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E. ALIMZHAN'S NOVEL ANAZHAR: EXISTENTIAL HOMELESSNESS AND CHOICE

Abstract. The article examines the motifs of alienation, existential crisis, the drive toward death, the realization of the meaninglessness of existence, the inability to die, and the subsequent reclamation of life by the protagonist of Elen Alimzhan's novel Anazhar. These themes are analyzed within the framework of Martin Buber's "existential homelessness," Jean-Paul Sartre's "Hell is other people," and Karl Jaspers' concepts of "boundary situations," "existential communication," and "choice." While existentialism in Kazakh literature resonates with global existentialist thought, it is distinguished by unique characteristics stemming from the national worldview and mentality. Although this distinction has not been explicitly defined in previous studies, it is evident in literary texts. To address this scholarly gap, the article provides a comparative analysis of the novel Anazhar based on fundamental existentialist categories, identifying the specificities of the national existential experience in Kazakh prose. The aim of the research is to uncover the existentialist motifs in the novel and, through a comparative analysis with global existentialist works, to demonstrate new dimensions of such prose within Kazakh literature. The study employs existential-hermeneutic analysis and the comparative-typological method. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to deepening the theoretical foundations of existential prose in Kazakh literary studies and in paving the way for further investigation into the synthesis of national identity and Western philosophical movements. Practically, the findings can be used as supplementary material in university-level philology courses on contemporary literature and literary movements.

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Keywords: existentialism, alienation, boundary situation, existential homelessness, "Anazhar".

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Е. ӘЛІМЖАННЫҢ «АНАЖАР» РОМАНЫ: ЭКЗИСТЕНЦИАЛДЫҚ ҮЙСІЗДІК ЖӘНЕ ТАҢДАУ

Аңдатпа. Мақалада жазушы Елен Әлімжанның «Анажар» романы кейіпкерінің жатсынуы, экзистенциалдық дағдарысы, өлімге талпынуы, өмірдің мәнсіздігін ұғынуы мен өле алмауы, қайтадан өмірді таңдауы сияқты мотивтері Мартин Бубердің «экзистенциалды үйсіздік», Жан-Поль Сартрдың

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«өзгелер – тамұқ», Карл Ясперстің «шекаралық жағдай», «экзистенциалды қарым-қатынас» және таңдау жасау тұжырымдамалары аясында қарастырылып, экзистенциалистік философия тұрғысынан талданады. Қазақ әдебиетіндегі экзистенциализм әлемдік экзистенциалистік ойлармен үндес болғанымен, ұлттық дүниетаным мен ділдің ықпалынан туындаған өзіндік сипатымен ерекшеленеді. Бұл ерекшелік зерттеулерде арнайы айқындалмағанымен, көркем мәтіндерде анық байқалады. Мақалада аталған олқылықтың орнын толтыру мақсатында «Анажар» романы экзистенциализмнің негізгі категориялары негізінде салыстырмалы түрде талданып, қазақ прозасындағы ұлттық экзистенциалдық тәжірибенің ерекшелігі айқындалады. Зерттеудің мақсаты – романдағы экзистенциалистік мотивтерді ашу, әлемдік экзистенциалистік шығармалармен салыстырмалы талдау жасау арқылы қазақ әдебиетіндегі осы бағыттағы прозаның жаңа қырын көрсету. Мақалада экзистенциалдық-герменевтикалық талдау және салыстырмалы-типологиялық әдіс басшылыққа алынды. Бұл зерттеу қазақ әдебиеттануындағы экзистенциалдық прозаның теориялық негіздерін тереңдетуге ықпал етіп, ұлттық діл мен батыстық философиялық ағымдардың ұштасуын зерттеуге жол ашады. Практикалық тұрғыда жоғары оқу орындарының филология факультеттерінде заманауи әдебиетті, әдеби бағыттарды оқытуда қосымша материал ретінде қолданыла алады.

Алғыс: Мақала BR27101897 (БНҚ 2025-2026) «Қазақстан әдебиеттануы, фольклортануы және өнертануы экожүйесінің цифрлық трансформациясы: пәнаралық зерттеулер» аясында жарияланды.

Кілт сөздер: экзистенциализм, жатсыну, шекаралық жағдай, экзистенциалды үйсіздік, «Анажар».

