GOLDING’S PINCHER MARTIN AND CAMUS’S THE STRANGER IN THE LIGHT OF EXISTENTIALIST PHILOSOPHY¹

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Abstract: This study aims to analyse two novels; William Golding’s Pincher Martin and Albert Camus’s The Stranger comparatively in relation to the major concerns of existentialism. These major concerns of existentialism are respectively as follows: the individual at the centre of the world, the revolt against death and ardent desire to live, abandonment of man to his fate, man’s alienation from society and nature as an outcast, suffering as a part of the world, freedom of choice and allusions to mythological characters. Thus, what is aimed to reach by this analysis particularly is to display the fact that although these two novels embody all major concerns of existentialism mentioned above, and the two authors deal with the existentialist idea in similar ways in most parts of the novel, they still have some notable differences in their approach to existentialism. And, this reflects the fact that the existentialist philosophy has been handled in two novels from rather different perspectives by two different authors, one English and the other French. These similarities and differences between the two novels, particularly between the characters of these two novels in relation to these main concerns of existentialism, will be explained and exemplified in detail in my study. As a result, it will be reached that despite the interaction between the two authors and thus their novels, Albert Camus and William Golding deal with the existentialist philosophy from very different perspectives.

Key Words: Existentialism, Revolt Against Death, Alienation, Abandonment Of Man To His Fate

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INTRODUCTION

In this study Golding’s Pincher Martin and Camus’s The Stranger have been analysed in terms of the major concerns of existentialist philosophy. These major concerns of existentialism are respectively as follows: the individual at the centre of the world, revolt against death and strong desire to live, abandonment of both characters into the world as poor creatures, their alienation from the society and nature as outcasts, suffering as a part of the world, their freedom to choose, and allusions to mythological characters. The similarities and differences between the two novels, particularly between the characters of these two novels in relation to these main concerns of existentialism, will be explained and exemplified in detail in this study. This study, which is a kind of “impact” research, will handle Camus’s The Stranger as the “affecting” work and Golding’s Pincher Martin as the “affected” work since the former work was written in 1942, and the latter in 1956.

1. INDIVIDUAL AS A CENTRE

The first existentialist concern is that the individual is at the centre of the world and everything other than him is “the other.” This is the situation for both novels in which all events are centered on Pincher Martin and Meyrsault. In other words, the two novels give the account of lives of the two individuals. In the novels, everything other than these two characters is “the other.” For the existentialists this “other” usually signifies social, moral and religious values which they regard as forms of hiding, and a kind of mask or a rock that the people or “they” try to cling to. In Pincher Martin for instance, the main character is called as “the centre” which indicates his significance in the novel. Realizing this, Pincher Martin attempts to use and devour “the others” in order to keep his egoist identity alive, to keep it going. To achieve this he has affairs with Sybil, Alfred’s girlfriend, and producer’s wife Helen, tries to seduce Mary and eventually he achieves to keep his identity alive by killing Nathaniel. Thus, in order to stay alive he consumes all the others around him.

Samuel Hynes points out to these people in Pincher’s past life and says: “(…) even the persons who people Pincher’s memories and visions are not really characters, because Pincher has regarded them not as separate human beings but as things to be devoured” (130). That means these people are only a means to preserve his life, they are not different from objects in Pincher’s life. The only value for him is this life in his hand, so he does everything to keep it going. Friedman supports this theme of “individual at the centre of everything” in existentialism by saying, “(…) he [Pincher Martin] had a freedom of choice which he used to centre the world on himself” (52). Thus, centering the world on himself, he wants to show his significance for this world as an individual, that he is more important than all the things around him which may be called “the other.”

As for Meursault, he is not as ambitious and cruel as Martin. Yet, there are some instances where this idea of individual versus “the other” is openly presented. This “the other” in The Stranger are the people who represent the institutions of law, religion and society. The most striking example is the instance that occurs between Meursault and the magistrate during one of the trials as the magistrate is questioning Meursault about the
murder. When the magistrate repeats the same question about the four shots following the first one, and brandishes a silver crucifix towards him, Meursault says:

I was about to tell him he was wrong to dwell on it, because it really didn’t matter. But he cut me off and urged me one last time, drawing himself up to his full height and asking me if I believed in God. I said no. (…) “Do you want my life to be meaningless?” he shouted. (…) I made it appear as if I agreed. To my surprise, he acted triumphant. “You do believe, don’t you, and you’re going to place your trust in Him, aren’t you?” [he asked]. Obviously, I again said no (68-70).

