

Chapter-I

I. Introduction

As this study is mainly concerned with the question of human existence, particularly, in this context with the existence of the protagonist, Stephen Richard Rojack in Norman Mailer's third novel, *An American Dream*, in intimate relation with the society and the world. The study examines the struggle of the central character to define himself through individual action and social engagement. The emphasis is on the protagonist's interpretation and active response to the world and human society. This study begins with the tentative hypothesis that the novel traces the protagonist's journey through a hostile world to define himself as an existential hero. Through actions which include murder, escape, criminality and varieties of sexual experiences, Rojack defines himself. All these actions bear the necessity of the individual's need to struggle to create meaning.

Rojack, in a moment of freeing impulse, murders his rich, unusually domineering, death-threatening wife Deborah who, is the "summation of death-force" (Unger 33). The charge of this self-stirring destruction propels him into action turning fear, dread, fatigue and despair into redemptive energy of desperation. With a courage that nourishes itself on the ultimate dread, the dread of death, he runs various courses of triumphs, thus turning himself into an existential hero - the sexual enmity with his maid, the hunting trickery of the police, the competition of a Negro stud of legendary sexual prowess, and an engulfing sea of guilt and self-doubt summoned by Deborah's father Berney Kelley. He finds love along the way, with a tender and charming cabaret singer named Cherry. At the end, Rojack is still running - his roles and customs of the war hero, congressman, professor, television personality and

husband of a socialite left far behind - now towards the darker and simpler challenges of the jungle of Guatemala and Yucatan.

Mailer, in *An American Dream* develops Rojack as existential hero who constantly tests the possible edges of human experience. He thus defines himself through actions which include murder of his own wife; varieties of sexual experiences with his maid Ruta and singer Cherry; the struggle with the Negro named Shiago and with even Deborah's father, Bernery Oshwald Kelley. But what is striking is that the self-creation involves a good deal of fear, dread, anxiety and despair and the sense of uncertainty as well as efforts to overcome them.

Rojack has at the very beginning of the work the potential to define himself as an existential hero. The murder, that he commits of his wife, is not an act of accident of circumstances, rather an act conditioned by the situation generated within him. After this act, when his roots are cut out by his employers, by the external professions by which he is defined within society are removed, leaving him alienated. The course he takes is to face the immediate danger of death through external violence. But what is significant here is that this choice is a voluntary, of his own accord and courageous as well. At almost any point, he can confess to the murder and have the pressure removed from him and be replaced in society's hierarchy by going to prison. But he decides to face society instead of conforming to the mores of the group and society. His decisions and choices give meaning to his life. In each successive action and step he takes, he is awarded with triumphs although facing fear, dread and anxiety, and thus becomes an existential hero.

As this research is mainly concerned with the existential question, the problem the study endeavors to resolve is that how the novel traces the protagonist's journey through a hostile world to define himself as an existential hero. This study

also explores the theoretical background which supports this view. From the study of his other novels also, it is apparent that he has been concerned throughout his career to identity and examine existential issues in different ways. In this context, I will use the ideas from existential theories, and primarily to study this novel, *An American Dream*. In particular, the study of the novel will be based on the ideas developed by Jean Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger and other existentialists considering the issues at hand. I will apply the of existential theories to analyze the protagonist's endeavors come to the significant conclusion.

Existentialism is a philosophical school whose proponents maintain that 'existence precedes essence'. Existentialists concern themselves with humanity's very being, with its perpetual anguished struggle to exist. They presume that individuals have free will and are thus entirely responsible for their actions. They assert that individuals freely construct and use (or choose not to use) their own value system, forming their own sense of being and creating meaning in the process. Jean Paul Sartre argues "man makes himself". Although, individuals make themselves through exercise of free will, but that necessitates engagement in the social sphere. And the "significance of the personal depends on a refusal merely to confirm to the mores of the group", asserts Kierkegaard (385-386).

As choice is central to human existence, according to Sartre, each individual makes choice that creates his/her own essence. Because each individual is free to choose his/her own path, existentialists argue that one must accept the risk and responsibility because the choice among alternatives implies certain degree of risk. But inauthenticity of existence results when the individual permits his/her life to be determined and defined by the rules and values of others. Hence, individuals define themselves by making self-directed choices. Man's freedom is inseparable and

manifests itself in each of the choices made. Since, the world is devoid of any meaning, individuals must define themselves and create themselves. The choice induces anxiety, dread and uncertainty into the mind.

Sartre says, "Existentialism is primarily concerned with human existence, specially man's most extreme experiences, the confrontation with death, anguish and anxiety, despair and guilt" (589-90). So, existentialism analyzes dread, anguish, despair, love, hope etc. and attempts to uncover their meanings. Because the attempt to create meaning and morality in a world without defined guideposts and rules, combined with the belief that freedom and responsibility rest squarely with the individual generates particular trenchant anxiety, fear, despair, and dread for the individual.

In brief, existentialism is a philosophy which "endeavors to analyze the basic structure of human existence and makes the individual understand their original freedom" in a purposeless and meaningless world where the authentic existence requires one to create meaning in life through freedom of choice, without being guided by the ready-made models provided by the culture and society (qtd. in Jain 186).

Therefore, existential theories developed by Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre and other existentialists with their ideas on the subject, will assist this research in an attempt to prove the protagonist's journey in *An American Dream* through the hostile world as a mode of defining himself in existential terms. Norman Mailer's *An American Dream* can, therefore, be read through the methodological tool of existentialism that proves the hypothesis mentioned above.

Though, the third novel by Norman Mailer contributed immensely to locate Mailer as a major Jewish American novelist, the novel also become the object of intense critical controversy. Elizabeth Hardwick describes the novel in *Partisan*

Review as a "Very dirty book-dirty and extremely ugly" (qtd. "Contemporary Authors" 9). Her judgment of the novel rests on the candid sexual descriptions found in the novel. Her evaluation of the text depends on the social and moral standards of the period because Mailer was writing against the structures of 1950s censorship and propriety. But John Aldridge's review in *Life* called the novel "a major creative breakthrough". He describes the novel as a new discovery in the same vein as Sinclair Lewis declares Mailer, "the greatest writer to come out of his generation" (qtd. in Hart 722) and Ernest Hemingway labels him, "Probably the best postwar writer" (qtd. in Glenday 2). But the difference between Aldridge and Hemingway and Lewis is that the first comment is on the particular work of Mailer while the others are on the literary career of Mailer as a whole. Other critics have also criticized the novel in various ways owing to different perspectives because this third novel by Mailer has remained something of an enigma to literary critics since its publication in 1965. Mailer also remained an enigma for the contemporary world as he was breaking away from conventions and norms; and there may be no better example of the way the world has changed around Norman Mailer than the recent criticisms showered on his writings and his world view.

As discussed earlier, sexual issue of the novel appears to be crucially thematic. For many critics by attempting to trace the dialectic of sex and society, Mailer was developing a prescient vision of counterculture rebellion. In this regard, Mailer has been identified as a Beat generation writer who expresses dissent against mainstream America because

"the new social freedoms brought about by World War II had helped ease the sexual reference, sexual language, and sexual incident in literature: sex in literature was authentic and it was 'true' to real

experience, and it no longer needed to be confined to the pages of underground or 'difficult' novels like *Ulysses* (Braudy 124).

Barudy further comments that "Sex is so central to his work because it expresses the individual will he values so highly. Sex and language are both acts of sub-version and revenge - ways of getting back at a world that has deprived men of will". He says *An American Dream* "sketches Oedipal drama in comic-book tones" and celebrates "an individual and personal voice that tries to stand against the personal pattern of history". He categorizes *An American Dream* as one among many "sexually" free novels of the postwar period.

Taking the same sexual issue of the novel, Feminist critic Kate Millet, who judges any text from the treatment female characters receive from the male protagonists, accuses Mailer of being "prototypical male chauvinist" because of the role Mailer provides to female characters as "secondary human beings (qtd. in Gerson 9). She sees sexual relationship between Rojack and his wife Deborah as victimization. But defending the view of Millet, Jessica Gerson sees the Mailerian ideas about sexuality in terms of Mystical Judaism. She asserts "the core of *An American Dream's* novelistic intent is the emergence of Rojack as saint and hero" (172). Because Deborah, his wife is not suffered. She is killed because she is the manifestation of the evil forces which Rojack must overcome. Thus, she justifies murder, which is the central action of the novel in symbolic interpretation where Deborah symbolizes the evil force prevalent in American society.

David Van Leer examines the novel in the same way as does Millet taking the underlying sexual issue. For him, *An American Dream* is "a white male's search for personal integrity which depends upon "his sexual violence upon women" (93). He takes the feminist stand point and is of the opinion that the male protagonist oppresses

women characters sexually. The totality of his personality, according to David Van Leer, depends on to the extent he commits sexual violence upon women. He is also highlighting the racial issue of the novel as well because he characterizes the search for personal integrity as that of White male's.

