

Chapter One

Introduction

A. Understanding Existentialism

The common perception is that existentialism is only about alienation, despair, absurdity and negativity. It is an odd movement as most thinkers deny that they fall under the category of existentialist. On one hand there are certain ideas and principle which most existentialist agree on some; on the other hand, there are ideas and principles which most existentialist reject. Fuller recognizes the problems in defining existentialism:

There is no single existentialist position. The philosophy varies with its proponents, some of whom insist that they are not existentialist at all. But there is a common fund doctrine that identifies them, nevertheless and indicates quite clearly their relation to the classical philosophic tradition. Their major and differentiating thesis is the metaphysical pronouncement that “existence is prior to essence”; while in the established tradition “essence is prior to existence.” What this means for existentialist is that human nature is determined by the course of life rather than life by human nature. (603)

The first and the most basic characteristic is that existentialism begins from man rather than from nature. This philosophy treats man as an existent rather than man as thinking subject. As Sartre says, “We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world, and defines himself afterwards. If man, as the existentialism sees him, is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself.” (“Existentialism” 290) In Sartre’s way of putting it, man’s existence precedes his

essence. In our life, essence is shaped by existence, not the other way round. We live our lives and that in turn defines what we truly are, not any set of features. There is no predefined pattern that we can fit into.

Existentialism starts with an individual. Rogers and Thompson write about it, “Existentialism is about the experience of living as a human being. It is about engaging with the world and dealing with two features of life- the situation in which we find ourselves and the constant desire to go beyond ourselves, planning and shaping our future.”(x) It is not only a philosophy but a way of life as it is not a special occupation concerning only a few. Rather, philosophy should be integrated within life. There are philosophers who developed an elaborate set of methods and concepts but life can be lived philosophically without a technical knowledge of philosophy.

Existentialism is not about negativity. Neither it is dark or depressing. It is about life -facing the challenges of life and fighting for life. The field is not purely nihilistic, and the possibility of improvement does exist:

The Existential view can assert the possibility of improvement. Most pessimistic systems find the source of their despair in the fixed imperfection of human nature or of the human context; the Existentialist, however, denies all absolute principles and holds that human nature is fixed only in that we have agreed to recognize certain human attributes; it is, therefore, subject to change if human beings can agree on other attributes or even to change by a single person if the person acts authentically in contradiction to the human principles. Hence, for the Existentialist, the possibilities of altering human nature and

society are unlimited, but, at the same time, human beings can hope for aid in making such alterations only from within themselves. (Harmon 186)

Sartre, Camus and Nietzsche were involved in various wars because they believed in fighting for their people and country. In a broad sense, existentialism is a set of philosophical system concerning with free will, choice and responsibility. Thus, it is concerned with the whole of human experience of thinking, acting and engaging with the world. For existentialist, this philosophy relates to life, to the ordinary concerns and decisions that people face.

Most of the thinkers who were categorized as existentialist were people who denied they are that. Major figures like Jean -Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger and Albert Camus denied that they were existentialist. Soren Kierkegaard and Fredrich Nietzsche, both referred as precursors, were too early for the movement, and yet treated as members of the group. Although these philosophers frequently disagreed with each other and denied belonging to a movement, they held certain views which were common among them. Commenting upon existentialism Philosopher Kaufmann says:

Existentialism is not a philosophy but a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy. Most of the living “existentialists” have repudiated this label, and a bewildered outsider might well conclude that the only thing they have in common is a marked aversion for each other. To add to the confusion, many writers of the past have frequently been hailed as members of this movement, and it is extremely doubtful whether they would have appreciated the company to which they are consigned. In view of this, it

might be argued that the label “existentialism” ought to be abandoned altogether. (11)

Although often treated like a philosophical school of thought, existentialism can be described as a trend that can be found throughout the history of philosophy. The founding fathers of existentialist thought are Pascal, Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche and Kafka. They found existential questions in their writings. There is also a longer history before this, which goes back to St. Augustine to Plato, even to Lao Tzu and Buddha.

Existentialism became more relevant after the Second World War. It depended on other thinkers, who provided much of its groundwork in the field. Barrett, in his study, provides the background and unique characteristics surrounding the school of thought in the following:

After the Second World War, the news of Existentialism arrived. It was news, which is in itself an unusual thing for philosophy these days... Existentialism was a literary movement as well and its leaders – Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Simone de Beauvoir -were brilliant and engaging writers. Nevertheless, that the American public was curious about the philosophy itself cannot altogether be denied. Perhaps the curiosity consisted in large part of wanting to know what the name, the big word, meant; nothing stirs up popular interest so much as a slogan. But there was also a genuine philosophic curiosity, however intricate, in all this, for here was a movement that seemed to convey a message and a meaning to a good many people abroad, and Americans wanted to know about it.(8)

The term was explicitly adopted by Jean-Paul Sartre, and his associates- notably Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Albert Camus. Existentialism was identified with a cultural movement that flourished in Europe in 1940s and 1950s. The major philosophers identified as existentialists were Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, Paul Tillich and Martin Buber of Germany, Jose Ortega y Gasset and Miguel de Unamuno of Spain, Jean Wahl and Gabriel Marcel of France and Nikolai Berdyaev and Lev Shestov of Russia.

Although a highly diverse tradition of thought, some essential themes need to be identified to provide some overall unity, these are as follows:

Central proposition of existentialism is that existence precedes essence and everything else follows from it. Our existence comes first and by existing and acting, our essence is determined. This phrase was originated by Jean- Paul Sartre. Human beings through this consciousness create their own values and determine a meaning for their life. As we do not possess any inherent identity or value, it should be created by our actions. What we do and how we act in our life, determines our apparent qualities.

According to Sartre, inanimate objects are different from human beings. This is so because humans are conscious of their own existence, whereas objects simply exist. Since no predefined essence or definition exists, a person must form his or her own concept of existence by taking responsibility for his/her actions and choices. A person gains his essence through individual choices and actions. Identity of any one person (their essence) cannot be found by examining what other people are like, but only by what that particular person has done. Thus no one can claim that his or her actions are caused by anyone else.

This view of existence and essence is contrary to the theological view of the human condition in which the essence of the man is formed in the mind of God before man's existence. Sartre reverses this theological idea for his atheistic existentialism, maintaining that man first exists, and then has complete responsibility for defining who he is as Jean-Paul Sartre has stated in the book *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*:

What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world –defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it... Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism... For we mean to say that man primarily exists- that man is, before all else, something which propels itself towards a future and is aware that it is doing so. (“Existentialism is a Humanism”396)

From an existential perspective, freedom cannot be separated from responsibility because freedom puts forth responsibility. Realizing the fact and nature of our freedom makes a man mature; he can exercise control, direction and command over his own life. He becomes an individual with all satisfaction, concreteness and security that this implies. For a successful and authentic living, a man must be fully aware of his freedom along with his responsibility and control.

A man must be willing to accept full responsibility for all his actions. Once the inevitability of responsibility is recognized, man is inclined to take the full blame on

himself rather than blaming others or on some situations beyond his control. Once we are clear about this fact that we are fully accountable for our actions, our lives and our mistakes, only then we will exercise our responsibility. No one else can make a decision for our life. It will be childish and immature to allow others to decide for us. It means that a man must be independent and thereby decide for himself. It is not possible to abandon our responsibility. We cannot request to anybody other than ourselves for the final decisions. We can request to a friend, a teacher, a parent, a counsellor, God and so for the advice, however, that cannot be the final since we personally make the decision of whom to approach. Once we have received the request advise, the decision of whether to adopt it or to reject it is again solely our own. We are solely responsible for our decision and this is the existential fact. Thus the ultimate responsibility rests on our own shoulders. We must recognize this fact in order to make a life successful.

Man's freedom is boundless so he makes great effort to hide it from himself. Doing so he escapes from freedom as Erich Fromm has referred. In the advanced technology of ours, we see man's escape from freedom. A man finds it difficult to identify himself with the products he makes. With the development of science and its reliance on universal determination – has given man an excuse to abrogate his freedom and the painful anxiety of responsibility. Avoiding our freedom solves nothing, but increases the already existing problem. Our freedom may be painful, but it is not as painful as the escape from freedom. Once we understand it and fully accept our freedom, we can handle our fundamental problems. This recognition and utilization of our freedom can give us the power to make our lives mature, meaningful

and successful. With this we assume our full responsibility. Koestenbaum writes about responsibility:

To feel responsibility for one's actions is not merely a desirable frame of mind, but is above all the recognition of a fact of human existence, a fact that follows directly from our understanding of our free will or freedom. That respiration brings fresh oxygen to the blood and removes old carbon dioxide is not merely a desirable characteristic of our human constitutions... In the same sense, the existence of responsibility is a fact of our spiritual nature, of our general experience of existing as a human being in the world. (71)

One of the most prominent themes in existentialist writing is that of choice. Humanity's primary distinction, in the view of most existentialists, is the freedom to choose. According to existentialists human beings do not have a fixed nature or essence; each human being makes choices that create his or her own nature. It is central to human existence. Choice is inescapable, even the refusal to choose is a choice itself.

All our actions are free choices. Whenever we act consciously and deliberately, we experience a sense of free will. All our conscious acts are in effect choices among alternatives. Free choice in actions cannot be avoided. When we are confronted with any particular situation, we are forced to make some choice. According to Sartre, choice is more accurately a condemnation than a matter of celebration. Often, it is difficult to realize that all acts are free choices as the choices that are available to us may be unpleasant and painful. Every time the alternatives available to us may not be pleasant. But to be free does mean that there are always alternatives among which we can choose. The mature and authentic individual makes

a deliberate and honest effort to identify clearly all the alternatives available to him and makes a choice/decision. This freedom of choice entails commitment and responsibility. As humans are free to choose their own path, existentialists have argued that they must accept the risk and responsibility of following their commitment wherever it leads.