Here, what the magistrate clings to is the silver crucifix or the religion it represents, and without that religion he thinks his life will be meaningless. It is the only value that gives meaning to his life. However, that is a totally foreign idea to Meursault. Neither the crucifix nor religion means anything to him, which more intensely reveals the two opposing points, one Meursault representing the individual, and the other is the magistrate, his crucifix and religion symbolising “the other.” Therefore, Pincher Martin and Meursault emphasize the confrontation between the individual and “the other” each trying to preserve their own ideas and living against this “the other.” However, what is different in their attitude is that Meursault’s confrontation or struggle with “the other” is internal. He does not confront with the others externally, he does not do it by force, but only mentally struggles with “the other” by stubbornly refusing to accept what “the other” claims to be true. Whereas, Pincher Martin in his confrontation with “the others” exercises his force on the others, and consumes the others around him in order to preserve his identity and life. That is to say, both characters’ ways of expression of their feelings and thoughts are very different; one employing an internal or mental way, apparently a more passive one, and the other transforming his ideas and feelings into action that is forced upon “the others.”

2. REVOLT AGAINST DEATH AND DESIRE FOR LIFE

Struggle or revolt against death is an important element for the Existential philosophy. Since death is the only limit and seal to human life, it liberates man both from life and the absurd. This idea of revolt against death is presented in both novels. As for Pincher Martin his revolt against death has three levels; the physical or elemental level, the social level, and the spiritual level, which is the most significant of three. His physical struggle is obviously the one he carries on in the water in order to survive, and it actually ends in the third page, but the reader until the last lines of the novel thinks that it is still going on. The social level of his revolt has already been mentioned in the previous part. In this level of the revolt, he destroys everyone that opposes or resists against him in order to assure his place in the society as the only superior one. Finally, in the spiritual level he is in confrontation with the “black lighting” or God that is seen in the form of a sailor. This struggle is of utmost importance among the three. Because as Wilson states: “This revolt is a revolt against the limitations of the body. Man [always wants] to be greater, to live longer, to possess more imagination and wisdom” (18). This means that Pincher Martin does not want to accept the limitations of his body, in other words, he does not want to admit that he is mortal. Therefore, he tries to find some ways of escape from death.
Especially, Camus’s idea of three types of man is very significant here. Because, Pincher Martin carries the qualities of all these three types of man:

The seducer, the actor and the conqueror. He is a seducer, because he has affairs with many women and still wants more, and exploits them in order to preserve his life and identity. For instance, he has a relationship with Helen, the producer’s wife and goes to bed with Sybil, Alfred’s girlfriend. Since he is aware of the idea of death, he tries to live this life as fully as possible when he has the chance, which also helps him get away from the idea of death, at least momentarily. Being an actor, he is able to play many roles, and even the role of God trying to create his own world in order to indicate that he is immortal. As for the third type of man, Pincher Martin is like a conqueror in his social life, he is like the “conqueror of the maggot box.” He again destroys and devours all the people or symbolically the maggots to be the conqueror, and to be able to continue his life by feeding his unsatisfied, egoist identity. Since none of these ways prove to be successful, Pincher Martin desperately decides to try his last way of escape from death which is to “creep into the crevice of madness,” which is perhaps the most striking of all, because even he himself believes that he is going mad due to the situation he experiences. At first, he believes that he has to remain sane and his intelligence is an important element to help him in his struggle. But, when he realizes that he has no way out, he tries to find refuge in madness against the idea of death, and he decides to use madness as a weapon in his revolt against death. As Martin himself says: “There is always madness, a refuge like a crevice in the rock. A man who has no more defence can always creep into madness like one of those armoured things that scuttle among weed down where the mussels are” (186). After his decision, he immediately starts to pretend that he is going mad. In the end he totally accepts madness and when God wants Pincher Martin to consider, Pincher replies, ‘What’s the good? I’m mad.’ Then, God warns him, ‘Even that crevice will crumble.’” (195-196). That points out to the fact that there is no way to escape death since it is the only inevitable reality, only seal to all things and life. So it should be faced in the end, in one way or the other.