For other critics the novel is a work of social criticism. They assess the novel on the basis of how far the novel depicts the social issues of the American society. Their views rest on the way society is represented in the novel and the writer's attempt to locate the characters within it. James D. Hart assesses that *An American Dream* is a "lurid depiction of disintegrating marriage and corrupt society" (407). As similar kind of judgment is passed by Berry H. Leed, who bringing all the novels of Mailer including *An American Dream* comments "two themes loom large in all of Mailer's fiction; that of social ills and the plight of the individual in contemporary society" (23). Thus, placing Mailer in American literary context, his novels with the expression of discontent focus on the politics of mainstream America and individuals plight in American society. Mailer in his novels appears an "individual contemplating the complexity of American experience" (Braudy 115). A similar type of judgment is passed by Carol and Walter Benn who pointed out that Mailer has depicted "the psychic marrow of American culture and the growing vulgarism in modern life" (Qtd. in Mc Cann 15).

But there are other critics who try to locate the personal details of the writer with the characters presented by the writers in the novels. They try to find out similarities between the personal details of the writer with the characters in his/her works. They judge any work as the representation of the writer's own life. James Ginden finds the novel "full of autobiographical fantasies" (587). "The protagonist of *An American Dream*, Stephen Rojack, was loosely modeled after Mailer himself, and

his strongest writing now included explicitly autobiographical elements" ("Contemporary Authors" 8). Criticisms of Mailer's fictions have been characterized by a tendency to read autobiographical significance into his novels which thwarts other issues of the novels and the text as autonomous in itself.

Though Mailer, a Jewish by origin, expresses through counterculture the dissent against materialist American culture as America headed towards a postwar corporate and institutionalized American character. After realization of the illness mainstream America suffered from, he joined his dissenting voice with others - the Beat writers, the Black writers and the Confessionals. The American, in his novels, has come a long way from the literary experiment of 1920s and radical self-reassessment of the 1930s.

Mailer's concern is similar to that of the writers of counterculture because his novels also reassesses the American Dream as a nightmare amid the image of America as a place of infinite possibilities and vast wealth flourishing with technical advancement. His novels generally exhibit the rebellion found among minority groups of his time. He always saw American society and American dream as an imagination of the minority groups. For him, the American dream has turned out to be a nightmare when seen from a non-advantageous individual's perspective. And from the beginning, the distrust of the "dominant technological culture and its achievements coupled with an admiration for, and desire for intimate knowledge of its power" has been the prevailing mode of his thought (Shechner 227).

Though Mailer's famous essay 'The White Negro' (1957) slightly touches upon the racial issues with the help of a new 'Hipster' hero, he generally leaves the racial issues and introduces himself as only a person of a general minority group in his writing. *Armies of the Night* (1968) subtitled 'History as a Novel/The Novel as a

History' invalidates historical bases. As the subtitle suggests, it is concerned with the march of dissident Americans in front of the Pentagon. *Why Are We in Vietnam ?* confronts the way realities are constructed by historical bases and examines American involvement in Vietnam with its pretended intention to civilize them. Now it apt to say that Mailer's roots of rebellion against American mainstream stretches through the strident ennui of Ginsberg and camera eye of Dos Passes, to the tragic eye foreseen by Theodore Dreiser.

With the development of post-structuralism and cultural theories, there is also the tendency to examine the novels of Mailer taking these theories as the methodological tool. Mc Cann Sean comments about the works of Mailer thus:

Throughout his writing, Mailer constantly endeavors to portray personal identity less as a given than as the product of cultural environment, political conflict and individual struggle [. . .]. He stresses the fact that people are constituted by a wealth of local attachments. As a good postmodernist, he suggests in fact that there are no autonomous selves, only contingent identities constantly in flux.

(10)

While applying this idea of cultural politics in *An American Dream* it can be said that the identity of Rojack is constantly changing and is the product of cultural forces.

Leonardo Unger finds the novel "in every way an extension and intensification of the manner and the substance of its predecessors"- *Barbary share* and *The Deer Park* (33). He clarifies further that the theme and the form of the novel try to establish a correlation between them and says "the intensities underlying Mailer's subject matter being to dominate the rational, circumjacent forms of the realists,

distorting them in the direction of the expressionistic and the surreal". Thus, for Under the novel is experimental in form which is unlike his earlier realistic novels and this is because of the changing pattern of his underlying theme.

In this context, it is apparent that many studies have been carried out to inquire into *An American Dream* using different approaches owing to different perspectives which includes feminist, experimental, sex-centered, autobiographical, social and cultural. The comment of Richard Ruland and Malcom Bradbury seem to summarize the myriad of the issues and perspectives the novel generates into a single sentence. They are of the opinion that *An American Dream* is "an unself-consciously obscene, semiautobiographical sex-and-power fantasy interweaving the psychic, sexual and political worlds of American life" (385).

Thus, taking different issues and perspectives, those writers examine the novel *An American Dream* from different angles. But my task in this dissertation will be to analyze the novel in terms of the existential dimension of the protagonist, Stephen Rojack because critics, focusing on different issues, have not assessed the existential dimensions of the novel. Thus, my research in this context, will be to examine the novel through the methodological tool of existential theories and to prove that the novel traces the protagonist's journey through the hostile world to define himself as an existential hero.

Generally, this study does not intend to correct those views of earlier critics, who in their analysis of different episodes of the novel have drawn fundamental conclusions about the work in different terms. But it would seem at this point much more valuable to examine in detail Mailer's existential characterization of the protagonist as it is implicit in the work's total design than to uncover any other layers of meanings. Such a focus may serve not only to increase our appreciation of the

book's thematic peculiarities, but affords us some new insights. The method used here in suggesting the characterization of the hero as existential will typically look at certain selected descriptions and then show how they may profitably be made to apply to Mailer's *An American Dream*.

Chapter-II

Existentialism

I. Background

In the twentieth century after the second world war, the view that man had become a meaningless particle in the universe prevailed. As for the individual person, he became insignificant nonentity in the modern state. Thrown into an incoherent, disordered and chaotic universe in which individual's destinies were obstructed and turned apart by the second world war, people could not believe in old concepts like unity, rationality, morality, values and even Christianity. The quality of modern life seemed ever ambiguous and obscure. There was widespread sense of anxious helplessness. Profound moral and aesthetic sensitivity confronted horrific cruelty and waste. In the background of every pleasure and achievement loomed humanity's unprecedented vulnerability. It appeared that modern men seemed to have driven themselves into a terrestrial nightmare and a spiritual wasteland, a seemingly irresolvable predicament.

Nowhere was this problematic modern condition more precisely embodied than in the phenomenon of existentialism, a mood and philosophy expressed in the writings of Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, among others. These writers saw the world as totally absurd, incoherent, disintegrated, chaotic and disordered, not governed by the laws of Providence, but by pure chance and contingency. An existence without justification became the main proposition of the 20th century. This was the product of experience of living in a world shattered by two world wars, totalitarianism, the holocaust, the atom bomb, and the lost belief in a wise and omnipotent God ruling history for the good of all.

Given the tragic dimensions of contemporary historical events, given the fall of the scriptures as an unshakable foundation for belief, given the lack of any philosophical argument for God's existence, and given above all the almost universal crisis of religious faith in a secular age, there emerged the theology of the 'death of God', as Nietzsche proclaimed. Not only 'God is dead', but also all the intermediary values connecting God and man declined. Man thus lost even the certainties and values of his own existence, which he/she had originally received from the belief in God. No transcendent Absolute guaranteed the fulfillment of human life and history. There was no eternal design or providential purpose. Things existed simply because they existed, and not for some 'higher' or 'deeper' reason. God was dead and, the universe was blind to human concerns devoid of meaning or purpose. Man was abandoned on his own. All was contingent. To be authentic one had to admit and choose freely to encounter the stark reality of life's meaninglessness, and struggle alone gave meaning. Human beings thus became castrated and deserted animal in the absurd and overwhelming universe.

In the background of such fragmented and disillusioned situation, existentialists sought to present the prevalent condition of the modern individual where there was no eternal value to cling on. There emerged the feeling of utter alienation and anguish in the world with the recognition of 'Death of God' on the one hand and the cataclysm of world war I and II on the other. Existentialists realized that life had become alarmingly insecure. In this context, Richard Tarnas says,

The anguish and alienation of the 20th century life were brought to full articulation as the existentialists addressed the most fundamental naked concerns of human existence – suffering and death, loneliness and dread, guilt, conflict, spiritual emptiness and ontological insecurity, the

void of absolute values or universal contexts, the sense of cosmic absurdity, the frailty of human, reason, the tragic impasse of the human condition." (88)

After the great world wars the term 'Existentialism' came into prominence particularly in Germany and France as a philosophical and literary movement or tendency. The term was explicitly adopted as a self-description by Jean Paul Sartre, and through the wide dissemination of the postwar literary and philosophical output of Sartre and his associates – notably Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau – Ponty, and Albert Camus – existentialism became identified with a cultural movement that flourished in Europe in the 1940s and 1950s. It was during the second world war, when Europe found itself in crisis and faced with death and destruction, the existentialist movement began to flourish, existentialism as a contemporary philosophical trend reached its zenith in the years following the war, the time when Europe was in a mood of despair, perhaps not without the hope of social reconstruction but pessimistic and morbid enough to accept the existentialist outlook of lack of design and intention in the universe and the nausea of human existence and its frustration. Dark portrait of such a sickness could be found even in the optimistic and confident nineteenth century in the works of authors as diverse as Karl Marx, Soren Kierkegaard and Fredrich Nietzsche.

Among the major philosophers identified as existentialists (many of whom – for instance Camus and Heidegger – repudiated the label) were Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, and Martin Buber in Germany, Jean Wahl and Gabriel Marcel in France, the Spaniards Jose Ortegay Gasset and Miguel de Uramuno, and the Russians Nicholai Berdyaev and Lev Shestov. The nineteenth century philosophers, Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, came to be seen as precursors of the movement.

