following existential discoveries are the most important. To face the absurdity, the most appropriate choice is to choose life continually. There is no question of ignoring the absurd. To find meaningful meaning to one's existence on earth, it is essential that man act continually. When one decides