Likewise, Meursault is struggling against death. His struggle against death can be considered to have two levels; first one is the physical level and the second is the mental level. The physical level is mostly seen in the first part of the novel, especially in his struggles with the sun. The sun has a great impact on Meursault physically first during the funeral, then on the beach causing discomfort and alienation, and making him lose his conscious and forcing him to do something that changes his life. Therefore, he constantly tries to flee from the sun, and thus death in some way. For instance, he frequently sleeps while he is waiting for the funeral time. His habit of sleeping there with his mother in front of him shows that he uses sleep as a defense mechanism against death, in order to forget the idea of it. Afterwards, during the funeral he feels the excessive heat, and after some time he cannot bear the alienating and oppressive effect of the sun and cannot wait till the end of the funeral of his mother leaving there to catch the bus to the Algiers where he finds respite from the sun and feels at home. Thus, he tries to flee from the effects of the sun by sleeping and
getting away from the place, which reveals the physical level of his revolt against death.

The mental level of his revolt is displayed in the second part of the novel where Meursault is closed into the cell. After the verdict for his execution is given, he realizes that there is no chance of overturning it and begins to think of ways of escape from “the machine.” He spends his time trying to find one way, and then another. Upon being unsuccessful, he calculates the possibility of the failure of the blade, but sees that it is impossible. Being cut off from the world and realizing that there is no way to escape from death, he completely concentrates on himself; his past life, his family and Marie. Thus, his past life – especially memories about his mother– becomes another way to flee from death in the mental level of his revolt. He is also overcome by his physical needs and his desire for women, not only for Marie but any woman. Thus, in the mental level of his struggle against death he employs two ways of escape, past life and sensual life, which is revealed by his desire for women, and dreams about them.

To sum up, both Meursault’s and Martin’s revolt against death is almost the same. But there are only some differences in their ways of escape from it. For example both of them concentrate on women, but for Pincher Martin, women are sole objects to be used for satisfaction. So, he exploits them to satisfy his egoist identity. However, Meursault only has affair with Marie with her consent. He doesn’t force her for anything. But he only wants to have a good time with her by spending time with her, he wants to get away from the idea of death. There is also another point which differentiates their physical struggle: While Pincher Martin, tries to do everything to struggle with death physically, Meursault is deprived of his freedom in the second part of the book. Therefore, his struggle is reduced to a mental one in the end since he has no chance to do anything physical. Eventually he becomes absorbed in his past life to forget the idea of death, and gives up thinking of his revolt against it. Pincher Martin also uses madness as a refuge from death. Whereas Meursault only finds refuge in sleep, which means that Meursault’s revolt is not a very active one, he only wants to get away from the idea of death. Pincher Martin, on the other hand, seems to be a more tricky man and does everything to get rid of death, even tries to cheat God by saying that he is mad. Hence, Pincher Martin seems to be more stubborn and decisive than Meursault in his struggle against death. What is similar in both novels is both characters’s realization of death as the inescapable end. So, both of them have to face it desperately in the end.

3. ABANDONMENT OF MAN

Another significant existentialist component is the abandonment or the throwness of man. According to existentialism man is a poor creature thrown into the world. There is no external force or being to help him, so he is deserted to his own fate. The world is a place of exile for man. He is totally alone in this place governed by chance. So, man’s situation in the world is one of solitariness. He is completely abandoned by God and alone in the face of everything. Therefore, he himself is responsible for all his actions, not any other thing or person.
Both Pincher Martin and Meursault are in the same situation as described above. In Golding’s novel, Pincher Martin is thrown off from the ship into the sea, and for a long time he struggles to get out of the water, eventually finding himself on a small rock in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Being a part of the world, this rock can be interpreted as a place of exile for him. On this rock he is completely alone abandoned to his fate, and there is no external force to help him. Therefore, he has to find ways to continue his life on his own. The first thing he does is to find solutions for his physical needs like a place to sleep, sea animals to feed himself, a place to accumulate the rain water in order to drink later. In other words, he tries to satisfy his elemental needs and tries to make a home, a familiar place out of this sole rock. So, there is no one and nothing to help him even when he is very ill. But, actually this is a kind of punishment given to him as a result of his past deeds, so now he has to bear the consequences of all his acts on his own without any help from the outside.