Existentialism was as much a literary phenomena as a philosophical one. The postwar years found very diverse groups of writers and artists linked under the term: retrospectively Dostoyevsky, Ibsen and Kafka were enlisted; in Paris there were Jean Genete, Andre Malraux, and the expatriate Samuel Beckett; the Norwegian Knut Hamsen and the Romanian Eugene Ionesco and even abstract expressionists such as Jackson Pollack were understood in existential terms.

Although, existentialism as a distinct literary and philosophical movement belongs to the 19th and the 20th century, elements of existentialism can be found even in the thoughts of Socrates, in the Bible and in the works of many pre-modern philosophers and writers. In fact, existentialism goes back to man's pre-philosophical attempt to attain self-awareness and understanding of existence, the world around us. The connection of being and thinking was Greek insight and it is this very insight that modern existentialists tried to reestablish. The Ancient Greek thought was revolutionized by Socrates who shifted the attention of the study of philosophy from nature to man, man as the centre of existence. The problem of what human being is in himself/herself can be perceived in the Socratic imperative 'know thyself', as well as in the works of Montaigne and Pascal, a religious Philosopher and mathematician (New Encyclopedia 612). The main idea of existentialist theory was already common to religious thought when existentialism was first introduced – the idea of man being responsible for his own actions and so on. Existentialist roots have been traced back to Pascal and St. Augustine. The subjectivism of theologian St. Augustine during the 4th - 5th century exhorted man not to go outside himself in the quest for truth, for it is within him/her that truth abides (612).

Existentialism is often seen as a revolt against traditionalist philosophy. It contradicts Descartes' views in that man is open to the world and the objects in it

without intermediary stratum of ideas or sensations. Also there is no distinct realm of consciousness on which one might infer, project, or doubt the existence of external objects. Existentialists are more concerned with being rather than with knowing; this is a rejection of Cartesian dualism.

Existentialism as a distinct philosophy began with the Danish Christian thinker Soren Kierkegaard in the first half of the 19th century. He was critical of Hegel's philosophical system that analyzed being or existence in an abstract and impersonal way. He turned the direction of the study of philosophy to the subjective, emotional and living aspect of human existence as against Hegel's objective and abstract academization of reality. He advocated that the irrational is the real against Hegelianism. He discussed human essence with the existential predicaments and limitations; hope despair, anxiety and so on. Gaarder in *Sophie's World* acknowledged, "he thought that both the idealism of the Romantics and Hegel's historicism had obscured the individual's responsibility for his own life" (377).

Kierkegaard is an existentialist because he accepts the absurdity of the world as fully as Sartre or Camus. But he does not begin with the postulate of the non-existence of God, but with the principle that nothing in the world, nothing available to sense or reason, provides any knowledge or reason to believe in God. While traditional Christian theologians like St. Thomas Aquinas saw the world as providing evidence of God's existence, and also thought that rational arguments a priori could establish the existence of God. Kierkegaard does not think this is the case. But Kierkegaard's conclusion about this could just as easily be derived from Sartre's premises. After all if the world is absurd, and everything we do is absurd, why not do the most absurd thing imaginable? And what could be more absurd than to believe in God? So why not? The atheists don't have any reason to believe in anything else, or

even to disbelieve in that, so we may as well go for it. Without reasons of heart or mind Kierkegaard can only get to God by a 'leap of faith'.

The development of modern existentialism was preceded by the works of the German phenomenologists Frenz Brento (1838-1917) and Edmund Husserl (1859-1998). They were immediately followed by the modern existentialists. In this century, German existentialism was represented by Martin Heidegger (1889-1970) and Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), French existentialism by Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80), Spanish existentialism by Jose Ortega Y Gusset (1883-1955) and Italian existentialism by Nicola Abbagnano (1910). The most forceful voices of existentialist thought were the works of the French existentialists-Sartre, Simon de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus (1913-60). None has contributed more to the popularization of this philosophical trend, existentialism than Sartre. In literary influence, the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-81) and Austrian Jewish Writer Franz Kafka (1883-1924) contributed significantly. Dostoevsky is often cited as a forerunner of existentialism precisely because in his disillusionment with rationalist humanism he stressed the unpredictable character of the universe because his individuals appear face to face with pure contingency. Dostoyevsky in his novels presented the defeat of man in the face of choices and the result of their consequences, and finally in the enigmas of himself. Kafka in his novels like *The Trial* (1925) and *The Castle* (1926) presented isolated men confronting vast, elusive, menacing beauracracy. In the art, the analogous of existentialism may be considered to be surrealism, expressionism and in general those schools that view the role of art not as reflection of objective and external reality to man but as the free projection of the human being (New Encyclopedia 613). An important aspect of the existentialist movement was its

popularization due to the ramification of existentialist philosophy in literature, psychology, religion, politics and culture.

Although, the classic forms of existentialism are characteristic of post-world war II philosophy, literature and art, we have already seen with Dostoyevsky, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche that existentialist like ideas were anticipated long before. Dostoevsky, although articulating the ideas, did not believe them; but there were real existentialists before their time. The most important was certainly Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). There are at least three ways in which Nietzsche qualifies as a classic existentialist, all of which we can see in what may have been his magnum opus, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885). Nietzsche focused precisely on the non-existence of God as implying the non-existence of all value in one of the most famous saying in the history of philosophy, 'God is dead'. Nietzsche's replacement of God is the *Übermensch*. This was originally translated 'Superman' since the Latin Super means 'Over' as does German 'Über'. The superman is not vulnerable to taming and domesticity. The second most important thing is that superman is free because all his own values flow from his own will. Value is a matter of decision, a matter of will. Because the superman, in whom we find the triumphant 'will to power', is free, he takes what he wants and does what he likes. He is authentic. The third point, which is advanced as the greatest teaching of *Zarathustra*, does the same job as Sartre's redefinition of 'responsibility'. This is the 'Eternal Recurrence'. Since every point where a time like the present has happened, or will happen, it itself also has an eternity of time before it, then what is happening now has already happened an infinite number of times and will happen an infinite number of times again. Though, actions to Nietzsche are no longer good or evil, it still doesn't after all mean that they

are right or wrong, it simply means that before you do something, you must determine that you really want to do it.

Phenomenology and ontology have had remarkable influences on existentialism. Sartre and Heidegger were disciples of the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl and Sartre himself, somewhat younger, was then influenced by Heidegger. Husserl's effort in the first decade of the 20th century had been directed towards establishing a descriptive science of consciousness, by which he understood not the object of the natural science of psychology but the transcendental field of intentionality, i.e. that whereby our experience is meaningful as an experience of something as something. The existentialists welcomed Husserl's doctrine of intentionality as a refutation of the Cartesian view according to which consciousness relates immediately only to its own representations, ideas and sensations. According to Husserl, consciousness is our direct openness to the world; one that is governed categorically (normatively) rather than casually; that is, intentionality is not a property of the individual mind but the categorical framework in which mind and world become intelligible. A phenomenology of consciousness then, explores neither the metaphysical composition nor the casual genesis of things, but the constitution of their meaning. Husserl employed this method to clarify our experience of nature, the socio-cultural, world, logic and mathematics, but Heidegger argued that he had failed to raise most fundamental question, that of the 'meaning of being' as such. In turning phenomenology toward the question of what it means to *be*, Heidegger insists that the question be raised concretely: it is not at first some academic exercise but a burning concern arising from life itself, the question of what it means for me to *be*.

Phenomenology and existentialism, though combined together by Heidegger and Sartre, have their own independent identity and are the two branches of

continental philosophy. The 'life-world' concept, the world in which we live with its everyday articles and its ideas as they appear to the users, of Husserl is the idea of immediacy (Skirbekk and Gilje 441). It is an idiosyncratic world, directly experienced with the ego at the center. Husserl laid emphasis on 'immediacy of experience and encouraged the tradition of making a direct analysis of the intrinsic structure of experience, pure data of consciousness and ignored metaphysical or scientific assumptions.

Further shaping and elaboration of this movement was made by Martin Heidegger, one of the main exponents of the 20th century existentialism and a German Ontologist who notably tried to disclose the ways of being in his most famous and controversial book, *Being and Time* (1927). In this book Heidegger discusses what it means for a man to be or how it is to be. It leads to a fundamental question, 'what is the meaning of being?'. And through speculation and interpretation, he has tried to reach the final truth of existence, the situation of being.

Heidegger's *Being and Time*, an inquiry into the "being that we ourselves are" (which he termed 'Dasein' a German word for existence), introduced most of the motifs that would characterize later existentialist thinking: the tension between the individual and the public; an emphasis on the worldly or situated character of human thought and reason; a fascination with liminal experiences of anxiety, death, the "nothing" and nihilism; the rejection of science as an adequate framework for understanding human being; and the introduction of 'authenticity' as the norm of self-identity, tied to the project of self definition through freedom, choice and commitment. Though in 1946 Heidegger would repudiate the retrospective labeling of his earlier works as existentialism, it is in that work that the relevant concept of existence finds its first systematic philosophical formulation.

In his book, *what is metaphysics?* (1929), Heidegger has elaborated das Nichts (nothing), that is to say, the nothing and given a phenomenological approach to the situation of human existence.