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РОМАН Е. АЛИМЖАНА «АНАЖАР»: ЭКЗИСТЕНЦИАЛЬНАЯ БЕЗДОМНОСТЬ И ВЫБОР

Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются мотивы отчуждения, экзистенциального кризиса, стремления к смерти, осознания бессмысленности бытия и неспособности умереть, а также осознанный выбор жизни главной героиней романа Елена Алимжана «Анажар». Данные аспекты анализируются через призму концепций «экзистенциальной бездомности» Мартина Бубера, «ад – это другие» Жан-Поля Сартра, а также понятий «пограничной ситуации», «экзистенциальной коммуникации» и выбора Карла Ясперса. Несмотря на то, что экзистенциализм в казахской литературе созвучен мировым экзистенциалистским идеям, он обладает уникальным характером, обусловленным влиянием национального мировоззрения и менталитета. Хотя данная специфика ранее не была детально артикулирована в литературоведческих исследованиях, она отчетливо проявляется в художественных текстах. С целью восполнения этого пробела, в статье проводится сравнительный анализ романа «Анажар» на основе ключевых категорий экзистенциализма, выявляющий особенности национального экзистенциального опыта в казахской прозе. Цель исследования – раскрыть экзистенциалистские мотивы в романе и через сравнительный анализ с мировыми произведениями данного направления продемонстрировать новые грани казахской экзистенциальной прозы. В работе использованы методы экзистенциально-герменевтического анализа и сравнительно-типологический метод. Научная и практическая значимость: Данное исследование способствует углублению теоретических основ экзистенциальной прозы в казахском литературоведении и открывает пути для изучения синтеза национального менталитета и западных философских течений. Материалы статьи могут быть использованы в качестве учебного пособия на филологических факультетах вузов при изучении современной литературы и литературных направлений.

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Ключевые слова: экзистенциализм, отчуждение, пограничная ситуация, экзистенциальная бездомность, «Анажар».

1. Introduction

The issue of existentiality in Kazakh prose has been partially analyzed in domestic literary criticism in connection with the nation's historical and social experience. This includes universal human questions such as the depths of human existence, the crisis of personality within various historical periods, freedom and responsibility, and the meaning or meaninglessness of life. The exploration of human existence is not a phenomenon exclusive to the twentieth century alone. Since it is not confined by specific temporal boundaries, it remains a persistent concern. For it is a natural regularity for human beings, regardless of the century or era they live in, to seek answers to such questions as "Who am I?", "What is the meaning of life?", and "What lies beyond death?"; that is to say, existential sensitivity can be encountered in Kazakh works of any period.

Nevertheless, the roots of issues pertaining to human existence in Kazakh fiction originate from *The Book of Words (Qara Sozder)* by Abai Kunanbaiuly. Since the poet's oeuvre delves deeper into reflections on becoming a human being, internal responsibility, and spiritual struggle, it can be stated that this topic has been comprehensively examined by researchers. The boundary situation (*Grenzsituation*) in the poet's *Book of Words* was not merely his own personal impasse, but a condition arising from a profound understanding of his people's plight. Consequently, the choice articulated by the poet is presented not as a personal resolution, but as a moral proposition addressed to his people.

As the poet states, "Whether for good or ill, I have lived my life, traveling a long road fraught with struggles and quarrels, disputes and arguments, suffering and anxiety, and reached these advanced years to find myself at the end of my tether, tired of everything. I have realized the vanity and futility of my labors and the meanness of my existence. What shall I occupy myself with now and how shall I live out the rest of my days? I am puzzled that I can find no answer to this question" (Abai's *Book of Words*, 2003:78) [translated by R. McKane], the poet, resolved to commit his thoughts to paper, offers his own choices and conclusions by asserting, "Should anyone find something useful here, let him copy it down or memorise it. And if no one has any need of my words, they will remain with me anyway..." (Abai's *Book of Words*, 2003:79) [translated by R. McKane], thereby presenting them for the benefit of the Kazakh people. Since the subject in Abai's *Book of Words* is not a fictional character but Abai himself, this is a topic directly examined in relation to the poet himself and requires distinct research.

This existential concern was later transformed and continued in early twentieth-century Kazakh prose through the works of Shakarim Kudaiberdiev, Zhusipbek Aimauytov, Magzhan Zhumabaev, and Mukhtar Auezov, manifesting in the inner turmoil and moral choices of their characters. There is no question regarding the validity of the scholarly consensus that the "I" (Self) in Abai's lyric poetry and the "I" (Self) in Shakarim's oeuvre represent two distinct worlds, not merely in terms of scale, but primarily regarding the inner subtleties and essence of human existence. As A.S. Ismakova notes, "While the personality in the older generation of writers was holistic and resilient, the characters of Mirzhakyp Dulatuly and Zhusipbek Aimauytov are psychologically highly complex, yet somewhat more fragile in their spiritual integrity compared to the preceding giants. The issue here lies not within the individual traits of the character, but in the radical transformation of the relational model between man and the world" (Ismakova, 1998:119) [translated by

the authors]. Emphasizing that the shifts in eras and changes in the structure of existence directed the individual's mode of perceiving the world into a new channel, A.S. Ismakova highlights that "the hopes and aspirations of the Kazakhs in the 1920s were crushed, and within the context of bloodshed, characters were forced to make existential choices, driven not only by external conflicts but by the inner contradictions that subjected them to constant confrontation" (Ismakova, 1998:119) [translated by the authors].