Authenticity is the degree to which one is true to one's own personality or character. It denotes the genuine, original and true state of human existence. It involves the idea that one has to create oneself and then live in accordance with this self. What is meant by authenticity is that in acting, one should act as oneself. The authentic act is that which is in accordance with one's freedom. In contrast to this, the inauthentic refuses to live in accordance with one's freedom. Authenticity means creating our own meaning of life. When we re-center and re-integrate our lives around our freely chosen purposes, we become more focused, unified and decisive. We gain greater autonomy and increase our capacity to resist and transcend enculturation. This approach to life was developed by such existentialist thinkers as Camus, Sartre, Kierkegaard and Maslow. But only we individually can decide what content to put within this structure of authentic existence. Flynn in his book *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction* describes existing authentically:

Authenticity is a feature of the existentialist individual. In fact, existential individuality and authenticity seem to imply one another. One is no more born an individual (in existential sense) than is one born authentic. To be truly authentic is to have realized one's individuality and vice versa. Both existential 'individuality' and 'authenticity' are achievement words. The

person who avoids choice, who becomes a mere face in the crowd or cog in the bureaucratic machine, has failed to become authentic. (74-75)

Thrown into this world, we must either choose our own lives or have our lives chosen for us by the social forces already operating around us. There are no given, automatic meanings in human life. We human beings must create whatever goals we will pursue. Each one of us grow up in a fully developed human culture. Our education empowers us to look back on the social processes that created us. When we understand our socialization, we can begin to resist and transcend it. We can become more autonomous through a long process of making free choices. By the process of trial and error we can decide how best to re-integrate our lives around purposes we have freely chosen rather than the values and meanings we inherited from the culture. We are what we pursue. If we want to become more authentic, we have to devise our own methods, which might go beyond what anyone has ever tried before.

With this notion of freedom of choice, Sartre defines what it is to be an authentic human being. This reflects the nature of the 'for-itself' as both transcendence and facticity. This notion of authenticity is closely related to Heidegger's 'Dasein'. Authentic choice requires a proper coordination of transcendence and facticity. A lack of proper coordination between transcendence and facticity constitutes bad faith, either at an individual or at an inter- personal level. For example a student who insists that she is going to become a rocket scientist but who automatically reaches for the snooze button on her alarm rather than getting out of bed to attend her physics class is acting in bad faith.

Existential anxiety refers to a sense of worry or panic that may arise from the contemplation of life's biggest question such as "who am I?" or "why am I here?"

This perspective arises from the fact that one has the freedom and responsibility to find meaning in life. With freedom comes responsibility. With responsibility comes guilt, and with guilt comes anxiety. Since our freedom leads to anxiety it is easier to repress it than to bear it proudly. The notion of existential anxiety originated from within existential philosophy, especially as articulated by Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche in the 19th century. Existential anxiety arises when people deeply think about their existence. This thinking leads to thoughts and feelings of freedom and responsibility, which burden the individual to find a purpose in life and to live life genuinely according to it. It can also lead to a sense of alienation and isolation in the world and a heightened awareness of morality.

Since Kierkegaard, many existential philosophers and practitioners have contributed significantly to its understanding. Kierkegaard, states it as an “adventure that every human being must go through” (138) and “the recognition of our freedom.” (64) Heidegger in *Being and Time* linked it to our awareness of the inevitability of death and the ‘impossibility of our possibilities.’ Van Deurzen and Kenward describe it as the “instigator of reflection on the situation one is in” (Dictionary, 7) and Van Deurzen as the “key to our authenticity” (septimus.info). Finally Tillich saw it as a pointer in the direction of the “ultimate concern.”(92)

Kierkegaard used the term dread to describe the general apprehension and anxiety in human life. According to him, dread is built on to us as a means for God to call us to make a commitment of a moral and spiritual way of life despite the void of meaninglessness before us. He interpreted this void in terms of original sin. Barrett describes Kierkegaard’s position concerning Adam and the Existential dread in *Irrational Man*:

Before Adam chose to bite the apple, Kierkegaard says, there opened in him a yawning abyss; he saw the possibility of his own freedom in the committing of a future act against the background of Nothingness. This Nothingness is at once fascinating and dreadful. In Heidegger Nothingness is a presence within our own Being, always there, in the inner quaking that goes on beneath the calm surface of our preoccupation with things. Anxiety before Nothingness has many modalities and guises; now trembling and creative, now panicky and destructive; but always it is as inseparable from ourselves as our own breathing because anxiety is our existence itself in its radical insecurity. In anxiety we both are and are not, at one and the same time, and this is our dread. Our finitude is such that positive and negative interpenetrate our whole existence. (227)

Angst means anxiety or fear as a result of the paradoxical implications of human freedom. We live our lives with our own choices. The dual problems of constant choices and the responsibility for those choices can produce angst in us. Martin Heidegger used the term angst as a reference for the individual's confrontation with the impossibility of finding meaning in a meaningless world and of finding rational justification for subjective choices about irrational issues.

Sartre used the word nausea to describe a person's realization that the universe is not properly ordered or rational but is instead highly contingent and unpredictable. He also used the word anguish to describe the realization that we humans have total freedom of choice in terms of what we can do.

In all of these cases the anxiety, dread, angst, nausea and the anguish are the products of the recognition that what we thought we knew about the world isn't really

the case after all. This world is not the way we assume. This produces an existential crisis which forces us to re-evaluate everything we believe.

Alienation or estrangement is a sixth theme which characterizes existentialism. In a simple term alienation means condition of being estranged from someone or something. The individual can be alienated from himself, from the world and finally he can be alienated from God. It is a kind of psychological and spiritual malaise which is pervasive in modern society of today's world. The concept of alienation is one of the most important and fruitful contribution of Hegel's social philosophy. It is central to the Hegel's account of the development of spirit, and thus of the process of human 'self- development.' Sayers states, "This self is a historical and social creation. It develops through a process of alienation and its overcoming, self- estrangement and self-recognition, a 'fall' into division and reconciliation." (2)

According to Hegel, self-conscious spirit evolves through a series of different historical and social forms. Subjectivity, individuality and freedom develop through a process in which the self is alienated from itself and then comes to recognize itself in its alienation. At the end of the process, the self eventually comes to be at home with itself.

There is also the alienation that exists in society: the alienation of individual human beings who pursue their own desires in estrangement from the actual institutional workings of their society. Alienated from the social system, they do not know that their desires are system-determined and system-determining. And there is the alienation of those who do not identify with the institutions of their own society, who find their society empty and meaningless. Also for Hegel, there is the alienation which develops in civil society between the small class of the wealthy and the

growing discontent of the large class of impoverished works. The most profound alienation of all in Hegel's thought is the alienation or estrangement between one's consciousness and its objects, in which he is aware of the otherness of the object and seeks in a variety of ways to overcome its alienation by mastering it, by bringing it back into himself in some way.

We are surrounded by a world of things which are opaque to us and which we cannot understand. Moreover, science has alienated us from nature by its highly technical concepts, law and theories which are unintelligible to a layman. These products of science stand between us and nature. According to Marx, the industrial revolution has alienated the worker from the product of his own labour, and has made him into a mechanical component in the productive system.

Kierkegaard's philosophy is also formed in response to Hegel. Though he does not use the language of alienation, his ideas about the self in modern society are in some respects similar to those of Marx. Like Marx, he rejects the Hegelian idea that in the modern world the individual can find reconciliation and alienation can be overcome. On the contrary, in the present age individuals are estranged from themselves and from the world which is hostile to an individual.

Absurdism denotes the idea that there is no meaning in the world beyond what meaning we give it. This meaninglessness also embraces the unfairness of the world. Because of the world's absurdity, at any point in time, anything can happen to anyone. It holds that the efforts of humanity to find meaning or rational explanation in the universe ultimately fail and hence are absurd.

The term has its roots in the nineteenth century Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard. Absurdism was born out of the Existentialist movement when the French philosopher and writer Albert Camus broke from that philosophical line of thought and published his manuscript *The Myth of Sisyphus*. The after-effects of World War II provided the social environment that stimulated the absurdist views especially in France.

In his most famous essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus formally introduces his idea, the concept of the Absurd and his famous image of life as a Sisyphean struggle. From its provocative opening sentence: “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide” (11) to its stirring paradoxical conclusion: “The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy”, Camus claims that there is a fundamental conflict between what we want from the universe and what we find in the universe. We will never find in itself the meaning that we want to find. Either we will discover that meaning through a leap of faith, by placing our hopes in God beyond this world, or we will conclude that life is meaningless. Camus opens the essay by asking that life is meaningless which leads one to commit suicide. According to Camus, if life has no meaning, does that mean life is not worth living? And if this was the case, we would have no option but to make a leap of faith or to commit suicide. He opens the third possibility that we can accept and live in a world devoid of meaning or purpose. He identifies three characteristics of the absurd life: revolt, freedom and passion.

To the existentialists, it is important that we must be aware of death. The existentialist does not view death negatively but holds that awareness of death as a basic human condition, which gives significance to living. The fear of death and the

fear of life are related. The fear of death appears to those who are afraid to participate fully in life. Those of us who fear death also fear life as they have never fully lived.

Koestenbaum states the nature of death:

The most dramatic reminder of man's limitations and of the decisive effects of them on his life, that is, on the problem of finding meaning in life, is to be found in the phenomenological analysis of the anticipation of death. Although no one has experienced death, everyone has confronted directly the anticipation of an inevitable personal death. Morality is an essential characteristic of life, and the anticipation of death affects the quality of human existence. (3)

The only knowledge we have regarding death is that it is an inevitable universal truth. Our existence implies at the same time our imminent non-existence, our impending death. This is also called nothingness- the nothingness of our life now and then. We all know that we will die, and sooner or later most of us confront the reality of our own mortality. Death has been discovered comprehensively by very few philosophers. Those who have dealt with it offer their views mostly on the awareness of death. We cannot understand death by seeing the death of others, for that is only a matter of experiencing our loss of them. We cannot experience what they experience.