Heidegger pursued these issues with the resources of Husserl's phenomenological method. While not all existential philosophers were influenced by phenomenology (Jaspers and Marcel), the philosophical legacy of existentialism is largely tied to the form it takes as an existential version of phenomenology.

Existentialism proper is a movement of the 40s and 50s, literary and artistic as well as philosophical, with Jean Paul Sartre as probably the most famous representative. Sartre is also a convenient representative because for a time he actually acknowledged being an existentialist and offered a definition for the word. It was unusual for existentialists to identify themselves as such, much less define what it was all about, so Sartre is a convenient starting point.

Sartre finds valuable philosophical materials in Descartes' subjectivism, Husserl's analysis of consciousness Heidegger's existentialist concepts and themes and also in two major forerunners of existentialism, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche (Lavine 241). From Kierkegaard, Sartre takes the emphasis upon individual conscious existence; from Nietzsche, he takes the concept of the 'death of God' (341). Sartre's originality lies in his reinterpreting, revising and reworking of these materials into bold new integration, which become the centre of French Existentialism (341).

II. Existentialism: Defined

The term "existence", according to I.A. Cuddon, is derived from Latin root *ex* 'out' + *'sistere'* from 'stare' 'to stand' (316). Thus the meaning of existence is to stand in the world that is incomprehensible and against us. Now the term applies "a vision of the condition and existence of man, his place and function in the world, and his

relationship or lack of one with God" (310). The existential ideals found particular relevance during and after Second World War when Europe was materially and spiritually in decay. In this context, the negative aspects of human existence such as pain, despair, frustration, sickness and death become the essential features of human realities. And existentialists in their works endeavored to cater the materials that reflected the world, society and human existence.

As the doctrine emerged world wide, existentialist thinkers also differed in their views. Existentialism is less of an-'ism' than an attitude that expresses itself in a myriad of ways. "Every existentialist philosophy is necessarily a personal interpretation; it is limited by the limitation of the author" (Jain 150). Because of the diversity of positions associated with existentialism, no single definition is possible however it may be said that the problem of the individual is central and that they stressed on individual human existence and consequently, on subjectivity, individual freedom, responsibility and choice. According to Ryan,

Hence there is no single existentialist philosophy, and no single definition of the word can be given. However, it may be said that with the existentialists the problem of man is central and that they stress man's concrete existence, his contingent nature, his personal freedom, and his consequent responsibility for what he does and makes himself to be.

Thus, it becomes explicit that any attempt to decipher only one definition of existentialism is out of the question. However, existentialist thinkers share some basic tenets. In this regard, Sartre is worth quoting here:

What . . . (all existentialists) have in common is simply the fact that they believe that existence comes before essence – or if you will, that

we must begin from the subjective [. . .] thus each individual man is the realization of a certain conception which dwells in the divine understanding [. . .], Man possesses human nature, that "human nature", which is the conception of human being, is found in every man; which means that each man is a particular example of universal conception, the conception of man [. . .] the essence which we confront in experience [. . .] man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world and defines himself afterwards [. . .] Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it [. . .]

Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. (827-28)

Thus the fundamental foundation for existentialism is human being's existence, and human being has no essence that comes before his existence. Sartre's Slogan – "existence precedes essence" – may serve to introduce what is most distinctive of existentialism, namely the idea that no general, non-formal account of what it means to be human can be given, since that meaning is decided in and through existing itself (825). Existence is self-making in a situation. In contrast to other entities, whose essential properties are fixed by the kind of entities they are, what is essential to a human being – what makes him/her who he/she is – is not fixed by his/her type but by what he/she makes of himself/herself, who he/she becomes. The fundamental contribution of existential thought lies in the idea that one's identity is constituted neither by nature, nor by culture, since to 'exist' is precisely to constitute such an identity. This view is a revolt against traditional European philosophy, which taking philosophy as a science produced knowledge that would be objective, universally true and certain. Especially, it rejected Cartesian old model, which

characterized existence as that of a substance determined by an essential property 'thinking'.

Existentialism is a philosophy not of things but of the human situation. For Heidegger, man's existences in the world is fundamentally different from the being of others only because man exists while others do not. Heidegger asserts, "The being whose manner of being is existence is man. Man alone exists. A rock is, but does not exist. A tree is, but it does not exist [. . .] God is but does not exist" (65).

Existentialism, according to Sartre, is "humanism" not in the sense that man as the end in itself and as the supreme value because existentialists never take man as the end, since man is still to be determined (51). It is humanism because for individual there is no legislator but himself/herself; thus abandoned, an individual must decide for himself. Thus, individual, for the existentialists, is the creator of his/her own destiny and values in this world, which is empty and devoid of any purpose and meaning. Individual has to make his own universe with a meaning of his own, realizing the fact that there is no a priori meaning of anything in the world.

The definition of oneself or creation of meaning in the hostile world is possible only through freedom of choice, individual action and responsibility. Each individual makes choice that creates his/her essence. Choice, therefore, is central to human existence and it is inescapable. For existentialists human life is basically a series of decisions that should be made with no way of knowing conclusively what the correct choices are. Individuals must decide what is true from false, right from wrong, what to do and what not to do. "Yet there are no objective standards or rules to which a person can turn for answers to problem of choice because different standards supply conflicting advice" (World Book Encyclopedia, 437). Therefore, the individual must decide which standards to accept and which ones to reject.

For an authentic existence, an individual must choose among alternatives. Macintyre says, "Even if I do not chose, I have chosen not the chose" (149). So even not to choose is to choose not to choose. But the choice, according to existentialists, is subjective because individuals must make their own choices and decisions without the help of any external standards as laws, ethics, or traditions. Because individuals make their own choices, they are free; thus they are free to choose, they are responsible for their choices. Individuals thus are forced to choose, they have their freedom and responsibility. Thus they are condemned to be free' as Sartre says: Human being is responsible for everything except for the fact of his responsibility. Man is free, but he is not free to obliterate fully his freedom.

With this freedom of choice and responsibility, individual actions are always inextricably related because Sartre says,

Man is nothing else but what he purposes; he exists only in so far as he realizes himself, he is, therefore, nothing else but the sum of his actions, nothing else but what his life is [. . .] In a life man commits himself, draws his own portrait and there is nothing but his portrait [. . .] you are nothing else but what you live, [. . .] what we (existentialists) mean to say is that a man is no other than a series of undertakings. ("Commitment" 854)

Thus, for Sartre, there is no reality except in action. The sum total of the actions that one performs during his whole life decides his/her destiny. Thrown into the world, the human being is condemned to be free. The human being must take this freedom of being and the responsibility and guilt of his actions. Each action negates the other possible courses of action and their consequences, so the human being must

be accountable without excuse. The human being must not slip away from his responsibilities. The human being must take decisions and assure responsibilities. It is likely that a coward may be a hero and hero, coward. Humans live not totally by any single action, but by whole actions that he/she chooses to carry out in his/her life. The authenticity of life demands free choices and actions, regardless of pre-established social or moral normative. Kierkegaard says, "The existentialists hold that the age of the Individual (authentic person) has arrived, the age in which it will be recognized that the significance of the personal life depends on a refusal merely to conform to the mores of the group" (qtd. in Jain 366).

For Sartre, free choice is not determined by any existent fact because an action is projected towards blank future, which is non-existent. And from traditional moralities or ethical systems, people cannot get authentic choice, thus they are unable to get good and right choice that is authentic.

Existentialism posits the emphasis on the lack of meaning and purpose in life, and the solitude of human existence. As there is no essence in human life, individual is the sum of life in so far that he has created and achieved of himself. As we do not have any eternal nature to fall back on, it is, therefore, useless to search for the meaning of life in general. We are condemned to improvise. We are like actors dragged onto the stage without having learned our lines, with no script and no prompter to whisper stage directions to us. We must decide for ourselves how to live. The situation of the human being is well described by Sartre:

We are like actors who suddenly find themselves on stage in the middle of a performance, but without having a script, without knowing the name of the play or what role they are playing, without knowing

what to do or say yes, without even knowing whether the play has an author at all-whether it is serious or farce. We must personally make a decision to be something or other-a villain or a hero, ridiculous or tragic or we can simply exist, immediately. But that is also erasing a role-and that choice too is made without our ever knowing what the performance was about. (qtd. in Shirbekk and cyilje 444)

This is the way we are thrown into existence. We exist, we find ourselves here free because there are no predetermined guideposts -we must decide for ourselves define the kind of person we are going to be. The inauthenticity of existence, which is serious and problematic, results when the individual permits his/her life to be determined and defined by the rule and values of others.

The fundamental problem of existentialism is concerned with ontology, the study of being. The human being's existence is the primary and basic fact. Human being as being is nothing. This nothingness and the non-existence of an essence is central source of freedom the human being faces in each and every moment. The human being has liberty in view of his situation, in decisions, which make him solve his problems and live in the world.