During the second half of the twentieth century, Kazakh prose witnessed an intensification of trends focusing on the exploration of the human inner world and the representation of the individual's existential crisis. J.Zharylgapov examines the existential issue in Kazakh prose, tracing it from the short stories of M.Auezov to the works of O.Bokei, D.Isabekov, and A.Kekilbaev, thereby demonstrating a growing impetus toward the profound psychological analysis of the human inner realm (Zharylgapov, 2023).

During the period of Independence, the existential paradigm in Kazakh prose advanced to a qualitatively new level. According to F. Toltai, the human figure in this era is manifested not as a social type, but as an autonomous subject responsible for their own existence and moral choices. Regarding this, the researcher states: "For instance, the works of contemporary Kazakh writers of the new literary generation, including Doskhan Zhylykbaev and Bakhytbek Kadyr, as well as the poets Adilet Shopen and Roza Aspanyzy, transcend the boundaries of socialist realism, rationalist frameworks, and ideological doctrines, portraying the individual as a living, feeling, doubting, and suffering spiritual being" (Toltai, 2025:224) [translated by the authors].

These studies demonstrate that the exploration of existence in Kazakh literature is not confined to a specific historical period, thereby verifying the timeless nature, transhistorical character of existential quests that manifest through distinct features in every era. Particularly, it is observed that these quests perpetually coexist with the national mindset, intertwining with the concepts of destiny, patience, endurance, and internal resistance.

Elen Alimzhan's novel *Anazhar*, which serves as the object of this study, constitutes a significant work that may be read as marking a new phase of existentialist inquiry within Kazakh prose. Through the protagonist's estrangement from their environment, emotional isolation, impulse toward death balanced by the inability to die, and ultimate resolve to engage in an internal struggle to choose life anew, the novel depicts existence within a boundary situation. While this portrayal shares a typological affinity with Karl Jaspers' concept of boundary situations, it acquires a distinctive character through Kazakh national ethos values such as patience, the acceptance of fate, and silent resistance.

U.Samenkyzy notes that the protagonist's internal contradictions are profoundly revealed through the trials of fate, stating: "The author placed particular emphasis on depicting the protagonist as possessing a distinctive character, unyielding in her own understanding and perception, and endowed with immense inner resilience and an absolute, unified perspective both in her childhood and later when subjected to the vicissitudes of fate... Placing the entire ideological burden on the protagonist and pitting her against the harsh trials of destiny provides an excellent opportunity to portray the turbulent inner world, resistance, and despair of a character who has suffered from social grievances. The author deliberately selected and creatively expanded upon this artistic method. While her soul is

wounded, Anazhar arrives at sharp insights and conclusions regarding her contemporary milieu" (Samenkyzy, 2023:34) [translated by the authors].

However, in these analyses, the connection between the novel and existentialist philosophy has not been made an object of specialized study. Nevertheless, there are several authors who have touched upon the existential dimension of the work. In her review, writer Fariza Abdikerimova was the first to draw attention to the possibility of elevating the novel to the level of scholarly analysis within the framework of existentialism, noting: "Alimzhan's Anazhar also emerges from among 'human angels' and the embrace of her grandmother Aktileu, only to find herself estranged from and alienated by the complex world of human society, and through this alienation, she recoils from a deficient life rife with corruption, cruelty, hypocrisy, and vanity..." (Abdikerimova, 2025) [translated by the authors]. Although these works contribute to clarifying the existential nature of the text, they do not constitute systematic studies aimed specifically at this paradigm.

For these reasons, this study aims to delineate the evolution of the protagonist in the novel Anazhar by analyzing existentialist motifs within the framework of boundary situations, freedom, and responsibility, while also demonstrating the convergence of Western existentialism and the Kazakh national worldview. As a result of this research, a new dimension of existential artistic thought in Kazakh prose will be identified, opening up fresh possibilities for explaining the philosophical depth of national literature.

The scientific novelty of this research lies in the fact that Anazhar is systematically examined for the first time through the lens of the core categories of existential philosophy, wherein the character's spiritual experience is analyzed as a model of existential choice shaped by alienation and boundary situations. Furthermore, a novel proposition of this article is the demonstration of how the existential experience in the novel interconnects with the concepts of patience, the acceptance of destiny, and inner resistance, which are inherent to the Kazakh worldview.

2. Research Materials and Methods

2.1. Methods

Through the method of comparative-typological analysis, the novel Anazhar was examined from a typological perspective in relation to A.Camus's novel *The Plague* and J.-P. Sartre's play *No Exit*. Furthermore, classical works dedicated to the philosophy of existentialism, such as M. Buber's *Between Man and Man*, A.Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*, J.-P. Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, and the second volume of K.Jaspers's *Philosophy*, served as the theoretical framework for this study.