As for Meursault, a similar scene is displayed in The Stranger when he is put into prison, and then taken into a cell. Likewise, he is stripped of his freedom. It is very clear from his words that in his cell he has got only the things to satisfy his basic human needs as Pincher Martin does. He says:

The day of my arrest I was first put in a room where there were already several other prisoners, most of them Arabs. (…). A few minutes later, it got dark. They showed me how to fix the mat I was supposed to sleep on. One end could be rolled up to make a pillow. All night I felt bugs crawling over my face. A few days later I was put in a cell by myself, where I slept on wooden boards suspended from the wall. I had a bucket for a toilet and a tin washbasin (72-73).

In this fragment it is obvious that Meursault’s situation is not very different from Martin’s. They both have merely the basic physical needs. Like Martin, Meursault is deserted to his own fate, too. Apparently, he has a lawyer and the priest thinks that he can help Meursault. However, as Pincher Martin relies on his education and intelligence to get away from that place, Meursault relies on himself, on his own mind to find a way of escape, eventually coming to the conclusion that there is actually no way out. As in the situation of Martin, this execution by the machine is the result of his killing the Arab. So, this is what he has to bear in the end as a result of his actions. However, unlike Martin’s aggressive and stubborn refusal of his punishment by self-deception, Meursault does not blame anyone for his crime. Meursault mostly accepts his crime and the punishment, and waits for his death in a passive way in his cell.

Therefore, these two characters’s situations are nearly the same except for a slight difference, in that, unlike Meursault who ends up in passive acceptance of his punishment, Pincher Martin refuses to accept the responsibility of his actions by blaming God for them. However, in the end both of them share the same destiny by being left alone in the face of everything, and they realize tragically that no one or nothing can save them from the inevitable end awaiting for them: one is already annihilated by the black lighting in the end, and the other is on the verge of being executed at any moment.

4. OUTSIDERS, REBELS ALIENATED FROM SOCIETY AND NATURE

The other existentialist quality is the alienation of man from nature and the society. These two
men are rebels or outsiders neither of whom lives by the rules and the norms of the society. So, they are alienated from the society and from the other people. Apart from their alienation from the society comes their alienation from the nature, which is particularly signified by the hostility of the sun towards two characters. Both men are conscious of their alienation and their being outsiders in the society.

For instance, in Golding’s novel *Pincher Martin*, the main character is alienated from the society, he is an outsider, because he does not care about the rules of the society, and does not show any respect to anyone and usurps them in order to satisfy his egoist identity. He is aware that he is an outsider. Towards the end of the novel, he says: “I’m so alone! Christ! I’m so alone! (…) Because of what I did I am an outsider and alone” (181). He knows that he becomes an outsider, a rebel because of his past deeds, which are against the rules of the society. Similar to Pincher Martin, Meursault also realizes that he is an outcast, an intruder in the society. This becomes evident especially during one of the trials while he is observing the behaviours of the people in the courtroom and describing the atmosphere there. He says:

I noticed then that everyone was waving and exchanging greetings and talking, as if they were in a club where people are glad to find themselves among others from the same world. That is how I explained to myself the strange impression I had of being odd man out, a kind of intruder (84).

The sight of people waving, greeting each other, and having conversation among themselves creates a feeling of being an outcast or an outsider among the others. He feels as if it were a club, and all the other people were the members of that same club except for him, which reveals the fact that he is alienated from the society.

These two characters are also alienated from the nature. In the fourth chapter of Golding’s novel, while Pincher Martin is struggling with the stones to build a dwarf, he begins to sweat. Then, after some time he realizes that he has been exposed to the sun for so long and suffers from sunburn. Therefore, the negative and disturbing effect of the sun is very evident in the novel. It is so hostile that it gives harm to Pincher Martin like an enemy and he is so alienated that he tries to make a home, a familiar place out of this sole rock since he needs to feel at home.

In the same way Meursault is also affected negatively by the sun, which is mostly evident during the funeral, and on the beach where he kills the Arab. In these instances Meursault strongly feels the alienating and disturbing effect of the sun which makes him feel uncomfortable. So, he constantly tries to escape from the sun. After the funeral, for example, he immediately leaves the home without waiting till the end and catches the first bus to Algiers, the only place where he feels at home. In the second event the sun causes him to lose his patience and conscious on the beach and kill the Arab. Therefore, the negative impact of the sun is so strong that it totally changes the flow of Meursault’s life. Thus, these examples that have been given so far reveal these two characters’ alienation from the society and the nature.