Existentialist approach has placed particular emphasis on the essential meaninglessness of the universe and on man's need to struggle to create meaning. There is no significance in this world, this universe. The human being cannot find any purpose in life and his/her existence is only a contingent fact. His being does not emanate from necessity. If human being rejects false pretensions, the illusions of his having a meaning, then he encounters the absurdity, the futility of life. The human

beings role in this purposeless and meaningless world is not predetermined or fixed, but one determined by choice. Rayan, in this regard, says:

Man is free and responsible, but he is responsible only to himself. As with Nietzsche, man creates moral values. Besides being free, man is finite and contingent being, existing in a world that is devoid of purpose. The pessimism resulting from this position is like wise expressed by Camus' doctrine of "the absurd." Absurdity or contradiction arises from the clash, between human hopes and desires and the meaningless universe into which man has been thrown. (639)

Camus declares this world as absurd, without any purpose and meaning. "This universe, Camus says, henceforth, without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile" (852). He also declares the condition of man as absurd when he understands that the systems of the past provided no reliable guidance for life or guaranteed any foundation of human existence. Camus asserts, "The absurd man aware of his futile living naturally feels anxiety and helplessness but he does not surrender himself in the mouth of death" (853).

Instead each individual must choose among alternatives and follow it with passionate conviction, aware of the certainty of death and the ultimate meaninglessness of one's life. Camus sees the affirmation of individual's worth only through the acceptance of absurdity repudiating the illusion of hope and ultimate meaning which enables the individual to recognize the peculiar meaning of his very condition. According to Camus, Sisyphus the archetype of the 'absurd hero' represents human condition as a whole because he challenges the absurdity by accepting it and struggling against it at the same time. Human being is alone because he cannot

communicate with others. He finds himself in a world in which he is utterly alien to others and even to himself . The world has no purpose and no meaning.

However, the attempt to create meaning and morality in a world without defined guidelines and rules, combined with the belief that freedom and responsibility rest squarely with the individual, generates a particular trenchant anxiety or anguish or dread for the individual. Anguish or anxiety, in other words, descends from the human being's realization that his destiny is not fixed but is open to an undetermined future of infinite possibilities and limitless scope. The void of future destiny must be filled by making choices for which the individual alone will assume responsibility and blame. This dread or anxiety is present at every moment of an individual's existence and is a part and parcel of authentic existence. Anguish or dread goes on developing an inward tension in individual mind till death. It is this anxiety, which leads an individual perpetually to mould experience to make the best from the objective situation, in which one is thrown. There are many alternatives in life, but the feeling of anxiety for destiny requires choice of only one of such infinite numbers of alternatives. It is in the moment of making his choice that an individual finds himself quite free and feels his existence. The freedom of choice plays an important role in realizing man's own existence. And anxiety has no object to achieve. It is something natural to human beings because without it one never feels that one exists. So it is a very dynamic impulse through which man creates and fulfills his own destiny. Sartre says, "It is in anxiety that man gets the consciousness of his freedom or if you prefer, anxiety is the mode of being of freedom as consciousness of being, it is in anxiety that freedom is, in its being, in question of itself" (qtd. in Jain 195).

Nothingness, anxiety and freedom are interconnected. These are inter-related structural determinants of the being of individual. Here the words-anxiety, anguish and dread-should not be confused. Ellman and Feidelson are of the opinion that Sartre's allusion to Kierkegaard indicates his use of the term "anguish" which is derived from angst or "dread" about which Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger have written about (805). They use the term to explain: "The mental state of person who departs from routine patterns of human observation and comes to realize that he can use his freedom; when the path that may be chosen is not understood and yet exercises an attraction to comprehend his essential condition" (805).

So, anguish is the state of mind of an individual who wants to escape from the predetermined ethics and notions of society in search of his authentic existence.

Existence is basically classified in terms of authentic and inauthentic terms. Inauthentic existence (being-in-itself) is the characteristic of things. It is what the human being is diseased with for his failure to act as a free agent and his impotency to reject bad faith. Things are determined and fixed whereas the human being is free because he can add essence in the course of his life, and he is in a constant state of flux and able to comprehend his situation. Individual is in a continuous process of becoming, creating and renewing the meaning of life. When an individual refuses to come face to face with harsh destiny and assumes the role imposed upon him by others he suffers from bad faith. But human beings do not live in a predetermined world; the human being is free to realize his aims and dreams. Hence he has only the destiny he forges for himself because in this world nothing happens out of necessity.

When a human being seems as if he is a passive subject, acting like a thing, instead of realizing the authentic being, this is bad faith. In bad faith, the human being

shelters from responsibility without understanding the dimension of alternative courses of action awaiting him/her. The individual behaves as others demand of him/her by conforming to the standards of the normative and by accepting roles designed for him. The human being loses his freedom to decide. In bad faith the human being imprisons himself within inauthenticity for he/she has refused to take the challenge of responsibility and the anxiety that comes along with freedom.

Existentialism as a set of philosophical ideas emphasize the existence of human beings as the first and central problem as opposed to the metaphysical explanation of existence as given by traditional schools of philosophy. Being contrasts not only with knowing, but also with abstract concepts, which fail to capture the individual and specific. Existentialist thinkers take existence as essential and fundamental, one that is always particular, unique and individual. Being cannot be a topic of objective study, rather, it is revealed and felt by human beings through his own experience and his situation. They try to connect the fragmented chaotic, disordered world with the passionate, disillusioned and disheartened human being. Existentialism emphasizes the existence of human beings, the lack of meaning and purpose in life and the solitude of human experience. It attempts to describe individual's desire to make rational decisions despite existing in an irrational universe. It stresses the risk, the voidness of human reality and admits that the human being is thrown into the world in which pain, frustration, sickness, contempt, malaise and death dominate.

In brief, it can be said that existentialism emphasizes human existence, especially with human's most extreme experiences, confrontation with death, anguish

and anxiety, despair and guilt, in intimate relation with his body, the world and society.

III. Theistic and Atheistic Existentialism

Jean Paul Sartre classifies existentialist thinkers into two camps - theistic and atheistic. The first group consists of Martin Baber, Soren Kierkegaard , Gabriel Marcel and Karl Jaspers; in the second group Sartre places himself with Martin Heidegger, Albert Camus and Simon de Beauvior. The first group believes in religion and God while the second does not. But both start with the premise that existence comes before essence and human being has the freedom of choice. In this context theistic existentialists believe the anxiety of modern individual can be entertained when one submits oneself to the will of God. On the other hand, atheistic existentialists starting with Nietzsche's "the death of God ",discard the concept of God as an authentic shelter. The atheists regard human being as optimistically forlorn, free and supportless creature creating a system in which the individual is paradoxically free to choose

IV. The Basic Existentialist Themes:

As a cultural movement, existentialism belongs to the past. As a philosophical and literary inquiry that introduced a new norm, authenticity for understanding what it means to be human- a norm tied to distinctive, post- Cartesian concept of the self as practical, embodied, being in the world - existentialism has played an important role in contemporary thought by providing popular themes- existence, anxiety, absurdity, death , dread, choice , freedom, responsibility, alienation, boredom, nothingness,

identity through struggle and so on, in the context of the search for a new categorical framework, together with its governing norms.

As discussed earlier in various ways, 'existence' is the first and fundamental theme of existentialism. It has primary status than essence. Vital human experiences as individual lives constitute his /her existence. Its depths have to be probed and meaning to be deciphered without idealizing or conceptualizing human being. Individual as he is, as he lives with his actual experience in all its layers, is the contention of existentialism.

'Anxiety' is the next theme of existentialists. It is the sense of anguish, a generalized uneasiness, a fear or dread which is not directed to any object, rather it emerges when an individual tries to create meaning in a world without any defined guideposts and rules combined with the belief that freedom and responsibility rest squarely with the individual. Another existentialist standpoint is the idea of 'absurdity.' To exist as a human is inexplicable, and wholly absurd. Every individual is simply here thrown into space and time but without any value and meaning in a world that is worthless, meaningless, empty and hopeless.

Another existentialist theme is 'death'. It is final nothingness hanging over every individual like a sword of Damocles at each moment of life, and with the realization of this fact, an individual is filled with anxiety or anguish. For Heidegger, death is the most authentic and significant moment because when an individual acknowledges death in his life, he will free himself. But for Sartre, death is another witness to the absurdity of human existence. 'Identity' is also one important aspect of existentialism. Identity is created through struggle in this absurd world with freedom of choice and bearing responsibility. Struggle for identities are struggles within

individuals and between individuals with group. Identity is not something we have, but it is something we receive through a tension filled inter- subjective process and it is something that can be endlessly rechallenged. 'Choice' is another important aspect. An individual faces many alternatives, but what is important is the freedom of choice for authentic existence, which is the mode of creating value and meaning for oneself in the purposeless and meaningless universe. 'Alienation' is another thematic aspect of existentialists. There is alienation of those who do not identify with the normative and institutions of the society, who find society empty and meaningless. The alienation that exists in society reflects upon the alienation of individual human beings who look for their own desires in estrangement from the actual institutional workings of society.

Chapter III

Textual Analysis

R.D. Laing in his book *The Divided Self* develops the idea of "Ontological insecurity" in relation to D.H. Lawrence's novels *The Rainbow* and *Sons and Lovers*. He labels a kind of pervasive state of anxiety, "Ontological insecurity". He elaborates further that a person afflicted with 'Ontological insecurity' has the feeling that he is unreal and the related fantasy that he is almost entirely dependent upon other people for his reality as well as his personal identity. Anyone who is haunted by this fantasy feels "precariously differentiated" from other people. For this reason 'Ontological insecurity' often causes a person to imagine that "every relationship threatens (him) with loss of identity and autonomy" (33).