The study primarily employs a comprehensive existentialist-hermeneutical analysis as its foundational methodology. Accounting for the distinct specificities of Kazakh existential reality, the atheistic concept of "the absurd" is integrated with and supplemented by the notions of the "leap of faith" and "transcendence" derived from religious existentialism. This analytical method serves as an optimal approach to systematically explicating the protagonist's internal contradictions, which manifest as an outward indifference toward religious rituals contrasted with a profound, intrinsic conviction in the afterlife. Through this integrated approach, this study analyzes and interprets the protagonist's existential experience, specifically the states of alienation and existence within boundary situations, as

articulated through interior monologues. In addition, the method of the hermeneutic circle is utilized to uncover the dialectical connection between individual episodes of the novel and the overarching philosophical content of the work. Analyzing minute textual details within the novel elucidates the essence of the collective national existential experience. Concurrently, based on the examination of the protagonist's interior monologues, the study determined to utilize both the atheistic and religious paradigms of existentialism in tandem. It is pertinent to note that the rationale for simultaneously applying both the atheistic and religious existentialist frameworks to a single literary work stems directly from the protagonist's internal state. When considering the author's arguments and underlying ideas in their entirety, this approach compels us to re-evaluate the profound meaning of each artistic detail and formulate new critical conclusions.

2.2. Research Materials

The primary research material consists of the definitive edition of Elen Alimzhan's novel *Anazhar*, published by the Daur Publishing House in 2019. In the course of the textual analysis, pivotal textual fragments, including character monologues, dialogues, and plot episodes, were initially selected to serve as the object of investigation. Each selected excerpt and citation was subsequently analyzed by aligning them with core existential concepts such as alienation, freedom, boundary situations, and choice. By reviewing the scholarly works of Kazakh literary critics including A.S.Ismakova, Zh.Zharylgapov, F.Toltai, U.Samenkyzy, and F.Abdikerimova, the analysis shows the trajectory of existential studies in Kazakh literature, thereby confirming the significance of our research and identifying this as an unexplored domain. In this regard, since our study focuses exclusively on a single novel, the article argues that the findings do not pertain to the entire panorama of Kazakh prose, but specifically reflect a new paradigm within the existentialist trend.

3. Discussion

3.1. Alienation and Existential Homelessness

In Elen Alimzhan's novel *Anazhar*, the protagonist's conflict with the social environment is not merely a clash of personalities; rather, it represents a vivid manifestation of alienation in the classical existentialist sense. *Anazhar's* worldview had already been formed during the five years of her life spent in Sandyktau prior to her arrival in Tokkent. In her understanding, the model of human relations and the general nature of human existence should have been identical to those of the inhabitants of Sandyktau. However, immediately upon descending from the mountain, the child's consciousness can neither comprehend this disharmony nor adapt to the value system and moral norms of the society in which she now lives. Although her childhood heart could no longer be confined to Sandyktau and she chose this society by her own volition, her worldview and choices clash with every environment, beginning with her parents. Having arrived from Sandyktau with a deep longing for her parents and the wider world, the child's dreams are met with loneliness from the very first day. It becomes evident that her parents did not experience a reciprocal longing of the same intensity. Far from opening their arms and embracing her with affection, they do not even attempt to consider the child's fear, isolating her in a private room – a loneliness from which she never recovers. "Anazhar was allocated one of those rooms for herself. She was not particularly pleased about this... No matter how anxious she felt in the secluded room, she tried to maintain her

pride and did not reveal it to anyone" (Alimzhan, 2019:30) [translated by the authors]. In this context, the "private room" is not a protective shelter; on the contrary, it serves as a symbol of the "existential homelessness" described by Martin Buber. "In those moments when the old forms of connection between man and the universe crumble, man feels himself a stranger in the world, falling into a state of 'homelessness'; he can no longer perceive the world as his home, and a new, unprecedented anxiety (dread) arises within him" (Buber, 2002:157). Because she arrived from a place where she was intimately connected with nature and had become a part of that nature herself, the artificial needs constructed by humans brought her to this state of homelessness. Her parents, pursuing these artificial needs, find no time for the attention and love due to the child, leaving Anazhar to feel like an unsheltered "stranger" within her own family home, and even within the room designated exclusively for her. This sense of estrangement within the home becomes even more acute within society at large.