In Heidegger's analysis we always live life forwards. Our lives are always waiting, planning, searching, fearing, and hoping for the next thing to happen. We never see our lives as a complete whole. They are always open ended, until death. With our death, our life becomes complete. Heidegger argues that death is absolute; it is the one thing that we have to experience for ourselves.

Turning to Jaspers' approach to death, we find that it is quite different from Heidegger's view. According to Jaspers we are always in situations. This is an inevitable condition of man's existence. Secondly, there are four major 'boundary situations' of which the most important is death because it signifies the end of man's 'being- in- the world.' He uses certain existential concepts such as 'Existenz', 'Transcendence' and 'Being' to explain death.

In case of Sartre, death is a threat for him, because it is the point at which we have to surrender ourselves to the judgment of other people. At death, for the first time, we are fixed, our future having vanished. The response to believing that we are soon to die is central to Sartre's wonderful short 'The Wall.'

Man cannot escape death be it real or symbolic. He must construct his life with the full realization of that fact. He must accept that he has been condemned to death. In accepting death, he will neutralize all fear. This is one key to the successful management of human existence. Once he has recognized the inevitability of his death, he will become fearless and decisive. Only through the constant awareness of death will an individual achieve integrity and consistency with his principles. He will not indulge in the art of self-deception and will concentrate on essentials cutting the red tape in his life.

B. The Roots of Existentialism

Existentialism is a trend or mood involving philosophical themes rather than a coherent system of philosophy. It is possible to trace through the past a number of precursors who were not existentialists, but did explore existentialist themes and thereby paved the way for the creation of existentialism in the 20th century.

The first of them was Blaise Pascal (1623-62) who was a mathematician, scientist and theologian of genius. He fully appreciated the heliocentric system newly revealed by Galileo. He questioned the strict rationalism of contemporaries like Rene Descartes. He also questioned the fideistic Catholicism that relied only on faith and revelation of God, and had no systematic explanation for it. He realized that humanity lived in a silent void. Pascal concluded that religion could only be a gamble or “leap of faith” (as put by Kierkegaard later) which was not rooted in any logical or rational arguments. He was the very first existentialists, centuries ahead of his age.

Second was Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881), one of the greatest Russian novelists, is also a leading precursor of twentieth-century existentialism, principally for *Notes from Underground*. The idea that there is no rational pattern in life that we can rely upon is prominent theme in it. His other masterpieces are- *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *The Brother Karamazov*, *The Devils*. In *The Brother Karamazov*, Ivan Karamazov, the intellectual of the siblings, tells a parable, *The Grand Inquisitor*, about Christ's return to earth in medieval Seville. Arrested and condemned to death by the Inquisition, Christ is visited in prison by the Grand Inquisitor Torquemada. Whether Christ or Torquemada has won the argument in it, is left to the reader to decide- an existential choice.

The third precursor was Franz Kafka (1883-1924), author of *Metamorphosis*. In this work Kafka carries the notion of being born or thrown into a particular time and place. This is the fate of Gregor Samsa, protagonist of this novella published in 1915. Gregor is alienated from everyone carrying the guilt that he can no longer work to support his family. He is abused and starved and to his great dismay killed by his relatives. His other two main novels are *The Trial* and *The Castle*. Most of his works are highly ambiguous and all his major novels were left unfinished.

Marie Maine de Biran was a French statesman and philosopher. He was a prolific writer who emphasized the importance of inner consciousness of the self. The others were German idealist F.W.I von Schelling and the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey.

Existentialism found a particular relevance during World War II, when Europe was threatened alternately by material and spiritual destruction. With the instability and risk of all humanity, existentialism acknowledged the fact that individuals are “thrown into the world.” The negative aspect of existence, such as frustration, pain, sickness and death, became for existentialists the essential features of human reality. Some thinkers who constituted the exception to 19th century Romanticism became the acknowledged masters of existentialism. Founding fathers of existentialism are Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche.

Kierkegaard (1813-1855) is Denmark’s greatest philosopher and a key figure in the genesis of existentialism. He was a philosopher, religious writer, satirist, psychologist and a literary critic. Being born to a wealthy family in Copenhagen enabled him to devote his life to the pursuits of his intellectual interests, distancing himself from everyday man of his times. He was brought up by a very religious father

who was guilt-ridden because he had once cursed God. Therefore, Kierkegaard inherited his father's melancholy and guilt.

He took Socrates as his role model, the Greek philosopher who laid the groundwork for Western systems of logic and philosophy. He was the one Greek thinker who was executed for his ideas. Kierkegaard, like many other philosophers, questioned the idea of progress in general, not because it makes people miserable but because it could make life too comfortable. For, according to him the technical progress threatens our life as it distracts us from the real existential questions.

Kierkegaard explored the theme of anxiety or dread in several short books written under various pseudonyms: *Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, *Stages on Life's Way* and *Sickness unto Death*. He outlined how the Christian must move from the attitude of atheist to the religious person, ready to make any sacrifice for God.

Fear and Trembling portrays the sacrifice of a father for his own son, a story told in the book of Genesis. Kierkegaard examines how Abraham could sacrifice his son, Isaac. In the passages of the biblical story, God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac and Abraham immediately accepts God's command. He takes Isaac to the mountain and binds the boy to an altar. As he is about to kill his son, he is stopped by an angel. A ram appears and Abraham follows God's commandment to substitute the animal for his son. He made his choice in a 'leap of faith', a phrase that encapsulates Kierkegaard's whole philosophy.

In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard attacks against Hegelianism. It is an inquiry into the subjectivity of truth. He explains how objective truth may differ

from the subjective truth and how objectivity differs from subjectivity. He describes how objective truth may be an outer truth and subjective truth may be an inner truth. Commenting upon Kierkegaard's theory of existential truth, Sinari says:

Truth is subjectivity, inwardness, eternal becoming and active freedom. The idealistic concept of truth as the conformity of thought to its thing, defined by speculative philosophers is completely formal and objective...For Kierkegaard, if truth is understood empirically in terms of thoughts and things(some practical or social beings), it is at once transformed into a *desideratum*, something that is always uncertain and fleeting and never rigid. Truth here becomes the property of our knowledge, which stands for an objective and epistemological impression rather than an ontological discovery.(15)

He defines three stages of existence: the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious. The religious stage is the highest stage of personal commitment / subjectivity. The religious person understands that suffering is inherent to the religious experience. In the process of attaining eternal happiness, the subjective individual is able to understand the meaning of suffering, an essential aspect of his or her own existence.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) was a German philosopher of the late nineteenth century who challenged the foundations of Christianity and traditional morality. His most famous quotation is his declaration "God is dead!" (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, par. 125) and "Now we want the *Urbemensch* (superman) to live!"(Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 3) His writings on truth, morality, language, aesthetics, cultural theory, nihilism, power, consciousness and the meaning of existence have exerted an enormous influence on western philosophy and intellectual history. Nietzsche's

writing fall into three well-defined periods. The early works, *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Untimely Meditations* are dominated by influence of Schopenhauer and Wagner. The middle period, from *Human, All-Too Human* up to *The Gay Science* reflects the tradition of French aphorists. It praises reason and science and experiments with literary genres. It expresses Nietzsche's emancipation from his earlier Romanticism. His mature philosophy emerges from *The Gay Science*.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra is a philosophical novel composed in four parts. Much of the work deals with ideas such as the "eternal recurrence of the same", the parable on the "death of God", and the "prophecy" of the *Übermensch* which were first introduced in *The Gay Science*. The book chronicles the fictitious travels and speeches of Zarathustra.

Key existentialist philosophers after Nietzsche were Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus. Their detailed discussions are as follows: Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) is widely acknowledged as one of the important philosophers of twentieth century, while remaining one of the most controversial. His thinking contributed to such diverse fields as phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics, political theory, psychology and theology. Heidegger's existential concerns were questions about how to live "authentically", that is with integrity in a dangerous world.

In his magnum opus *Being and Time*, Heidegger investigated the meaning of *Being* by means of phenomenological analysis of human existence *Dasein*. Sinari writes about Heidegger's *Dasein*: "In Heidegger's exposition of *Dasein* we come across an obvious parity between the problem of human existence...*Being* presents itself through *Dasein*...Its reality is essentially constituted of possibilities or

potentialities. Its act is not determined from outside; it can go either way or that, either conquer itself or be lost.” (41) Heidegger realized that the best starting point for a general understanding of ‘being’ was to consider it from the point of view the human being; not in an abstract sense, but a person engaged with his or her living world. He also investigated the significance of our morality, our place in the world and among other people an individual. He begins his philosophy with a profound anti-cartesianism that rejects any dualism regarding mind and body, the distinction between subject and object and the very language of “consciousness”, “experience” and “mind.”

After *Being and Time* there was a shift in Heidegger’s thinking that he himself christened ‘the turn.’ He links ‘the turn’ to his own failure to produce the missing divisions of *Being and Time*. Between 1936 and 1938 he wrote *Contributions to Philosophy*.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) was a French philosopher, playwright, novelist, biographer and a literary critic. He was one of the key figures in the philosophy of existentialism, in 20th century. With the possible exception of Nietzsche, his writings are most widely anthologized and his literary works are widely read. He is commonly considered as the father of existential philosophy whose writings set the tone for intellectual life in the decade immediately following the Second World War.