Anyone reading *The Divided Self* side by side with the chapters of *An American Dream* having Stephen Richard Rojack as the Protagonist of the novel, will amply understand the ontological insecurity on the part of the central, character. For Rojack's experiences consist very largely of ramifications of this nuclear anxiety. Time and again, Mailer dramatizes Rojack's dependence on his wife Deborah and his nearly insane anxiety when he is or thinks he is separated from her. His idea that "Deborah had occupied my center" and if she stopped loving him, it would offer the "promise of extinction" and "open a void" because he "was now without center" and did not belong to himself any longer has been anticipated earlier in the novel by a passage describing his sudden dread when he thinks that Deborah has left him alone in the house, in the early days of their marriage (32). His belief that he is alone in the empty house awakens in him a feeling of "horrible emptiness" that makes his heart ring with insanity" (18). Thus in Rojack's mind, the belief that another person supplies him with existence is complemented by the fear that another person will

deprive him of his existence and his separate identity. For Rojack, these gontasies

Focus on his wife Deborah:

Without Deborah they did not add to any more than another name for the bars and gossip columns of New York. With her beside me, I had leverage, however, I was one of the more active figures of the city. No one could be certain finally that nothing large would ever come from me. But for myself the evidence made no good case: probably I did not have the strength to stand alone. (24)

But, while describing Deborah too much, he feels he has given an excessive portrait of Deborah and has reduced himself. At the same time, he cannot come out of the ontological insecurity and says, "she had at her best, a winner's force and when she loved me, her strength seemed then to pass mine and I was alive with it, I had vitality. I could depend on stamina, I possessed my style. It was just that."

Rojack, television personality, Professor, ex-congressman, holder of the Distinguished Service Cross, thinks that his wife Deborah is the gateway to his identity and existence. Because he has the secret ambition to return to politics, "which would not be possible without the vast connections of Deborah's clan", and earlier she had been his means to enter into the "big league" of politicians of the first rank, tycoons, racing drivers and other dignifieds of the western world (23). So, he loved her the way "a drum majorette loved the power of the band for the swell it gave to each little strut". Another reason for this dependence on her was sexual fulfillment in which he thinks she was an artist. He says, "I had a physical need to see her as direct as an addict's panic waiting for his drug" (25).

At the same time, Deborah is the worst threat to his existence. And he feels that she is destroying him by depriving him of his real existence. So, he wants to

"look for love in another land" (16). Rojack is intensely ashamed of his dependence on Deborah. Much as he cannot bear the thought of separation from her because in Deborah's absence he fears that if "he relaxes his will", he will fade to "extinction" and be reduced to "nothing" (27). He longs to be free from her because by introspecting, he finds his personality was built upon void" and "emptiness", and reaches to the conclusion that he is "finally a failure" (14-15). He says, "I had lost my sense of being alive and here on earth, it was more as if I had died and did not altogether know it, this might be the way it was for the first hour of death if you choose to die in bed – you could blunder through some endless repetition believing your life was still there" (21).

Thus, Rojack, who lives vicariously through the life of other inevitably comes to feel that his own life is unfulfilling and that the development of his potential for creative activity has stopped. His relationship with Deborah illustrates this. Living entirely through Deborah, having nothing but her, Rojack feels that he will never find satisfactory channels for self-expressive activity. Rojack's role of identity confusion arises partly from the conflict between his desire to be master of his own and his feeling that he is completely dependent on Deborah. So while in surrealistic conversation with the moon, the moon says, "You have not done your work but you have lived your life and you are dead with it". He decides, "Let me be not all dead. I cried to myself [. . .] I was sick. I assure you I was sick in a way I had never been before."

This feeling of sickness on his part is the product of his realization of ontological insecurity, condemned to an identity, definition of himself, through being the complement of another that he would wish to repudiate. At last, he has the decision to live a life of his own.

With the decision to free himself from Deborah because she is the threat to his autonomy, Rojack is on the brink of a decision because he finds alternatives awaiting him. For authenticity of life demands free choices among alternatives. The alternatives to come out of the situation, he finds is either to commit suicide because he "had come to understand that there was suicide in me" and his "instinct was telling (him) to die" or to murder Deborah because "living with her I was murderous" and "Deborah had gotten her hooks into mine, eight years ago she had clinched the hooks and they had given to other hooks" (16).

Having faced the alternatives of murder and suicide, Rojack's mind cancels the idea of suicide because he find Deborah solely responsible for his failures in life because Deborah was "an artist with the needle, and never pricked you twice on the same spot" (23). He says:

I hated her more than not by now, my life with her had been a series of successes cancelled by quick failures, and I know so far as I could still keep any confidence that she had done her best to birth each loss, she has an artist at sucking the marrow from a broken bone, she worked each side of the street with a skill shared only in common by the best of street walkers and the most professional of the heiresses. (22)

Thus, in the moments of his emotional crisis he feels that "he must kill her (Deborah) or himself" (23). He feels this way because his utter dependence on her makes him proportionately desperate to be free from her, and at the same time, paradoxically, because she insists that he achieve independence from her although, killing Deborah would be just as suicidal as killing himself.

Rojack, with the loss of his self respect and on the verge of despair because of his dependence on Deborah and of his consequent compulsion to visit her frequently

at odd hours, is frightened and sick. He hurries from his building to visit Deborah (although they are a couple, they have been living separate for five years). After a brutal exchange of insults, the two struggle and Rojack strangles his wife. The act of murder is described by Rojack in terms of a vision of some heavenly city, and in the aftermath he feels as though he has been reborn. The purifying outpour of hatred leaves him in a calm and surrealistic mood:

It was as if in killing her, the act had been too gentle, I had not plumbed the hatred where the real injustice was stored. She had spit on the future, my Deborah, she had spoiled my chance, and now here her body was here. I had an impulse to go up to her and kick her ribs, grind my heel on her nose, drive the point of my shoe into her temple and kill her again, kill her good this time, kill her right. (52)

After the act of murder and the purging of his hatred, Rojack says, "The calm I contended seemed delicate. It was enough to stand near her body and look about the room" (42). When he goes to the mirror and looks into it searching for the riddle of his face, he finds it rejuvenated after the act as if he has been reborn again with more confidence and energy:

I had never seen a face more handsome. It was the truth. It was exactly the sort of truth one discovers by turning a corner and colliding with a stranger. My hair was alive and my eyes had the blue of a mirror held between the ocean and sky [. . .] I looked deeper into the eyes into the mirror as if they were key holes to a gate which gave on a palace. (42)

With this act of murder Rojack has set on for his existential journey which we follow in *An American Dream*. With this act Rojack has the potential to define

himself as an existential hero. The murder, thus, is not unnecessary accident of circumstance, but an act conditioned by the situation generated within him, the primary symptom of which is the confrontation of death upon his friend's balcony. Rojack stands alone on the balcony of his friend's apartment after a late party. Staring at the full moon he feels a powerful compulsion to suicide. He goes so far as to step over the balustrade, then, wavering, he clammers in fear back to safety, thus failing to obey his impulses to jump and commit suicide. This voluntary risk of moving toward destruction is repeated again and gain throughout the journey.

By murdering Deborah, Rojack takes his first step into what he sees as a new life, a rebirth and the act itself provides him the first glimpse of heavenly city. What is significant is that by murdering Deborah, Rojack has set himself outside of the structure by which the world is governed, and as an outsider, an outlaw, he is besieged by paranoid fears; He says, "your mind is not your own, your anxiety ceased to be neurotic. Your dread was real" (192). Thus, Rojack is bombarded by the intuition of dread. After this act by Stephen Richard Rojack, the remainder of the novel traces his journey through a hostile world to define himself as an existential hero. Difficult choices are made at every further steps. The way in which Rojack moves ahead is through a courage which is constantly tested, one which is nurtured by each successfully more difficult victory.

His early confrontations are faced with considerable weakness and fear, and reluctance. But toward the end, a growing sense of strength is presented. In these confrontations, Rojack is left unscathed and in his journey he appears as the only person not to be destroyed or defeated.

Leaving his wife's warm corpse, Rojack goes with his maid, Ruta to engage in sexual conflict. It represents a major turning point in his life, the first of many

decisions to be faced during the next twenty four hours. Before leaving Deborah's room, Rojack has come to no decision whether to confess or attempt to cover up his crime. A long prison sentence conducive to serious writing has momentarily appealed to him, and in fact he has come close to giving himself up. It is clear to him that if he is detected in any attempt to falsify the circumstances of death, he will be prosecuted. He thinks:

There was a decision to be made inside the room. I could pick up the phone and call the police. Or I could wait [. . .] yes, I could go to prison, spend ten or twenty years, and if I were good enough I could try to write that huge work which I had all but atrophied in my brain over the years of booze and Deborah's games. That was the honorable course and yet I felt no more than a wistful muted impulse to show such honor; no there was something other working at the base of my brain, a scheme, some desire - I was feeling good. As if my life had just begun. "Wait", said my head very directly to me. (42-43)

Thus, Rojack has alternatives to choose. Either accept the crime and go to prison or wait and see what happens. At this moment, he believes too much evil remains bestowed on him from Deborah, as a consequence of this act of murder:

"I was doomed if I thought to do my work in jail, for her curse would be upon me" (44). Then he goes to Ruta's room and engages in a sexual act with her and finds, "Everything which passed from her body to mine was now alive inside, as if a horde of tourists [. . .] were wondering through my body. I had one of those anxieties which make it an act of balance to breathe [. . .] there is the fear of fall" (44).