However, there is another level of their alienation, which is their alienation from themselves. This means that after some time, these two characters become strangers even to themselves, which is
reinforced by particularly two elements. These are the images of mirror and the speech. In addition, in Golding’s novel there is the image of the photograph. As for Golding’s novel, these three elements are used as the symbols of the identity of the main character, Pincher Martin. Since he is completely alone on this rock, he is in danger of losing his identity. So, he uses these three elements to assure and preserve his identity and his existence. However, it turns out to be the opposite. Whenever he uses one of them to assure his existence, he realizes that the man in the photograph or in the mirror is not himself, and the voice does not belong to him, but it sounds completely different. He cannot recognise this “the other man,” which means that he becomes a stranger to himself. For instance in chapter nine he talks about the photographs and the mirrors:

How can I have a complete identity without a mirror? That is what has changed me. Once I was a man with twenty photographs of myself—myself as this and that with the signature scrawled across the bottom right-hand corner as a stamp and seal. Even when I was in the Navy there was that photograph in my identity card so that every now and then I could look and see who I was. (…) I was content to wear the card next to my heart, secure in the knowledge that it was there, proof of me in the round. There were mirrors too, triple mirrors, (…) I could spy myself and assess the impact of Christopher Hadley Martin on the world (132).

Here, what he says is that he can be sure about his existence only by the help of mirrors or photographs, and without them his identity lacks something, it is not complete. Now, what he knows of his face is only “the scratch of bristles, an itch, and a sense of tingling warmth,” and getting angry he cries out that it is “no face for a man.” Afterwards, not having a mirror on this sole rock, and being in danger of losing his existence, he goes to the water-hole and peers into the pool to see his own reflection. “But his reflection was inscrutable” (133). So, however hard he tries what he can see in the end is not the man he was once, but completely a stranger. In another example he tries to recognize his face in one of his photos which he finds on the rock, but he cannot achieve it since the photo is blurred. This part is related as in the following:

He peered through the cover and made out a fogged portrait. He could see a carefully arranged head of hair, a strong and smiling face, the white silk scarf round the neck. But detail had gone for ever. The young man who smiled dimly at him through fog and brown stains was distant as the posed portraits of great-grandparents in a faint, brown world (75). Especially the phrases “arranged head of hair,” “a strong and smiling face,” “the young man who smiled dimly at him” give the description of a totally different man and creates the impression that the man in the photograph is totally foreign to Pincher Martin. with this image of blurred photograph Pincher Martin’s alienation from himself is assured again. For Pincher Martin another proof of his identity is his voice or speech, but even this attribute of him sounds strange to him. In the sixth chapter he says: “If it [the rock] tries to annihilate me with blotting-paper, then I will speak in here where my words resound and significant sounds assure me of my own identity” (87). So, this resounding of his voice again creates a similar feeling as though another man were talking instead of Pincher Martin, and again shows alienation of him, his being a stranger to himself.

These two images, mirror and speech, are used in the same way in Camus’s The Stranger. Likewise, Meursault cannot find a mirror in his cell,
either. Therefore, he takes a tin plate to use it as a mirror to look at himself. He says: “That day, after the guard had left, I looked at myself in my tin plate. My reflection seemed to remain serious even though I was trying to smile at it. I moved the plate around in front of me. I smiled and it still had the same sad, stern expression” (81). Similar to Pincher Martin, Meursault tries hard to see his own reflection smiling in the mirror, but it is as if he looked at a different man and saw a sad face instead of his smiling face. Then, he does not want to believe it, so goes to the window this time trying to find his smiling reflection there. He says: “I moved closer to the window, and in the last light of day I gazed at my reflection one more time. I was still serious— (…)” (81). Though he tries once more to see his smiling reflection, what he only finds is that serious face again. Thus, his alienation from himself is very evident in this example.

Following this instance of alienation comes another realization of Meursault about his own voice and his monologue to himself. He relates that: “But at the same time, and for the first time in months, I distinctly heard the sound of my own voice. I recognized it as the same one that had been ringing in my ears for many long days, and I realized that all that time I had been talking to myself” (81). In his cell, Meursault is alienated from everything and everyone so much so that he cannot recognize his own voice when he first hears it after a long time. Like Pincher Martin, Meursault becomes so alien to himself. It sounds as if somebody, another man were talking, but not Meursault himself. He spends there so long a time that not only is he alienated from the other people but also from himself. Consequently, both Meursault and Pincher Martin are left alone for a very long time being separated from the society that they eventually turn out to be strangers to themselves.