Sartre’s ontology is explained in his philosophical masterpiece, *Being and Nothingness*(1943), written under the influence of his reading *Being and Time*. He defines two types of reality which lie beyond our conscious experience: the being of the object of consciousness and that of consciousness itself, the ‘in-itself’ and ‘for-itself’ respectively. He concludes with the existential psychoanalysis that interprets

our actions to uncover the fundamental project that unifies our lives. Sinari writes about the nature of the ontology of Being, “That which is given to consciousness is a ‘being-in-itself’. No consciousness is possible without the presence of something of which it is conscious. In fact human world is an ensemble of beings-in-themselves...It is the nature of a being-in-itself to manifest itself as ‘an organized totality of qualities.’ ”(117-118)

Existentialism and Humanism is a 1946 philosophical work by Sartre. The book is based on a lecture that he gave at Club Maintenance in Paris, on October 29, 1945. He asserts that the key defining concept of existentialism is that the existence precedes essence. Then he claims that people must take responsibility for their behavior. He defines anguish which is related with his notion of despair.

Sartre wrote successfully in number of literary modes. His plays are richly symbolic and serve as a means of conveying his philosophy. The best known is *No Exit* (1944). His first great novel *Nausea* (1938) describes about the absurdity of human life. His other major works of fiction are *The Roads to Freedom* trilogy. He wrote many short stories from an early age one of it was recognized as a masterpiece, *The Wall*. Set during the Spanish Civil War, *The Wall* focuses on the psychology of three prisoners condemned to death without trial and awaiting execution at dawn.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) was a French writer, existential philosopher, feminist, political activist and social theorist. She had a significant influence on both feminist existentialism and feminist theory. She is well known for her famous treatise *The Second Sex* (1949). The book deals with the treatment of women throughout history and is often regarded as a major work of feminist philosophy and the starting point of second wave of feminism. She explored the way women have been seen

historically, and questions why they have accepted the role of being ‘second sex’ which is defined in terms of their relationship to men-as wife, mother, daughter and lover.

The Ethics of Ambiguity (1947) is her philosophical essay in which she developed existential ethics that condemned the “spirit of seriousness” in which people too readily identify with certain abstractions at the expense of individual freedom and responsibility.

She Came to Stay was her first published novel. *The Mandarins* is her novel, published in 1954 which won her France’s highest literary prize Prix Goncourt. The story is set just after the end of Second World War. The book deals with the personal lives of philosophers and friends among Sartre’s and de Beauvoir’s intimate circle.

Some of her influences include French philosophy from Decartes to Bergson, the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, the historical materialism of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and the idealism of Immanuel Kant and Hegel.

Albert Camus (1913-1960) was a French Nobel prize winning author and philosopher. Although he separated himself from existentialism, Camus posed one of the twentieth century’s best known existential questions in his *The Myth of Sisyphus*: “There is only one really serious philosophical question, and that is suicide”. (3) In it Sisyphus had to push a rock up a mountain; upon reaching the top, the rock would roll down again, leaving Sisyphus to start again. Camus sees Sisyphus as the absurd hero who lives life to the full, hates death and is condemned to a meaningless task. Thus, Camus introduces his philosophy of absurd.

Camus' first successful novel *The Outsider* was written in 1940. It is the story of a man who without any heroics, agrees to die for truth. Meursault's living and dying for the truth makes the novel a central work of existentialism. His other novels are *The Plague*, *The Fall*, *A Happy Death* and *The First Man*. *The Rebel* (1951) is a second major philosophical book by Camus which treats both the metaphysical and the historical development of rebellion and revolution in western societies.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) is another influential and often overlooked French existentialist of the period. He was strongly influenced by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. The constitution of meaning in human experience was his main interest, and he wrote on perception, art and politics. He expressed his philosophical insights in writings on art, literature, linguistics and politics. He was a major phenomenologist of the first half of the twentieth century to get involved extensively with the sciences and especially with descriptive psychology.

Merleau-Ponty emphasized the incorporation of the body as our way of being in the world. *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) is his most famous work which established him as the pre-eminent philosopher of the body. In it he attacked Cartesian cogito. The Cartesian dualism of mind and body is questioned as our primary way of existing in the world and is rejected in favour of an inter-subjective conception or dialectical and intentional concept of consciousness.

According to Merleau-Ponty, we perceive the world through our bodies; we are embodied subjects, involved in existence. We perceive phenomena first, and then reflect on them through the meditation of perception, which is synonymous with our being in perception, as an outcome of our bodyhood. Other major philosophers associated with existentialism are: Paul Tillich, Rudolph Blutman, Karl Jaspers,

Gabriel Marcel, Clifford Williams, Lincoln Swan, Miguel de Unamuno, Nikolai Berdyaev and Lev Shestov.

C. Existentialism Today

Human existence in the twenty first century is premised on the development of man and time. Before the twenty first century, human beings had lived and existed through the Stone Age to the Modern Age. The development of human beings in areas of life such as science, technology and philosophy have in a way helped in reshaping and defining the history of human existence.

The dawn of the twentieth first century led to new definitions of moral, religion, philosophy, science and technology. The twenty first century man is a man whose existence is characterized by independent thinking and responsibility, and ideas with a gradual shift from “us” to “me.” Human existence in the twenty first century surpasses the construct of his existence in the pre- 21st century. The pre-21st century human exists in a world of universal absolutism where he defines his essence premised on the definitions of his being offered to him by his religion, society, culture and communal interactions.

The 21st century man is a “new man” who defines his existence based on his own perception of his universe. This century man has evolved in every respect be it in field of bio-engineering, medical sciences, arts, culture and literature. This century man dwells on the optic- fiber boundaries which transcend the previous century geographical borders. We can generate new organs and can even create true cloning- and this is not the end of the exploit.

In transcending his existence the postmodern man has become a “superman” or a new age man who takes risks and has high destructive tendencies. Today’s man

lives with the philosophy of survival without recourse to religious dogma or universal value in asserting his authenticity.

Mugge in *Nietzsche: His Life and Works* explains, “The savior hath put them in fetters of false values. Churches (Mosque, African traditional Religion, Buddhism etc.) they call sweetly smelling dens, made by those who sought to hide themselves.” (199) Thus today’s man is sum total of his existence, without an essence within and without. The postmodern existential era is the age of rather “overman.”

In postmodern existentialism human existence takes a shift from the ideas of “objective truth” to subjectivism that is I am my world and my belief is me. Rosenau describes the postmodern existential man as:

As a man who will have an almost anonymous existence. He will be a person but will not be held accountable for events, actions, outcomes, nor will he be the author of “caring” relationships or creative individualism. He will be so independent of all identifiable truth- seeking perspectives that he is, in short, no subject at all. (52)

In such post- modern era we need to realize that the new generations are being raised by technology that has lost its contact with reality. Young people must be educated in the basics of philosophy only then they might be able to use technology responsibly and creatively. There is very little concern for the deeper issues that plague our species. Technology is simply a tool. It seems we have become slaves to the very technology that was supposed to make life easier. Yet we have more stress and less time to think for ourselves.

The message of existentialism, unlike that of many obscures and academic philosophical movements, is as simple as can be. It is that every one of us, as an individual, is responsible- responsible for what we do, responsible for who we are, responsible for the way we face and deal with the world, responsible ultimately, for the way the world is. It is, in a very short phrase, the philosophy of ‘no excuse.’ We cannot shift that burden onto God, or nature, or the ways of the world.

The field of cinema, which is nothing but reflection of our society, also contains the theme of existentialism. There are number of existentially- themed films, which address the human condition in a profound way. Some of them are: *Ex Machina* (2015), *Mia Madre* (2015), *Leviathan* (2014), *Boyhood* (2014), *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* (2014), *All is Lost* (2013), *Amour* (2012), *The Last Laugh* (1924), *Modern Times* (1936), *The Killers* (1946) and so.

Existentialism has continued to play an important role in contemporary thought in both the continental and analytical traditions. It introduced a new norm and authenticity for understanding what it means to be human. The society for phenomenology and existential philosophy, as well as societies devoted to Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir and other existential philosophers, provides a forum for ongoing work that derives from classical existentialism, often bringing it into confrontation with more recent movements such as structuralism, deconstruction, hermeneutics and feminism.

In the area of gender studies Judith Butler draws on existential sources and so do Lewis Gordon in the area of race theory and Matthew Ratcliffe develops on existential approach to psychopathology. Works of Charles Taylor and Paul Ricoeur, David Carr has its roots in the existential revision of Hegelian notions of temporality

and its critique of rationalism. Hubert Dreyfus developed an influential criticism of the Artificial Intelligence program drawing essentially upon the existentialist idea especially of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty.

Existential motifs have once again become prominent in the works of leading thinkers. The books by Cooper and Alan Schrift suggest that re-appraisal of existentialism is important in contemporary philosophy. Reynolds, for example, concludes his introduction to existentialism with a consideration of how post-structuralists such as Foucault and Derrida extend certain reflections found in Sartre, Camus and Heidegger.

Margaret Simons re-evaluates the role of Beauvoir, and of feminist thought, in existentialism. In 2011 *The Continuum Companion to Existentialism* appeared followed by *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*. Both deals with the systematic relevance of existential concepts and approaches for contemporary work in philosophy and other fields. Finally, Aho highlights how existentialism plays an important role in areas as diverse as science, psychiatry, health care and environmental philosophy.

D. Existential Psychology

Existential psychology is the psychology of human existence in all its complexity and paradoxes. Human existence is more than an abstract concept as it involves real people in concrete situation. The field of existential psychology combines the big question of philosophy with the tenets of psychology. This field considers how these philosophical questions affect the psyche and behavior. It is a practical psychology of everyday living-how to survive and thrive in the midst of tensions between good and evil, hope and despair, love and hate, courage and safety and so. It is the mature, positive psychology of how to live and die well in spite of the conflicts and tensions that pervade human existence.

Existential psychology seeks to address fundamental questions relevant to the survival of humanity and well-being of every individual. Some of such questions are: What does it mean to exist and live as a human being? What does it mean to be authentic and fully alive? What are the givens of human existence? How do we live with fear, anxiety, despair, alienation, loneliness guilt, absurdity and meaninglessness? What are the forces that shape human condition?