His decision to counterfeit suicide is made not when he picks up the phone, and reports a suicide but when he gives himself, through Ruta. After the police

suspicion, when his roots are cut from under him by both his employees, the external professions by which he is defined within society are removed, leaving him alienated. Arthur, the producer of his television show, and Dr. Frederick Tharchman, the head of his department at the university, both appear sympathetic over the loss of his wife and police inquiry, but both are firm in canceling his connections with their institutions. These correlations are important in establishing the hypocrisy which governs mass media and institutions of higher education alike, and the insecurity which governs men of authority.

After this, the course he takes is to face the immediate danger of death through external violence, and concurrently to make a journey establishing himself the only character in the novel reluctant to be destroyed or defeated. But what is significant here is that this choice, though it is the only one that can lead to survival and self definition, is voluntary, his own. At almost any point he can confess and have the pressure removed from him, be redefined and replaced in society's hierarchy, by going to prison. What he wants rather is to face and struggle against society and the people instead of following what is a regulatory or normative practice where a murderer goes to prison for the crime.

The charge of murder compels him into action turning his fear and fatigue into redemptive energy of desperation. With a courage that nourishes itself on the dread of death, he runs various courses of triumphs. At many times during his courses of action, he feels fear and fatigue which is evident while detectives Robert, O' Brien and Lezncki are interrogating him suspecting the murder of his wife:

I could feel my heart beating now like a canary held in my hand. It throbbed with a tender almost exhilarated fatigue; I could have been no more than a drum with a bird's heart trapped inside, and the

reverberations seemed to sound outside my body, as if everyone could hear me. (74)

Though he experiences fear, he is not ready to surrender to the police by admitting his crime. The thought of prison creates within him 'a faint nausea, kin to the depression with which one could wake up every morning for years, drifted through my lungs' 985). He finds the prison an 'iron cage' where the thought of unvarying repetition of the days gives the courage for him to fight against the detectives even by counterfeiting the arguments of suicide.

All of Rojack's major decisions are won through the refusal to yield: to temptation, to cowardice, to societal pressures. This definition of oneself through negatives has been an important aspect for development of the protagonist. Rojack's decision to defy Shago Martin, even when the later flourishes a knife, is central to the development of the protagonist's strength. It is evident that the conflict between Shago and Rojack is sexual in tone. The physical position from which Rojack beats Shago, and the words of abuse used are too suggestive of homosexual contact:

And with that he walked over to me, put his fingers on my chest, gave a disdainful push, "Up your ass [. . .] and turned around, leaving the scent of marijuana on my clothes. The pressure at back of my neck let go of itself and I was a brain full of blood, the light went red, it was red. I took him from behind, my arms around his waist, hefted him in the air, and slammed him to the floor so hard his legs went, and we ended with Shago in a sitting position, and me behind him on my knees, my arms choking the air from his chest as I lifted him up and smashed him down again. (181)

After this fight, Rojack has the choice of letting him go or letting him stand up and fight but he is afraid of Shago's abusive words because he finds the vitality reverberating from those words. So the further step is strengthened by refusal of Rojack to relinquish his aggressive position of control, from behind. The sexuality of the encounter becomes consciously apparent to Rojack immediately afterwards, and this frightens and enrages him still further:

I almost kicked in his head. Close at that. Instead I picked him up, opened the door, manhandled him to the hall. There he put up resistance, and when I got a whiff of his odor which had something of defeat in it and a smell of full nearness as if we had been in bed for an hour-well, it was too close: I threw him down the stairs. Some hard-lodged boulder of fear I had always felt with Negroes was in the bumping, elbow busting and crash of sound as he went barreling down, my terror going with him. (182)

Even the "Fear I had always felt with Negroes" has a sexual basis, if we apply with Mailer's thesis that the white American male is jealous and afraid of the supposedly superior capacity of the Negro male ("The White Negro", 332). And such a fear is concretely applicable to Rojack at this point.

The beating of Shago does not show Rojack in good light: his rage is prompted at least in part by fear, and his earlier ability to face Shago in fair challenge is shaken in the end. But more good than bad has come of it, because he has purged some of his own fears and hatred and he has gained some of what is good in Shago. When Rojack leaves the room, Rojack carries Shago's umbrella. It is significant that Cherry gives it to him because he has defeated Shago in the fight and also, sexually with Chhery and the phallic quality of the umbrella she takes from her old lover and

presents to the new is obvious. Her words, too, are significant: "Then saw me looking at Shago's umbrella, and handed it to me" . 'Now you got a stick', she said" (189).

And, "With his left hand he held a furled Umbrella, taut as a sword in its case, and he kept it at an angle to this body, which returned-since his body was tall and slim – some perfect recollection of a land of Harlem standing at his street corner" (173).

The sword simile is chosen with explicit meaning because the umbrella is used as such by Kelly when he thrusts at Rojack on the balcony, with intent to kill. Shago is, in fact, a power in his world, which he makes clear before the fight: "[. . .] Listen, you, he said to me, 'I should have brought my army down here. We could have put toothpicks under your nails. I in a *Prince* in my territory, *dig* ? But I came alone' (181). With such a power, Rojack fights courageously overcoming his hatred, fear and fatigue. And what is significant in this episode is the importance of the umbrella which becomes a means through which he is able to defeat the next force he has to fight with, Kelley.

Rojack carries with him certain qualities of courage, power and masculinity in the umbrella which is their tangible representation when he leaves Cherry's apartment for his meeting with Kelley. The handle feels "alive to my fingers" and, sensitive to his moods, "felt sullen to my palm" when he falters in his resolve (189-90). Now carrying the umbrella given by Cherry, Rojack sets his steps to fight with the most powerful force, Barney Oswald Kelley, father of Deborah.

Rojack brings with him, to Barney Kelley's suite, all the strength he has derived from Cherry (he has consciously committed through his love for cherry to the side of good) and Shago, and from his own courage in the face of the earlier confrontations. The meeting with Kelley is made more significant and menacing by the fact that the plot line pointedly omits any contact between him and Rojack during

the course of the novel's action. Even telephone arrangements for the appointment are carried out by Rojack's answering service, rather than personally.

The confrontation with Kelley in his Waldorf Towers Suite is the climactic one of the novel. At first, other people are present; Eddie Gannucci, Ruta, Daidre Deborah's young daughter, and a cousin of Deborah's mother named Bess. But soon the two antagonists are alone. Kelley reveals his own incestuous attachment to Deborah, along with a complex tangle of sexual, financial and mystical dealings. Ultimately, the perverse intimacy established by Kelley's tale breaks out into hatred:

Kelley was near to that violence Deborah used to give off, that hurricane rising from a swamp, that offer of carnage, of cannibals, the viscera came from him to me like suffocation. I was going to be dead in another minute; all Deborah's wrath passed now through him, he was agent to her fury and death set about me like a ringing of echoes in either, red light or green. I waited for Kelley to attack-he came that close I had only to close my eyes and he would go to the fire, pick up a poker – his stepped up violence filled the room. (237)

It is implicit that a similarity exists between two men who have intimately lived with the same women and that the recognition of one self in another can lead to hatred. Because both Rojack and Kelley have lived intimately with Deborah, Cherry and Ruta. Here, Rojack identifies Kelley with Deborah who can be violent as Deborah used to be. This struggle, Rojack finds very climactic and hard. Because of the power Kelley has, Rojack thinks that he is going to be defeated and death is approaching him. Rojack feels compelled to face death by a walk along the parapet with Kelley the sole witness – one which echoes Rojack's fantasy with suicide in the first chapter of the novel.

I had left my life behind me. Just as a man in dying might have a moment when he passes into the mantle of some great cloud, and helpless, and full of fear, knows nonetheless that he is in death already and so can wait for it, so my force ceased, and again I felt death come up like the shadow [. . .]. (239)

Because while saying why Rojack did not go to the funeral, Rojack accepts with Kelley that he committed the murder.

"Yes, I killed her", I said, "but I did not seduce her when she was fifteen, and never left her alone, and never ended the affair", and I leaned forward to attack him, as if finally he were mine and I was free of waste and guilt and gutting of the earth, and looking at him knew this was exactly what he had wanted me to discover [. . .]. After this revelation. (236)

Aware that Deborah's death was not suicide, Kelley attempts to push Rojack over the edge with Shago Martin's umbrella:

[. . .] and he lifted the tip of the umbrella to my ribs and a push to poke me off. But I turned as he pushed, and the tip was diverted, turned just enough to grip the umbrella as it went by, which brought me back. From going off, and I jumped down to the terrace even as he let go, and struck him across the face with the handle so hard he went down in a heap. I almost struck him again, I was in a rage I could not have stopped, and in relief, some relief, wrong or right, I did not know, I turned and hurled the umbrella over the parapet - Shago's umbrella was gone. (243)

Here, Rojack is again enraged, and justifiably so. Kelley has just attempted to push him over the parapet. This is more of an obvious death struggle and Kelley is, both in his own and Rojack's eyes, the carrier of Deborah's wrath. Despite this, Rojack suppresses his rage and after one blow and flings the necessary stick over the edge.