Anazhar's choice of Karl Jaspers' pathway of "loving struggle" – manifested in her desire to rescue first her classmates and teachers, and later, society as a whole by entering into an existential connection – ultimately ends in failure. This outcome arises because such a relationship, according to Jaspers' framework, fundamentally demands the inner freedom of both participating parties. Anazhar's desperate struggle to understand and redeem humanity confronts the existential deafness of the residents of Toqkent. Her inability to conform to socially constructed norms recalls Jean-Paul Sartre's famous proposition from his play *No Exit* that "Hell is other people." Furthermore, Anazhar's conflict with her surrounding environment mirrors the metaphorical hell depicted in this very play *No Exit*. To illustrate this point, we may cite the following excerpt:

"Well, what are you waiting for? Do as you're told. What a lovely scene: coward Garcin holding baby-killer Estelle in his manly arms! Make your stakes, everyone. Will coward Garcin kiss the lady, or won't he dare? What's the betting? I'm watching you, everybody's watching, I'm a crowd all by myself. Do you hear the crowd? Do you hear them muttering, Garcin? Mumbling and muttering. "Coward! Coward! Coward! Coward!" – that's what they're saying. . . . It's no use trying to escape, I'll never let you go. What do you hope to get from her silly lips? Forgetfulness? But I shan't forget you, not I! "It's I you must convince." So come to me. I'm waiting. Come along, now. . . . Look how obedient he is, like a well-trained dog who comes when his mistress calls. You can't hold him, and you never will." (Sartre, 1989: 44-45) [translated from the French by Lionel Abel].

Much like the characters in this play who are locked in mutual recrimination, Anazhar remains confined within a "spiritual cage" from which she cannot escape the objective gaze of others. Her exceptional naivety and absolute truthfulness are perceived by the Toqkent community merely as a form of "harmful eccentricity." In both the police encounter and the school incident, as well as throughout her time at school in general, Anazhar's attempts to reform the world by speaking the truth yield the opposite effect. Society condemns her, labeling her a "traitor." It is precisely here that Sartre's concept that the gaze of the Other objectifies the self finds its expression (Sartre, 1956). Just as Garcin, Inez, and Estelle in the playwright's work become captives of the gazes they impose upon one another, for Anazhar, other people become an alienating force that distorts her authentic essence and brands her with a bad reputation.

While falsehood, cruelty, and hypocrisy were alien to her own understanding of human nature, they were considered normal occurrences in this environment. Failing to find anyone capable of understanding or supporting her, she becomes alienated from society and falls victim to injustice. The incongruity and antithesis between the protagonist's inner world and external reality lead her toward emotional alienation. Although this sense of foreignness was discernible during her primary school years, it was swiftly forgotten through her childlike disposition; however, as she grew older, this loneliness progressively intensified. "Indeed, belonging neither to the world of her origins nor to the immediate society, the eccentric girl completely failed to comprehend these behaviors of her peers. 'The children of a declining nation dispute a futile cause,' she would lament, filled with intense anxiety. 'Do not envy others; urge yourself forward.' This was how Anazhar thought. The young girl had not yet analyzed where, when, or how this attribute, which isolated her from others, had emerged within her – whether its origins lay in an innate nature or an acquired character. In any case, as the discord among her peers escalated, this stance became even more deeply entrenched within her" (Alimzhan, 2019:34-35) [translated by the authors].

For Anazhar, the surrounding environment – ranging from her classmates to her parents, teachers, and law enforcement officers – functions like a collection of infernal entities living by their own meaningless dogmas and stripping the individual of their authentic being. To her parents, she is an ungrateful and unruly child who rejects their care, while to the school, she is a troubled girl. The injustice inflicted by her teacher, Pende, in particular, marks the ultimate failure of Anazhar's Jaspersian "loving struggle." The protagonist's honest aspiration for dialogue collides with Pende's nature as a "captor of freedom," ultimately reducing Anazhar to a girl who seemingly initiated her own physical violation in the twilight. In this regard, the concept of hell in both works emerges from the characters being forced to exist merely as images inscribed into the consciousness of others. This continuous struggle against the "identity imposed by others," the defense of her own existence, and her fight for goodness eventually lead Anazhar to the tragic realization of cosmic absurdity. As Lev Shestov noted, "Existential philosophy begins with the tragedy of realizing that everything offered by the scientific worldview and rationality is not truly as it seems" (Shestov, 1966:98); thus, the cruelty of her teachers, especially Pende, who masked his injustice behind the guise of a fighter against iniquity, serves as the very catalyst that propels Anazhar past childhood and forces her to make a complex choice. This sense of alienation inevitably drives the protagonist into a boundary situation. However, Elen Alimzhan's novel diverges from the play "No Exit" because it presents an open social space rather than a confined, closed space. Although both environments are employed as metaphors for hell, implying the transformation of the protagonist from a subject into an object, the distinction between the two works becomes clear at this exact juncture. While the tragedy of the three characters in the play, Garcin, Inez, and Estelle, lies in their inability to alter their past, Alimzhan's narrative space grants Anazhar the agency to transform her existential condition. According to Karl Jaspers, boundary situations in human life do not merely shatter the individual; they also manifest as opportune moments leading to self-realization. Viewed through the lens of this proposition, alienation and the perception of "others as hell" do not represent a final impasse for the protagonist, but rather function as a boundary situation that triggers an existential breakthrough.