Rollo May has been referred to as the father of American Existential Psychology. The beginning of May's contribution began with his doctoral thesis which was published in 1950 titled *The Meaning of Anxiety*. James Bugental may not be well known but has contributed to existential humanist approach. Victor Frankl is another major figure in existential psychology. His most famous book is *Man's Search for Meaning*. He was the founder of logotherapy and is a prominent source of inspiration for humanist psychologists.

E. An Existential Approach to Literature

Existential idea is better conveyed through literature since art is the most powerful expression of human creativity. Existentialists communicated their ideas through plays, novels and short stories. This was due to the unique literary talent and aspirations of the French existentialists- Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Gabriel Marcel. Their novels and plays published during and after World War II, were more widely read than their philosophical works. It was mainly through these philosophers that existentialism was initially conveyed to the reading public. The 19th century Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky is probably the most well-known existentialist literary figure. His great novels *Notes from Underground* and *The Brother Karamazov* made a great impact on the writers of this movement. Some important literary works are Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*, *The Stranger* and *The Plague* and Sartre's *Nausea*.

The most prominent theme in existentialist writing is that of choice. American writers like Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson often wrote about these concepts. Some other American writers who reveal existential elements in their writing are: William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck. The other themes are alienation, freedom and responsibility, and authenticity. Within the sphere of drama, the theatre of absurd and Beckett were influenced by existentialist ideas; later playwrights such as Albee, Pinter and Stoppard and Peter Weiss continued it.

In Australian literature, existential theme occurs first and foremost in the works of, Patrick White. Man's search for a purpose in life and his free will to decide his own fate to govern his own life are some of White's major themes in his novels and

plays. Les Murray's verse novel *Fredy Neptune* is about experiences of Fred Boetteher, during the years between the world wars. Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang* deals with existential experience of achieving authentic behaviour. Peter Carey is seen as the heir and successor to Patrick White and both explore similar themes with a singular grace and gravitas.

In Indian literature, Arun Joshi and Anita Desai are the two novelist who have been acclaimed for the treatment of existential themes in their novels. Along with them Anjana Appachana has also achieved a place for herself as an existentialist. These writers reveal the confrontation of modern man with his self and the question of his existence. Joshi's recurrent theme is alienation. In his four novels- *Foreigner*, *The Strange Case of Mr. Billy Biswas*, *The Apprentice* and *The Last Labyrinth* Joshi deals with four facets of the theme of alienation, in relation to self, the society and humanity at large. The characters of Joshi are alienated and strangers to their own land.

Anita Desai's characters are complete opposite to the protagonist of Camus as they live like strangers and are unable to communicate. The crisis in her fiction is born out of marital discord. Starting from her first novel *Cry the Peacock* to the latest *The Zigzag Way*, all her novels highlight the existentialist's predilection for portraying the predicament of man.

Anjana Appachana's only novel *Listening Now* narrates the story of Padma who undergoes existential suffering in the world as a single woman in the society.

II. Origin and Development of Australian Literature

When European sailors began entering Australian waters in the early 1600s, they called it Terra Australia Incognita (unknown land of South). Captain James Cook discovered Australia in 1770 when he reached Botany Bay. It was made a penal colony for exilement of the convicts. Many convicts and free settlers, together with some officers and soldiers, soon realized that it was not a temporary exile but a new home. Before this aborigines had already been there for tens of thousands of years. These aboriginal peoples of Australia developed a very rich oral literature which constituted their songs, chants, legends, and stories.

At the point of the first colonization, Indigenous Australians had not developed a system of writing, so the first literary accounts of Aborigines come from the journals of early European explorers, which contain descriptions of first contact. David Unaipon (1872–1967) was the first aboriginal author. He provided the first accounts of Aboriginal mythology written by an Aboriginal: *Legendary Tales of the Aborigines*. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (1920–1995) was a famous Aboriginal poet, writer and rights activist credited with publishing the first Aboriginal book of verse: *We Are Going* (1964). Sally Morgan's novel *My Place* was considered a breakthrough memoir in terms of bringing indigenous stories to wider notice.

The chief subject of Aboriginal narratives is the land. As Aboriginals travel from place to place, they (either informally or ceremonially) name each place, telling of its creation and of its relation to the journeys of the Ancestors. Many of the stories have to do with the journeys of the Ancestors and the “creation sites,” places at which they created different clans and animals. Other stories concern contests between Ancestor figures for power and knowledge.

The oral literature of the Aboriginals is involved with performance. It is not simply a verbal performance. Traditional song is very often associated with dance, and storytelling with gesture and mime. Stories may be accompanied by diagrams drawn in the sand and then brushed away again. Each song, each narrative, is in effect acted out. The traditional Aboriginals have permitted their songs and stories to be collected and recorded for the time when the young people, who they feel show little interest in their traditional literature at present, return to the old ways of custom. The non-Aboriginal's knowledge of this traditional literature relies almost entirely on printed translation.

Anthropologists Catherine H. and Ronald M. Berndt were the first to publish traditional narratives and songs in full in the original language (though linguists have still not agreed on how best to represent Aboriginal speech), then with a translation and a commentary. One good example of their work is *Three Faces of Love: Traditional Aboriginal Song-Poetry* (1976).

Not all Aboriginal song and story is in tribal dialect. In the 1970s and '80s, as Aboriginal people began to write in formal English, some began to express themselves in what might be called Aboriginal English, English that is different from standard English. It is formed in short, simple sentences, and it makes considerable use of repetition with variations. It also conveys a certain dignity—and a rich sense of humour. Some versions of this can be found in the different narratives included in Sally Morgan's *My Place* (1987) and, more sensitive still as a transcription, in Paddy Roe's *Gularabulu: Stories from the West Kimberley* (1983).

Since Australia was a collection of British colonies, its literary tradition begins with and is linked to the broader tradition of English literature. The earliest writing

was that of reports, letters, journals and memoirs. The most literary of these were by Lieutenant Watkin Tench, a British Marine officer. In *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay* and his subsequent work *A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson*, Tench provides a first-hand account of the voyage and then goes on to describe the subsequent settlement in Botany Bay. John White's *Journal of a Voyage to Botany Bay* was published in 1790. *Quintus Servinton: A Tale founded upon Incidents of Real Occurrence* has been called Australia's first novel. It was written and published in Tasmania in 1831 by the convicted English forger Henry Savery. In 1838 *The Guardian: A Tale* by Anna Maria Bunn was published in Sydney. It was the first Australian novel printed and published in mainland Australia and the first Australian novel written by a woman. It is a Gothic romance.

Some early poets were Charles Harpur, Adam Lindsay Gordon and Henry Kendall. Charles Harpur was famous for writing his first sonnet sequence *Thoughts: A Series of Sonnets* published in Australia in 1845. He began contributing poetry and sketches to Sydney newspapers. Adam Lindsay Gordon was much more famous poet. He was the only Australian to be included in the Oxford Standard Authors series and the only Australian to be given a place in poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey (1934). "The Sick Stockrider" from his *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes* (1870) was a general favourite, much admired and much recited. It conveyed a sense of comradeship, mapped a world by a bushman's kind of detail, and exhibited a stoic sentimentalism that was exactly to colonial taste. The Australian born poet Henry Kendall is a poet of forests and mountain streams who specialized in more mournful effects. His prize winning poem 'The Sydney International Exhibition' (1879) takes

up Harpur's theme of lament for what has been lost through the white settlement of Australia.

The early novelists such as Rolf Boldrewood (*Robbery Under Arms*), Marcus Clarke (*For the Term of His Natural Life*), Henry Handel Richardson (*The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*) and Joseph Furphy (*Such Is Life*) gave valuable insights into the penal colonies which helped form the country and also the early rural settlements. Miles Franklin (*My Brilliant Career*) and Jeannie Gunn (*We of the Never Never*) wrote of lives of European pioneers in the Australian bush from a female perspective. Albert Facey wrote of the experiences of the Goldfields and of Gallipoli (*A Fortunate Life*). Ruth Park wrote of the sectarian divisions of life in impoverished 1940s inner city Sydney (*The Harp in the South*).

James Tucker's *Ralph Rashleigh; or, The Life of an Exile* (written in 1844) begins as a picaresque account of low-life London and proceeds through the whole gamut of convict life, escape, bushrangers, and life among the Aboriginals. One of its most telling moments is Ralph's panic at being lost in the bush, a theme that compelled many colonial writers and painters. The first widely known novel of Australia was *Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn* (1859) by Henry Kingsley, brother of Charles Kingsley. Catherine Helen Spence's *Clara Morison* (1854) details with a nice sense of irony the social preoccupations of Adelaide in the mid-19th century, but it was not a well-known novel.

Marcus Clarke's *His Natural Life* is the first novel regarded as an Australian classic. It is a powerful account of the convict experience, drawing heavily on documentary sources. *Robbery Under Arms* by Rolf Boldrewood (Thomas Alexander Browne) was

a work that earned him a great reputation. Narrated by Dick Marston, it covers cattle-duffing, bushranging, horse theft, convictism and aborigines.

Ada Cambridge (1844-1926) began publishing before Bolderwood. She wrote twenty four novels, a volume of short stories, three volumes of poetry and two autobiographies. Rosa Praed (1851-1935) produced almost fifty novels and a collection of stories, about twenty of them dealing to some extent with Australia. All were published after she settled in England with her husband. A third woman novelist of this period is 'Tasma'(Jessie Catherine Couvreur). Her marriage to an adulterous husband was dissolved later. Four of her six novels are identifiable with the life of this man. She is remembered for her first novel, *Uncle Piper of Piper's Hill* (1889).