Thus, it is through the umbrella of Shago that Rojack is able to defeat this enemy. Through overcoming Shago, Rojack earned the strength to face Kelley inside the suite. He has earned by his final walk on the edge of death the right to overcome Kelley. This struggle with Kelley has become easier for Rojack because Rojack and Kelley himself entertain the idea that he is one of Satan's representatives. At one point Kelley says to Rojack:

"Well, for all we know, I'm a solicitor for the Devil.

"But you really think so."

"On occasion, I'm vain enough".

Rojack emerges from the violent scene on Kelley's balcony alive and purified, free to pursue his new life because he thinks "the first trip was done" by conquering Kelley (245). So, he now sets for the second trip because all the combats he had to fight to define himself as an existential hero either with Ruta or Shago or Kelley are now over. The vision of a future refreshed after all confrontation, awaits him:

In a few minutes I would be close to Cherry again, and tomorrow we would buy a car. We would travel for a long time [. . .] There might be a way. And felt the beginning of a heart of happiness being with Cherry – there was promise at the center of the thought [. . .]. The city was awake.

On the way to Kelley's by cab, Rojack had experienced another intuitive flash, dictating that he go to Harlem and risk violent death in order to purge his

treatment of Shago and to bless his love. Overcoming the urge by the realization that he may merely avoid his primary responsibility of meeting Kelley, Rojack proceeds to Woldrof, but he is disturbed by a feeling that somewhere in Harlem a man is being beaten to death in his stead. That man is Shago, killed for no apparent purpose with a length of lead pipe. And to complete the circle, Cherry is killed in revenge by a mistaken friend of Shago.

The confrontations with Romeo, Roberts and Tony are characterized by negatives: the refusal to back down and the rejection by Rojack of the inner corruption which he shares with these men. The relative purity of Rojack at this point enables him to take a major positive step, that of choosing to love Cherry. The encounter with Shago provides Rojack with new power. The ultimate test for which he has been prepared through his ordeal is the triumph over evil as represented by Kelley, and the consequent triumph. Thus, Rojack, by confronting different characters, at last gets triumph over everyone. Along his struggle in this hostile world he is besieged by paranoia, fear, dread, and uncertainty, but at last he is victorious in order to get his right position.

The men whom Rojack confronts and overcomes are tough, but their toughness is based on total commitment to a corrupt system. They know their places in this system, and cannot conceive of breaking out of it. In accepting corruption as a necessary condition of life, they support it and become corrupt themselves. Thus encompassing different areas of American society – the worlds of mass media, academics, politics, the stock exchange, organized crime, local law enforcement and the CIA. In every case, no matter how brief the treatment, but different characters like the detectives, Robert and Deborah Kelley are all corrupt and enmeshed in the corrupt system.

If we take the case of police investigation of his murder he is discharged with the case because Robert, the chief investigating officer says that there is pressure from above to release him and suspects Rojack of being a CIA agent. Earlier, when Deborah's body, landing on the Riverside Drive, precipitates a minor traffic accident, Eddie Gannucci, a mafia leader, is caught in one of the car involved. So, it becomes evident later that the release of Rojack is connected to the arrest of Gannucci because Robert says he does not have enough time to investigate Rojack because Glannuci who is the leader of the under world in caught..

The conversation with Dr. Frederick Tharchman, the head of his department at the university and Arthur, the producer of his television show, establishes with a few deft strokes the hypocrisy which governs mass media and the institution of higher education alike, and the insecurity which governs men of authority in them. Arthur is worried that newspapers want the statement about the show Rojack used to produce because he says, "I think too much in terms of social response status, public reaction" (132). The reason he gives is: "no audience is going to trust whose wife takes a leap" although he comments his program is great and successful (133). In his conversation with Dr. Tharchman, he notices that newspapers are behind him and asking for a statement from the university about Rojack. And Frederick's comment is apt here: "They (newspapers) are termites eating at the very substance of western civilization" (135). This shows the corruption in mass media but everyone is reluctant to go against it. Instead, they accept whatever the system permits and obliges. As a result, although he shows sympathy toward Rojack, he has to quit his job.

The corrupt American system becomes more evident when we examine the case of Deborah, Kelley, Ruta and others. Deborah, one of her friends reveals was a double agent. And Kelley had sent his own mistress Ruta as a servant of Deborah in

order to spy on the secret life of Deborah. It becomes more evident that Kelley was a leader of the mafia, so he had earned enough. He is rich because he is corrupt.

But Rojack, who has for most part of his life accepted the system and his place in it, has by his self-defining act of murder, set himself outside of it. Before murdering Deborah, he had the idea that, without the connection she had, which was mostly corrupt, the gateway to success would be obstructed and he would be alone. His intuitions tell him that the only course which will lead to survival is that of daring to challenge, rather than evading, the corrupt external forces which seek to destroy him. In doing so, he purges his own corruption and gains increasing personal strength. Thus, the creation of authentic existence lies in Rojack's attempt to refuse the structure of society and the normatives that govern it. He is able to define himself through freedom of choice where the creation of authentic self consists of Rojack's attempt to confront the standard of normatives and defy roles designed for him.

Thus, Mailer places Stephen Richard Rojack in intimate relationship with society. So, the individual and society are placed side by side where Rojack struggles to defy the modes of society. The society Mailer presents is unqualifiedly black, with most men corrupt, weak and evil, Rojack through great courage, anguish, fear and uncertainty is able to survive the American experience and remain an individual. The establishment is most clearly represented by the financial, governmental, and underworld power which are brought out in the person of Kelley. The climactic fight and victory over him shows the triumph of an individual and his lonely struggle.

Rojack, thus at the end, defines himself as an existential hero struggling with a hostile society. At the beginning, Rojack achieved military heroism, political success, a wealthy wife, social acceptance, academic recognition, one's own television show and numerous sexual partners. But at the same time he is a weak man, an admitted

failure on the verge of despair and suicide. His personal freedom and integrity is achieved in his lone strength to face the challenges of life in as corrupt, disorganized and meaningless society. The novel presents the commitment of the lone hero to face the challenges through his own choices overcoming fear, dread, fatigue and anguish and coming out victorious. At the end of the novel, Rojack is seen as planning his ways toward the simpler challenges of the jungle of Guatemala after being refreshed and triumphant in all of life's difficulties.

Chapter IV

Conclusion

Reading Mailer's *An American Dream* side by side with the standpoints of existentialism, this study reaches the conclusion that the novel presents the struggle of the protagonist, Stephen Richard Rojack to define himself through individual action and social engagement as an existential hero. The world he struggles with is a hostile and corrupt one. But the act of creating an authentic existence rests in his attempt to break away with it through great strength and courage overcoming fear, hatred, fatigue, and dread. The actions, by which he is able to define himself, include murder, escape, criminality and varieties of sexual experiences. These actions are necessary because they highlight the fact that the individual needs to struggle to create meaning in this hostile, unfriendly world.

In this hostile world, one possible way of authentic living is to move ahead through choice among many choices because there is no pre-established guideposts nor any providential purpose because 'God is dead'. Rojack is a lonely figure-alone, all alone, in the wide sea of life. Truly, he is a stranger, an outsider, an exile. He recognizes the shortcomings of the system by which people are governed and he himself was governed before the act of murder. But Rojack, through the act of murder, places himself outside of that system and starts his journey fighting against that corrupt system and leaping toward authentic existence because authentic existence necessitates going outside of the normatives.

An American Dream is a parable of modern man's existence and his struggle to create meaning. Its hero Rojack is faced with a world in which he can no longer rely on traditional 'props for his existence. Rojack, the existential hero, seems at the very beginning of the novel to have lost his self confidence and identity as a free,

autonomous individual because he is overpowered with the anxiety that his wife, Deborah is his center and she supplies him his existence. More, he is fearful that Deborah would deprive him of his identity.

Then Rojack explores the possibility of existence in the world devoid of meaning through his choices and consequently, through his individual actions which include murder, confronting the police, counterfeiting Suicide, and confrontations with Shago Martin and Kelley. Like Sisyphus, Rojack is a rebel in the alarmingly insecure and incoherent world. He exists therefore he rebels. Rebellion and struggle are the marks of his life, nothing beyond it. For Sartre as well as for Camus, existentialism leaves to man a possibility to choose which is very true to the life of Rojack who from the beginning faces alternatives for example, at the beginning either committing suicide or murder to come out of his existential insecurity. So Rojack's life is similar to Sartre's statement: "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself" (15).

Rojack, goes on exploring his possibilities. At heart, he has sometimes a realization of guilt in him, but outwardly he is not ready to surrender to the structure because it is full of corruption, perversion and false refinement. He has killed his wife Deborah because of his ontological insecurity, it continually leads him to more struggle and hardship, culminating at last in the confrontation with her father, Berney Oswald Kelley. He is on a quest to be, to exist in an authentic existence. He tries to create his true self by his own will and effort. Thus, we find Rojack trying to be authentic all the time acting on his own conscience instead of working as an object or an instrument, in the process overcoming his own fear, dread and the sense of uncertainty. At last, he is triumphant overcoming every confrontations no matter how tough his enemies are.

Thus, Norman Mailer's novel, *An American Dream* presents the protagonist face to face with the hostile world. The novel traces the protagonist's journey from ontological insecurity through overcoming fear, hatred, fatigue and dread to the simpler challenges of the jungle of Guatemala and Yucatan. Rojack, at last, defines himself as an existential hero because coming in terms with the existential situation, he is always triumphant.

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