3.2. The "Boundary Situation" and Death

The protagonist's understanding of life's meaning, which she once perceived as an established and unalterable order in Sandyktau, ultimately led to her alienation from others. The narrative notes that in Sandyktau, where Anazhar spent her childhood, the idea of committing suicide, let alone digging one's own grave, would never cross anyone's mind because the locals do not abandon a person in distress; instead, they collectively shoulder the burden to alleviate their hardship (Alimzhan, 2019:16) [translated by the authors]. Having completely despaired of a world steeped in the absurd, Anazhar seeks to attain her freedom through death. She desires to find sanctuary beside her daughter in the afterlife. Having lost the only person capable of engaging in a relationship in the form of "I and Thou" according to Martin Buber's concept, and being unable to avenge her or find support anywhere, time stands still for the protagonist, past and future lose their meaning, and only the present torment of the soul remains. This occurs because her "I-Thou" dialogue with society fails to materialize, causing everyone else to decline to the level of "It" (object), thereby plunging her into "existential homelessness." The protagonist believes that she can only escape this solitude by reuniting with her own "Thou," namely her daughter.

"From that day on, the woman felt an inescapable urge to remain by the grave of her Akperishte. Even when she resolved to leave, she would circle back and return, much like a tethered horse... Her daughter understood what the people here failed to comprehend; thus, unlike them, she did not interrupt her words or dismiss her with a wave of her hand. Yet Anazhar, whose sorrow remained unalleviated no matter how much she poured her heart out, longed for Akperishte to speak to her. ... Initially, she did not realize that she had begun digging her own grave alongside that of her Akperishte. Once she became aware, she felt no regret, operating under the principle that 'one who has stripped for the water does not shrink from the river'." (Alimzhan, 2019:199) [translated by the authors]. Her yearning for a connection with her daughter represented a quest for an existential sanctuary. She believed that she would find an eternal refuge, a home, alongside her daughter in the afterlife. This act was not merely a reflection of her despair, but also a profound protest against the absurd existence of the world, symbolically represented by the inhabitants of Tokkent. Anazhar's decision to confront death was a conscious step through which she rejected a meaningless world and chose to transition into what Martin Buber terms the "authentic being."

The failure of her attempt and her inability to die were not merely another mockery of fate, but rather symbolized her confinement to this absurd world. The author conveys this sign through specific details, such as her seeing her daughter in a dream while lying in the grave, her mother refusing to let her follow with the words "Your time in that world has not yet expired," and her classmate Doszhan arriving at the grave to awaken her by playing the melody "While you are in your prime, play and laugh, for one day you too will be covered by the earth." Although the protagonist faced death and failed to die, she could have still carried out her original intention afterward. However, this boundary situation reawakened her resilient nature, which had previously slumbered due to helplessness and grief. Karl Jaspers notes that when encountering boundary situations, the individual perceives them as a "wall" against which they shatter (Jaspers, 2012: 205) [translated by the authors]. Explaining this proposition by Jaspers, the scholar P.V. Lakaev writes, "In a boundary situation, a person sees nothing else but that very situation. This represents an individual trapped in the grip of

unfolding events and driven into an impasse; yet, it is precisely these moments that push them toward a certain threshold. Once this threshold is crossed, a completely new existence begins, which fundamentally transforms their prior experience" (Lakaev, 2024:102) [translated by the authors]. At this juncture, Anazhar's religious perception and existential responsibility converge; consequently, even though she believes in the existence of the Creator, she realizes that the mechanism for altering the world resides solely within human freedom and action. The boundary situation within the grave awakened her from despair and led her, as described by Jaspers, to a new existence that completely altered her previous experience. Anazhar, who had formerly succumbed to existential alienation due to her inability to find the necessary method of struggle despite her inner turmoil, now begins to establish a different kind of relationship with others. Through this existential communication, she perceives that others are not merely hell, but also those who awaken her. The author delivers this transition progressively and convincingly. What stopped her was not the fear or anxiety prior to death, but rather a chance encounter with the ordinary girl Orynkul, which nevertheless plants the seed of the idea that "life in this absurd world is worth living and fighting for."

"If you die, the goodness within you dies with you." "What difference does that make to others?" "It makes a great difference, because as long as you exist, you maintain the balance between goodness and cruelty. Perhaps within your own circle, you allow the former to prevail. But if you die, the latter will triumph" (Alimzhan, 2019:205) [translated by the authors]. Even if late, Anazhar realizes that she cannot attain freedom through death, but will only suffer defeat.