In 1880 the most famous of all Australian periodicals, the *Sydney Bulletin*, was founded. Its chief effects on literature were to popularize bush life as a subject, to encourage amateurs to write and to move the literary capital of Australia from Melbourne to Sydney. The best-known of all the *Bulletin* contributors was Henry Lawson. The best of his works was done in the first fifteen years of his writing career. Among the collections of Lawson's work are *While the Billy Boils* (1896) and *Children of the Bush* (1902). The view of bush life offered by Andrew Barton Paterson or 'The Banjo' (1864-1941) is very remote from the desolation and despair of Lawson. Paterson was a well-known bush balladist. His best-known song is 'Waltzing Matilda', which is based on a bush story from Queensland. His ballads and short stories were considered by Lawson to be over-optimistic and unrealistic.

Henry Handel Richardson (1870-1946) was the most impressive novelist of the period who wrote under the pseudonym of Ethel Florence Lindesay Robertson. Her impressive trilogy *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* traces the fluctuating

fortunes of the immigrants who established the new urban Australia in the late 19th century. It was her own immediate experiences that formed the substance of her first two novels, *Maurice Guest* (1908) and *The Getting of Wisdom* (1910). Richardson's experiences as a music student in Leipzig, where she had been taken by her mother to continue her piano studies, forms the background to *Maurice Guest*. *The Getting of Wisdom* is based on her own experiences at Presbyterian ladies' College, Melbourne. It is much lighter in tone. Richardson called it 'a merry little book', though it has episodes of bitter disappointment and frustration.

An Australian nationalist who has continued to have an influence is Mary Gilmore (1865-1962). Her poetry has a unique aphoristic quality; it deals with elemental features of the landscape and corresponding general ideas. Her first volume, *Marri'd and Other Verses* (1910) is largely composed of poems on domestic themes. Two of her volumes of the early 1930s, *The Wild Swan* (1930) and *Under the Wilgas* (1932) introduce aboriginal material.

Norman Lindsay (1879-1969) made his career as an artist, etcher, sculptor, writer and editorial cartoonist. His first novel, *A Curate in Bohemia*, was written in 1904-5. It is a light hearted account of his art student days in Melbourne in the later 1890s. His other works are: *The Magic Pudding: Being the Adventures of Bunyip Bluegum and his Friends*, *Bill Barnacle and Sam Sawnoff* (1918), *Redheap* (1930), *The Cautious Amorist* (1932) and *Saturdee* (1933).

Katharine Susannah Prichard (1883-1969) though born in Fiji, was brought up in Melbourne and Launceston. Her Launceston experiences formed the base for the autobiographical children's story *The Wild Oats of Han* (1928). Her first novel, *The Pioneers* (1915), won the Hodder & Stoughton All Empire Literature Prize. In all

Prichard wrote eleven novels, many short stories, at least twelve plays, two volumes of poetry, an account of a visit to Russia and a great many political pamphlets and articles. Her early novels deal with romantic infatuation but from *The Black Opal* (1921) onwards fashionableness and style becomes insignia of spiritual emptiness.

Vance Palmer (1885-1959) is better known as a novelist, short story writer and essayist than a dramatist. His first substantial work was *The Outpost* (1924). In it he introduces his essential theme: a man physically and psychologically strong engaged in a contest with fate. These themes pervade in *The Man Hamilton* (1928), *Men and Human* (1930) and *The Passage* (1930). He wrote several other novels, the most notable being the Macy Donovan trilogy *Golconda* (1948), *Seedtime* (1957) and *The Big Fellow* (1959). Some other social realists are: Marjorie Barnard and Flora Eldershaw who wrote under the pseudonym 'M. Barnard Eldershaw', Jean Devanny Eleanor Dark and Brian Penton.

John Shaw Neilson was an Australian poet. His first volume of poetry was *Heart of Spring*, (1919) and the subsequent volumes were: *Ballad and Lyrical Poems* (1923) and *New Poems* (1927). His best known poem is 'The Orange Tree'. Kenneth Slessor (1901-1971) has a substantial reputation as a writer who managed to combine Australian and international poetic influences and to write with understanding of past and present. He was one of Australia's leading poets, notable particularly for the absorption of modernist influences into Australian poetry. The 'Kenneth Slessor Prize for Poetry' is named after him. His best known poem is 'Five Bells'. A second major poem from Slessor's middle period was 'Five Visions of Captain Cook'.

Christina Stead (1902 –1983) was a novelist and short-story writer acclaimed for her satirical wit and penetrating psychological characterizations. Her first novel

Seven Poor Men of Sydney (1934) is in sharp contrast to the social realist novels of Prichard, Palmer, Devanny or Penton in that its concentration is inward rather than outward. Stead's best-known novel, ironically titled *The Man Who Loved Children*, is largely based on her own childhood, and was first published in 1940. She wrote 15 novels and several volumes of short stories in her lifetime.

Jindyworobak movement, brief nationalistic Australian literary movement of the 1930s to mid-1940s was sought to promote native ideas and traditions, especially in literature. The Jindyworobak movement was begun in Adelaide during 1937 by the poet Rex Ingamells and the other members of the Jindyworobak club. The name was taken from a Woiwurrung word meaning "to join" or "to annex", which had been used by the poet and novelist James Devaney in his 1929 book *The Vanished Tribes*.

Xavier Herbert was best known for his Miles Franklin Award-winning novel *Poor Fellow My Country* (1975). His other famous novel was *Capricornia* (1938) in which he celebrated the glory and tragedy of Aborigines. It typifies the goals of the Jindyworobak movement. Herbert is considered as one of the elder statesmen of Australian literature. He is also known for short story collections and his autobiography *Disturbing Element*.

R. D Fitzgerald was a poet known for his technical skill and seriousness. FitzGerald's poetry, together with that of Kenneth Slessor, was an important modernist influence on Australian literature of the late 1920s and 1930s. Fitzgerald's first publication, *The Greater Apollo: Seven Metaphysical Songs* (1927) introduces his lifelong concern with the nature of time. *Moonlight Acre* (1938) was awarded the gold medal of the Australian Literature Society for the best book by an Australian author published that year. In 1965 FitzGerald shared with A. D. Hope the Britannica

Australia award for literature and in 1974 he won the Poetry Society of America's Frost medal.

A.D Hope was a poet and essayist known for his satirical slant. He was also a critic, teacher and academic. His writing, compelling in its originality and passion, and rigorous in its satirical edge and philosophical insights, embodies in its language both the greatness and the frailty of the human spirit. Though traditional in form, his poetry is thoroughly modern, two outstanding examples being "Conquistador" (1947) and "The Return from the Freudian Isles" (1944). Both poems are typical in their satirical approach and striking clarity of diction. Hope also wrote religious and metaphysical poems, as well as erotic verse, which often attracted controversy; *The Wandering Islands* (1955) was his first collection which was followed by several volumes of new poems and of collected poems. He also wrote essays and criticism.

Judith Wright was a prolific poet, critic, and short-story writer, who published more than 50 books. Wright was also an uncompromising environmentalist and social activist campaigning for Aboriginal land rights. She believed that the poet should be concerned with national and social problems. In 1945 Wright's poetry began to appear in magazines. The first of her several books of poetry, *The Moving Image* (1946), was followed by *Woman to Man* (1949), *The Gateway* (1953), *The Two Fires* (1955), *The Other Half* (1966), and *Alive* (1973).

James McAuley was like both Hope and Wright, a major critic of Australian poetry. His first poem, 'Homage to T. S. Eliot', appeared in 1935 in *Hermes*, the university magazine he was to edit. His first volume of verse, *Under Aldebaran*, was published by Melbourne University Press in 1946. McAuley's poetic reputation was consolidated with *A Vision of Ceremony* (1956). The role as public intellectual, which

he increasingly sought, found expression in *The End of Modernity* (1959). His later poems are: *Collected Poems 1936-1970* (1971), *Music Late at Night: Poems 1970-1973* (1976) and the posthumous collection *A World of its Own* (1977). He also wrote books on literary criticism. Ken Goodwin states the themes in Australian literature, “For a variety of reasons and from a variety of cultural backgrounds, writers in Australia have emphasized such themes as the search for identity by a wanderer or explorer, the establishment of a habitation and family line, the quest to recover the past, the sense of being an outcast, and the threat of impending violence. The wanderer or explorer, in the work of such writers as Furphy, Brennan, Herbert, McAuley, White or Stow is likely to be more engaged on a metaphysical quest than a topographical one...” (3).

Patrick White is regarded as one of the most important writers of the twentieth century. In 1973, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, the first Australian to have been awarded the prize. His writing tackles existential questions as well as myriad human flaws, weaknesses and hypocrisies. His works have already been discussed in detail. Some other novelists of this period were: Eve Langley, George Johnston, Ion Idriess, Jon Cleary, Morris West, Colleen McCullough and Ruth Park. The most outspoken of Australia’s social and political novelists are Xavier Herbert and Frank Hardy.

Les Murray is Australia's leading poet and one of the greatest contemporary poets. His work has been published in ten languages. He has published around 30 volumes of poetry and is often called Australia's Bush-bard. The recipient of numerous honors for his poetry, he has published collections including *The Ilex Tree* (1965) and *Dog Fox Field* (1990), both winners of the Grace Levin Prize for poetry;

Subhuman Redneck Poems (1996), winner of the T.S. Eliot Prize for poetry and a UK Poetry Society Choice; *Learning Human* (2000); *Conscious and Verbal* (2001); *Poems the Size of Photographs* (2004); and *Taller When Prone* (2011). He is also the author of *Killing the Black Dog: A Memoir of Depression* (2011). Recurrent subjects in Murray's work are the history and landscape of Australia, white settlers, indigenous life, family, and the rural landscape.

Bruce Dawe is one of the biggest selling and most highly regarded of Australian poets. His ability to express the drama and beauty of everyday life has made his work readily accessible to the general public. His first volume of poetry, *No Fixed Address*, appeared in 1962. More volumes of poetry were to follow, culminating in *Sometimes Gladness: Collected Poems 1954 – 1997* (1997). David Malouf's volumes of poetry include *Bicycle and Other Poems* (1970; also published as *The Year of the Foxes and Other Poems*), *Neighbours in a Thicket* (1974), *Wild Lemons* (1980), *First Things Last* (1980), and *Typewriter Music* (2007).

Australian theatre history incorporates the stories of many actors, entrepreneurs, playwrights, directors and others, working behind the scenes and on stage, across many cities and towns. Countless performances have entertained, bored, captivated and confronted Australian audiences. There have been amateur and professional groups, local performers and artists visiting from other countries, lavish large-scale productions and small community-based shows featuring plays and performances written by Australians and imported from other countries. Writing about theatre Goodwin says:

Stage Cockney was a theatrical language used in much of the comedy and melodrama presented in Australian theatres in the nineteenth century. Mixed

playbills of farce, nautical drama, Shakespeare, recitations, operetta songs and variety acts were the staple of the Australians as of the English theatre. Some of the material was imported, some drew on the local experience of convictism, bushranging and the gold rushes for its melodramatic material.

(59)

The function of Australian Drama has always been the development of a unique Australian identity. This identity is inextricably linked to the land. Throughout the history of the world there have been works of art which signal a country's identity. For Australia, a relatively new country, the need to establish a unique Australian identity has been a focus of artistic expression. The issue of identity has been linked with what they experience every day. The convict writer Edward Geoghegan wrote nine or ten plays for the Royal Victorian Theatre in Sydney during the 1840s. They included *The Currency Lass* (1844), a sentimental farce, and *The Hibernian Father* (1844), a historical melodrama set in Galway.

Professional theatres had begun in Sydney with the opening of Levey's Theatre Royal in 1833. Hobart's Theatre Royal opened in 1837, to be followed by the Queen's Theatre Royal in Melbourne and the Queen's Theatre in Adelaide. By the early 1980s there were five large theatres in each Sydney and Melbourne, three in Brisbane, two in Adelaide and two in Tasmania as well as many small semi-professional and amateur theatres. Between 1834 and 1914 over 600 Australian plays are known to have been performed.

The most talented of the playwrights was Louis Esson (1878-1943). His first full length play was *The Time is no yet Ripe*, a political comedy. The best of his plays

is *The Drovers*, published in his *Dead Timber, and the Other Plays*, 1920. Its central character is a dying drover who is fatally injured in a stampede.

The first post-war Australian stage play of merit was *Rusty Bugles* (1948) by Summer Locke-Elliott. It is an episodic work about the boredom of a group of soldiers at an ordnance depot in the Northern Territory. The Melbourne Union Theatre in 1954 and the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust in 1955 had a box-office success with *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* by Ray Lawler. In the late 1970s he wrote two other plays about the same group of characters – *Kid Stakes* (1978) and *Other Times* (1978)- which, with a revised version of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, form *The Doll Trilogy* (1978, first performed in 1977). *Kid Stakes* is the first in the trilogy, introducing the characters, and set in 1937 during the summer of the first doll. *Other Times* is set in 1945 during World War II, and *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* concludes the trilogy. Although a number of technically competent plays appeared in the 1950s, no play after *The Doll* excited widespread interest until *The One Day of the Year* by Alen Seymour.

Patrick White's contribution to Australian indigenous theatre is noteworthy. He is a pioneer in the move away from naturalism to the opening of inner world. His plays represent a change in the history of Australian theatre, initiating a period of experimental drama. So far, the Australian drama reflected the ordinary life in a naturalistic way as in the plays like Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* and Alan Seymour's *The One Day of the Year*. Patrick White employed modernist techniques like expressionism and symbolism. He has written eight plays: *The Ham Funeral* (1947), *The Season at Sarsaparilla* (1962), *A Cheery Soul* (1963), *Night on Bald Mountain* (1964), *Big Toys* (1977), *Signal Driver* (1982), *Netherwood*(1983) and

Shepherd on the Rocks (1987). Like his novels, Patrick White's plays offer a rich medley of styles - comedy and tragedy, vaudeville and melodrama, poetic reverie and philosophical exploration.

Peter Kenna's plays explore the milieu of suburban Irish Catholicism on the edge of crime. He first attracted national attention as a writer in 1959 when *The Slaughter of St Teresa's Day* won a General Motors-Holden National Playwriting Competition. His other play, *A Hard God* (1974) introduces another Irish Catholic family, the Cassidys.

David Williamson first turned to writing and performing in plays in 1967 with La Mama Theatre Company and The Pram Factory, and rose to prominence in the early 1970s, with works such as *Don's Party* (1973), a comic drama set during the 1969 federal election; and *The Removalists* (1971). He also collaborated on the screenplays for *Gallipoli* (1981) and *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1982). Williamson's work as a playwright focuses on themes of politics, loyalty and family in contemporary urban Australia, particularly in two of its major cities, Melbourne and Sydney. Major works include *The Club*, *The Department*, *Travelling North*, *The Perfectionist*, *Emerald City*, *Money and Friends* and *Brilliant Lies*.

Some other playwrights are as follows: Dorothy Hewett's first play, *This Old Man Came Rolling Home* (1976) is set in the Sydney working-class suburb of Redfern. Its realism is akin to Sean O'Casey's. Later plays move from poetic realism to symbolic expressionism. Louis Nowra was one of the most intellectual of the younger playwrights. His first major success was *Inner Voices* (1977). Other plays were *Visions* (1979), *Inside the Island* (1981), *The Precious Woman* (1981) and *Sunrise* (1983). The first full length play by Stephen Sewell was *The Father we Loved*

on a Beach by the Sea (1980) and the fourth, *The Blind Giant is Dancing* (1983) deal with similar contemporary Australian matters.

III. Patrick White

A. Patrick White: His Life and Works

Patrick White remains a key figure in twentieth century literature as his works are read and studied widely across the globe. He was born in Knightsbridge, London on 28 May 1912, to a wealthy Australian grazing family with strong ties to England. His family returned to Sydney, Australia when he was six months old. At the age of four White developed asthma, a condition that had taken the life of his maternal grandfather. White's health was delicate throughout his childhood, which prevented him from participating in many childhood activities. Due to asthma, he started reading and writing early (from the age of about nine) chiefly to poetry and plays.

White received his school education partly in Australia and partly at Cheltenham College, England. His parents felt that he should work on the land rather than become a writer, and hoped that his work as a jackaroo would temper his artistic ambitions. White had realised early in life that he was not cut out for a grazier's life but rather for that of an artist and writer. He then lived a few years in Australia, working as a jackaroo and preparing for university.

At King's College, Cambridge, White studied French and German languages and literatures (1932-1935) and spent considerable time in France and Germany. The experience of the Australian landscape on the one hand, and European literature and thought on the other were to become two major sources of influence on White's writing. During White's time at Cambridge he published a collection of poetry titled

The Ploughman and Other Poems, and wrote a play named *Bread and Butter Women*, short stories and his first novel *Happy Valley*(1939).

After graduating from Cambridge he went to London where he moved in artists' circles, making friends with painters, musicians and writers. While on a visit to USA he wrote his second novel *The Living and the Dead* (1941). By the time World War II broke out, he had returned to London and joined the British Royal Air Force. He was accepted as an intelligence officer, and was posted to the Middle East. He served in Egypt, Palestine, and Greece before the war was over. While in Egypt, he had an affair with a Greek army officer, Manoly Lascaris, who was to become his life partner. Through Lascaris and his family White also developed his love for Greece.

After spending some years in London White and Lascaris moved to Australia. They first settled on a farm at Castle Hill and in 1964 moved to Centennial Park, Sydney. During these years he started to make a reputation for himself as a writer, publishing *The Aunt's Story* and *The Tree of Man* in the US in 1955 and shortly after in the UK. *The Tree of Man* was well received in England and the United States but it was greeted with cries of scorn in Australia. White had doubts about whether to continue writing after his books were condemned in Australia. But he decided not to give up and his major breakthrough in Australia came when his next novel, *Voss*, won the inaugural Miles Franklin Literary Award.

In 1961, White published *Riders in the Chariot* which became both a bestseller and a prize-winner, gaining him a second Miles Franklin Award. A number of White's works from the 1960s depict the fictional town of Sarsaparilla, including his collection of short stories, *The Burnt Ones*, and the play, *The Season at Sarsaparilla*. The longest of White's novels, *The Vivisector* was written in 1968. It

details the lifelong creative journey of fictional artist/painter Hurtle Duffield and was actually dedicated to painter Sidney Nolan. The book explores universal themes like the suffering of the artist, the need for truth and the meaning of existence.

When Patrick White was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1973, the Swedish Academy referred to the author's epic and psychological narrative art as having introduced a new continent into literature. His Nobel Literature Prize was the first to be awarded to an Australian. The same year *The Eye of the Storm* was published. It is regarded as one of White's best novels, largely owing to the reputation it received from the Swedish Academy.

Voss (1957) is based on the story of the German explorer Ludwig Leichhardt. Like him, Voss intends to cross the Australian continent from east to west with a group of men. The three stages of his quest are represented by coast/city, bush, and interior/desert, respectively. *A Fringe of Leaves* and *The Twyborn Affair* are the two books representing the last phase.

A Fringe of Leaves (1976) is a historical novel, as the story of its heroine, Ellen Roxburgh, is based on experiences of Eliza Fraser, who was also shipwrecked on the island, met with an escaped convict who had lived alongside the island's aboriginal people, and married to "Mr. Jevons". She, however, eventually returned to the UK. In *The Twyborn Affair* (1979) White charts the transmigration of a soul through three different identities -Eudoxia, Eddie, and Eadith - two of them in female guise. The novel can be read as an enquiry into bisexuality, and sees androgyny as a symbol of wholeness.