3.3 Western Existentialism and National Identity

The perceptions of life and the scientific inquiries of Orynkul, who was rescued from a freshly dug grave, alongside her close friend Akbikesh, a biophysicist, and the meaningless existence of her parents, who mistakenly believed that their offspring required financial capital rather than care, gradually prompted her phased return to the very life that had once alienated her. Akbikesh's discovery shook Anazhar out of her apathy and horrified her: "...the entire tragedy of humanity lies in this insatiability of the flesh. People's inclinations have shifted so heavily toward satisfying the two apertures of the body that they sacrifice everything in the process. As long as the flesh persists, human beings are bound to remain this way. Therefore, the mortal must be severed from the flesh. Only then will their pettiness cease. Modern science, indeed, is currently occupied with this very task" (Alimzhan, 2019:218) [translated by the authors]. Horrified, she strained every nerve, realizing she had to take action somehow to halt this "atrociousness" (Alimzhan, 2019:223) [translated by the authors]. Perceiving this scientific breakthrough as an encroachment upon divine providence, she offered a sudden decision, which she had embraced at that very moment, as an answer to her friend's question: "I want to remain bound to earthly existence. My sustenance is on earth," she said, tapping the floor. 'Do you then desire your descendants to continue suffering the same earthly torment that you endured?' Akbikesh asked in astonishment. 'Yes, I want my descendants to endure the same spiritual agony that I did. Spiritual agony is inscribed upon the forehead of the earthly angel!' Anazhar replied, declaring her unexpected resolution" (Alimzhan, 2019:220) [translated by the authors]. Following her unexpected decision to accept destiny along with all its granted blessings and tribulations, the laws of nature and the testaments carved by our ancestors into balbal

stones echoed within her consciousness. Perceiving her family's plight as a circumstance leading toward a global catastrophe, she concluded that the true path of resistance lay not in separating the human soul from the body, as Akbikeshi had suggested, but rather in leaving behind a noble lineage. Consequently, her struggle is distinct from the individualistic choice and isolated rebellion of the solitary figures found in European existentialism. Anazhar's thoughts became imbued with the collective purpose of reforming society, as reflected in her reflection: "In any case, what remains in its place will eventually amend itself. Perhaps the next child to be born will attain the ideals that Grandmother Aktileu, she herself, and Akperishte could not reach. Even if they do not lead the entire nation to prosperity, they will conduct their own life with integrity. And if those who conduct their lives with integrity multiply, the affliction of society will also ease" (Alimzhan, 2019:222) [translated by the authors]. The final catalyst for her renewed choice of life was her encounter with the happy Tinibek, who, much like Sisyphus rolling a boulder uphill, acknowledges the absurd and relentlessly continues to strive. Anazhar marveled at him, thinking: "How fortunate was Tinibek, who, unlike me, did not strike his head against mountains and stones, but knew all this, and not only knew it but lived and died along that path" (Alimzhan, 2019:230) [translated by the authors]. The moral maximalism within the work manifests through the protagonist's return to a world rife with injustice after turning back from death. Anazhar chose to join the ranks of solitary individuals fighting against meaninglessness, just as Tinibek did. Having failed to die, she does not merely return to existence; instead, she consciously and responsibly re-embraces life.

If her previous desire to reform the world was akin to a romantic or utopian fantasy, confronting death ultimately led her to a rigorous stoicism. Despite her faith in the Creator, she fully acknowledged the absurdity and injustice of society. However, this acknowledgment did not drive her toward nihilism; on the contrary, it propelled her into a conscious struggle. At this juncture, she chose freedom through her own resolve. As Karl Jaspers noted, "Only the person who can make a decision is free. By making a decision, a person assumes the freedom they have chosen" (Jaspers, 1991:169) [translated by the authors]. Although she is aware that rectifying the world is impossible, she authenticates her own being through her actions toward that very rectification. By forging her spiritual resilience, she resolved that even if she could not alter the external world, she would not allow that world to violate her inner freedom.

This is precisely where the work converges with Albert Camus's novel *The Plague*. Both protagonists are engaged in a battle against a pestilence, with one confronting a spiritual plague and the other a physical disease. In Camus's *The Plague*, Dr. Rieux continues to fulfill his medical duties without abandoning action, even though he is fully aware of the futility of fighting the epidemic. Similarly, Anazhar resolves to initiate her struggle against the meaningless existence of her parents and those around her in her capacity as both a mother and a wife. This choice was made not merely for herself, but for her parents and society as a whole. Regarding Dr. Rieux's situation in *The Plague*:

"Tarrou nodded. 'Yes. But your victories will never be lasting; that's all.' Rieux's face darkened. 'Yes, I know that. But it's no reason for giving up the struggle.' 'No reason, I agree. ... Only, I now can picture what this plague must mean for you.' 'Yes. A never-ending defeat.'" (Camus, 1960:108) [translated by S.Gilbert].

While Rieux resolves not to cease his resistance against death despite facing inevitable defeat, Anazhar directs her struggle toward the act of defiance itself, rather than its ultimate outcome.