In 1981, White published his autobiography, *Flaws in the Glass: A Self-Portrait*, which explored issues about which he had publicly said little, such as his homosexuality, and his refusal to accept the Nobel Prize personally. In 1986 White released one last novel, *Memoirs of Many in One*, though it was published under the pen name "Alex Xenophon Demirjian Gray" and edited by Patrick White. He died in Sydney on 30 September 1990.

B. Patrick White as Playwright

The most important reason for Patrick White's success as a dramatist involves his ability to create realistic characters who face universal predicaments and challenges that cannot be easily overcome. Through those characters, we witness White's concern with the plight of the human situation, the problems involved with making difficult decisions, and the destinies that we create for ourselves.

White's career as a dramatist began even earlier than his collection *Four Plays*. He had a lifelong passion for theatre from the very first childhood, when his mother introduced him to the amateur theatre of Sydney. Bjorksten states about his interest for plays:

Patrick White began to write plays as a ten-year old, and long before he had completely deserted poetry for prose he wrote dramatic material. His first plays were performed in Sydney in 1933- among others, a drawing-room comedy. In London towards the end of 1930s he wrote sketches and lyrics and practiced writing realistic plays to suit the taste of the time. One of these was accepted and was to be presented with Françoise Rosay as guest in one of the parts, but the war intervened, and not one of these examples of his dramatic apprenticeship has been preserved. (79)

White's first appearance as a dramatist took place in 1947, when his comedy *Return to Abyssinia* was performed in London. But there is no copy of it in existence. Eight plays in all have been published: *The Ham Funeral*, *The Season at Sarasparilla*, *A Cheery Soul*, *Night on Bald Mountain*, *Big Toys*, *Signal Driver*, *Netherwood* and *Shepherd on the Rocks*. While writing the plays, White carried Australian drama one step further. He broke away from the tradition of naturalism and blended different

dramatic forms. Doing so, he served as a model for other Australian playwrights. It was more revolutionary when he wrote the play in the year 1947 than when it was published in 1961. He used realism, symbolism, expressionism, comic imitation and poetry in his drama. McCallum states that White didn't follow any one style but chose from wide range:

What was troublesome about White then, and so welcome now, is that he was untrammelled. He was the first successful modern dramatist- in the special Australian sense of the word, meaning non- naturalistic. He has dramaturgical links with the early surrealists, Strindberg, the German expressionists, and the post-World War II absurdist. He also drew on the popular theatrical traditions of the vaudeville and the musical hall. (140)

Mixing all the styles caused a strong condemnation of attack at that time but now it is seen as exciting theatrical opportunity. What White was writing in 1950s and 1960s was incomprehensible for the readers as they expected an easy literature. He persistently tried to disclose the intricacies of human psyche, thus his narrative is psychological employing stream-of-consciousness technique, Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis and archetypal psychology. Talking about the narrative techniques Akerholt states:

There is always a mixture of colloquial speech and heightened prose in White's dramatic dialogue, often within the same speech, as we see in the goat woman's words. Sometimes it is interspersed with songs or lyric verse, expressive of a character's inner mind, deepest fears and desires, beyond the masks which hide the inner reality. (*Patrick White Centenary: The Legacy of a Prodigal Son* 155-156)

During his life, White's plays were not excessively well-received, with *Night on Bald Mountain* severely criticized by critics and rejected by White himself. Despite this, he went on to write and publish four more plays, ending his life with a list of eleven plays, thirteen novels, two volumes of poetry, three short story anthologies, a screenplay and an autobiography.

Patrick White's 1947 play *The Ham Funeral* is the stuff of legend. The play deals with a young introvert poet who lodges in Mr. and Mrs. Lusty's boarding house. Mrs. Lusty laments to her husband about the boredom of her life. When Mr. Lusty suddenly dies, Mrs. Lusty takes the opportunity to give a lavish feast, 'an 'am funeral', in his honour. She forces Young Man to help her lay out her husband's body and to bring the relatives.

The Young man grapples with reality and his guilt before joining the group in mourning. He finds himself to be the subject of his landlady's unwanted attention, with comically tragic consequences.

The Season at Sarasparilla (1961) was White's ground-breaking play which depicts the trivial routine of three families- the Boyles, the Pogsons and the Knotts- in their neighbouring homes in Mildred Street. The action of the play follows over a few days in which a young girl, Julia Sheen becomes pregnant and kills herself; another girl, Judy Pogson falls in love; a marriage cracks under infidelity; Mavis Knott has a baby; Roy Child abandons his teaching job for a life of adventure but achieves nothing; a small girl is struggling with the problems of growing up.

White's third play *A Cheery Soul*, unlike the other plays is based on a short story with the same title. The play's central character, Miss Docker, a do-gooder

believes that people need to be told when they are doing something wrong. In her act of goodness, she destroys everything around her. During the course of the play, she is met with a mixed reaction and she goes back to Sundown Home to pray again. White invites us to sympathize not with Miss Docker but also with the victims of her charity, who too are the poor unfortunates of the cheery soul.

Written in 1964, *Night on Bald Mountain* could be described as one of Patrick White's most divisive works. It is White's attempt at the first true Australian tragedy. The play depicts the failure of a number of people to escape the society in which their characters are formed. They include Miss Quodling, an eccentric who has escaped Sydney society to live with her herd of goats; Professor Sword and his alcoholic wife; Denis Craig, his colleague; Stella Summerhayes, the nurse who is wooed by Craig and harassed by Sword; and even a couple of hikers whose weekend walk on the mountain is only a temporary escape. White throws light on the Australian psyche, a great sense of isolation and even entrapment felt by the disparate group of characters.

It was almost fourteen years after *Night on Bald Mountain* that White returned to playwriting. *Big Toys* was first performed at the Parade Theatre, Sydney in 1977. Each of the three characters (Ritchie Bosanquet, a wealthy and successful lawyer and his socialite wife, Mag and Terry Legge, a well-connected trade union leader) are opinion-leaders, apparently moulders of the views of significant portions of society but they are also constrained by it. The play is about manipulative games played with human pawns in a deadly conflict which holds the characters in a fluctuating score of triumph and defeat.

First produced in 1982, *Signal Driver* deals with the married life of two characters, Ivy and Theo Vokes. Their marriage is a long one. There are also Two

Beings, avatars who function as a chorus but who also enable the stage action and the references to range far and wide and they give the play another dimension altogether. They are timeless and are able to evoke the past, present and the future.

Netherwood is White's great war play. It is a story of people fighting to survive their own inadequacies. It is the story of a whole society and its phobias and prejudices. The play is complex and ends in a scene of apocalyptic dimensions, destructive and essentially meaningless.

Shepherd on the Rocks is White's last play. It is based on the true story. In the play Danny is an ex-vaudeville entertainer who has found God and has a mission to spread his message of love, which he does by travelling regularly to King's Cross to minister to the whores. He is thrown out of the church for the carnal zeal. Finally he joins a circus where he is eaten by one of the lions.

C. Existentialism and Patrick White

After examining various characteristic works and writers of existentialism, it is important to discuss the influence of the philosophy on the works of Patrick White. White's work of art comes under the literary contributions that are independent of any direct philosophical influence from the existentialists but to some extent carries the implications of existentialists especially of Kierkegaard's, Dostoevsky's, Sartre's and Camu's. Bjorksten says about it, "Like Dostoevsky, Patrick White views suffering as a necessity; it is the path of purification that leads to spiritual insight. But suffering is not so much a religious phenomenon as an existential one; it is less a prerequisite for salvation than it is a part of existence." (19)

Any writer who handles the theme of modern man's predicament, shall find his/her endeavor a big task since modernity involves not only scientific and technical improvements but also moral confusion, psychic tribulations and spiritual trepidations resulting in the evolution of Existentialism. Like Sartre's and Camus' White holds diverse thinking with regard to the man's life in this world. His writing exposes human psychology. It substantiates man's search for himself and his potentialities to create his own values in the world. It describes men's situation in its totality and cares for basic conditions of their existence. It derives its contents from everyday experiences. It presents a picture of life with hope and exultation amidst grim realities of life. It promotes man's striving for becoming truly human. Its message is rooted in the fact that a man's possibilities are not in preordained mould but exists first and then he makes himself out of his conditions. Man therefore is the maker of himself.

White's characters face the problems of life noticed by existentialists, and their experiences are in no way simple. Many face real problems and predicaments;

their actual experiences are often tumultuous and conflicted, leading them to make choices in attempt to mend their nearly impossible situations. According to Akerholt, “White shows a deep sense of understanding and pity for the human condition in which man is caught, and for his struggle to find himself as an individual with a purpose and meaning in this vast and complex life.” (*Patrick White: A Critical Symposium* 61)

After getting involved with the Lustys, Young man of *The Ham Funeral*, for the first time deals with humans and their sufferings and his own guilt. In act I scene VII, when the Young Man goes out to call the relatives of Alma Lusty, he witnesses death again by seeing a foetus in a bin. At first he is transfixed, and then he shows anger and finally compassion. He was compelled to think, “... So much for visions! Who’ll ever tell where the flesh begins...or ends? The Landlord and the dead child are one. But who am I?” (White, *Four Plays* 43) And it is due to the recognition of death that it has a revitalizing effect on human existence.

Many of White’s characters demonstrate the existential dilemmas in that their situations are not easy; however, a choice is offered to them (even if their decisions lead to greater loneliness and despair). David Tacey in his article “It’s Happening Inside” mentions White’s existentialism: “...White’s characters are not passively chosen by God and do what they are told- in his world the creative factor lies in the conscious attitude of the individual. It is this that White has in common with existentialism: the individual must accept responsibility for his own life and make of it what he can.” (37)