She acts not because she believes in victory, but because non-resistance is completely alien to her nature. Replacing her former resentment toward her environment and her sense of alienation with sheer willpower, she embarks on a journey of spiritual healing. Her struggle is not merely that of an individual, but one of the most taxing battles as a woman, a mother, and a spouse. She is not a wounded soldier on the front line against an enemy, but a warrior engaged in a desperate, hand-to-hand combat. In the novel *The Plague*, Doctor Rieux, unable to save the life of a young boy, completely severs his fragile faith in the Creator and turns away from the transcendent world. In contrast, while the actions of Anazhar, who has lost her daughter, contain many contradictory aspects, she ultimately submits to the laws of both nature and the Creator. This phenomenon can be characterized as a return to faith. Indeed, the protagonist – who had neither sought nor prayed to her Creator in her isolation, and who even attempted self-harm when her daughter passed away, an act forbidden by religion – ultimately does not bypass the faith and traditions ingrained within her. From a Sartrean perspective, Anazhar's impulse toward death and its failure is not a mere plot device; rather, it is the ultimate manifestation of her freedom of choice and the fact that she is "condemned to the earth, to struggle," thereby assuming absolute responsibility. The moment the protagonist realizes that she does not even possess sovereignty over her own death, a new existential choice emerges before her. She must either perish spiritually as a living corpse, or act despite the inherent meaninglessness of life. Upon returning to life, she perceives even more clearly that injustice among humans has always existed, exists now, and will continue to exist. As Alimzhan writes: "Since the dawn of humanity, so many Messengers have come from the Creator, so many saints, prophets, and wise scholars have emerged, and rulers have reigned in their epochs, bringing snow with their wrath and sunshine with their smiles, demanding unconditional obedience. Yet, not a single one succeeded in turning the earth into paradise. This is because humans, having conquered everything, failed to conquer their own carnal desires. And the intent of a mortal who cannot master their desires remains constantly volatile and unstable. Consequently, their struggle for honesty and justice turns into an act of cruelty against another, and the ultimate outcome of the slogan 'everything for humanity' turns out to be the annihilation of humanity" (Alimzhan, 2019:25) [translated by the authors].

Anazhar is not the only character in the novel who follows the path of Sisyphus. From her grandmother, Aktileu, who instilled in her since childhood the belief to "never lose hope in the Almighty, even if you face ninety different tribulations a day," to Bekemzhan Shynakhmetuly, who traveled from city to city to establish an Abai Studies Center and preserve the spiritual heritage of ancient towns, to Orynkul, who defiantly bore children whenever she faced hardships, and Tinibek, who tirelessly moved between entertainment venues and rehabilitation centers – all have deemed the path of Sisyphus worthy of emulation. However, the nature of their struggle varies. "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (Camus, 1991:95). Elen Alimzhan's protagonist extends this proposition by Albert Camus into the existential conclusion that "the meaning of life lies in an uncompromising struggle against its own meaninglessness" Anazhar is a Camusean hero who possesses the right to die, yet resolutely chooses to live.

4. Results

Based on the results of the existential-hermeneutic analysis, this study identifies specific patterns in the existential trajectory of the protagonist in Elen Alimzhan's novel "Anazhar" and proposes the following conclusions: First, Anazhar's transition from Sandyktau to Tokkent is not merely a relocation; it is a transition into the state of "existential homelessness" as described by Martin Buber. In this context, the protagonist's "private room" in her family home does not serve as a sanctuary, but rather transforms into a symbol of her isolation from society and her loved ones. Second, the cruelty of Pende and the injustice of society drive Anazhar into what Karl Jaspers terms a "boundary situation." While the protagonist's tragedy of "being unable to die" marks the ultimate peak of her comprehension of the absurd, her final choice to embrace life anew manifests as her existential triumph. Third, while Western atheistic existentialism posits the individual as entirely solitary in a meaningless universe, Anazhar's resistance is actualized through patience, the acceptance of destiny, and an internal spiritual compass inherent to the Kazakh worldview. This demonstrates the distinctive national character of existential motifs in Kazakh prose.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Elen Alimzhan's novel Anazhar demonstrates a new dimension of the existential paradigm in contemporary Kazakh prose. It is established that the concepts of alienation and choice in the work are typologically consonant with global classical models of existentialism, particularly Jean-Paul Sartre's metaphor of "hell" and Karl Jaspers's concept of "existential communication." For the first time, this article analyzes the protagonist's image from an existential-hermeneutical perspective and provides a scholarly foundation for the connection between her spiritual experience and the national mentality.

On the whole, Anazhar can be evaluated as a work that masterfully integrates the tragedy of human existence and the pursuit of freedom within the national context, thereby expanding the philosophical horizon of Kazakh literature. The central idea and humanistic conclusion presented by Elen Alimzhan through the novel suggest that life becomes meaningful only when it actively resists its own meaninglessness. The novel Anazhar does not offer the reader a ready-made blueprint for living; rather, it invites the reader, through aesthetic reception, to share in the protagonist's tragedy. The pivotal point of the novel is that the individual must remain true to their own choice under any circumstances. In a world fraught with injustice, remaining "human" is not an act of heroism, but an existential necessity.

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