5. FREEDOM OF CHOICE

For Existentialists, man is condemned to be free, and so he has freedom of choice. He can choose how to act and how to lead his life. Since he is condemned to be free, he has no guides to help him, he is on his own. Therefore, he is the only person responsible for his actions and must bear the consequences of them without trying to find excuses for them. In Golding’s Pincher Martin and Camus’s The Stranger, it is very evident that both main characters have freedom of choice.

Golding’s main character Pincher Martin has, as Golding himself states, a total freedom to choose. He says: “Christopher Hadley Martin had no belief in anything but the importance of his own life; no love, no God. (…), he had a freedom of choice which he used to centre the world on himself” (Friedman, 52). Thus, whatever he does and says, he decides it by his free will without being influenced by any external power. In his confrontation with God disguised as a sailor, Pincher Martin admits that he is aware of the fact that he is free to choose. Through the end of their conversation, indicating Pincher’s imaginary world God says:

‘You have created it.’ He glanced sideways along the twitching water, down at his skeleton legs and knees, felt the rain and spray and the savage cold on his flesh. He began to mutter. ‘I prefer it. You gave me the power to choose and all my life you led me carefully to this suffering because my choice was my own. Oh yes! I understand the pattern. All my life, whatever I had done I should have found myself in the end on that same bridge, at that same time, giving that same order—the right order, the
wrong order. Yet, suppose I climbed away from the cellar over the bodies of used and defeated people, broke them to make steps on the road away from you, why should you torture me? (197).

He knows that all of what he has experienced so far were his choices and the results of them, because he was given freedom of choice which he used to usurp people and to create his own world centering it on himself. So, what he normally must do is to accept the responsibility of his actions whether they are right or not, and to endure the consequences of them. But, the is that Pincher Martin does not want to accept the consequences of his actions by trying to find excuses for them, which is called self-deception or bad faith by the existentialists. Moreover, he surprisingly blames God for his own wrongdoings or past deeds. He says God Himself gave him the power to choose, so why he is the one to be blamed for using it now. But, however hard he tries to find excuses for his actions, it does not work, and he is annihilated by the black lighting, symbolically death, and reduced to a pair of lobster claws in the end, as a kind of punishment for his past deeds.

Similarly, Meursault has the freedom to choose, and he is conscious of this freedom like Pincher Martin. However, what matters is that although Meursault has both physical freedom and freedom of choice in the first part of the novel, he is shut up into a cell thus being deprived of his physical freedom in the second part of the novel. In the first part, it is implied that except for the working hours he is a very free man: he goes to have a swim whenever he wants, he spends time with Marie, he goes to the cinema with her, shortly he does whatever he likes and whenever he likes, which actually points out to Meursault’s physical freedom. As for his freedom of choice, when his boss asks him if he wants to work in Paris, he uses his freedom to refuse his offer and to stay in Algiers. Whereas, in the second part, when he is arrested for killing the Arab and put into the prison, he is stripped of his physical freedom trying to get used to this situation and expresses the difficulty of being shut up into a cell by the following sentences:

When I was first imprisoned, the hardest thing was that my thoughts were still those of a free man. For example, I would suddenly have the urge to be on a beach and to walk down to the water. As I imagined the sound of the first waves under my feet, my body entering the water and the sense of relief it would give me, all of a sudden I would feel just how closed in I was by the walls of my cell (76).

However, this of course does not mean that he has lost his freedom of choice along with his physical freedom. He still makes his own choices and has his own preferences even though he is in prison. For example, his confrontation with the magistrate about their belief in God is displayed in one part of the novel. In this scene the magistrate forces Meursault to admit that he has belief in God. But, Meursault persistently refuses to do so, and repeats that he does not believe in God. He says:

I was about to tell him he was wrong to dwell on it, (…). But he cut me off and [asked] me if I believed in God. I said no. (…). He said it was impossible; all men believed in God, even those who turn their backs on him. That was his belief, (…). “Do you want my life to be meaningless?” he shouted. As far as I could see, it didn’t have anything to do with me, and I told him so. (…). I made it appear as if I agreed. To my surprise, he acted triumphant. “You do believe, don’t you, and you’re going to place your trust in Him, aren’t you?” [he asked]. Obviously, I again said no (69).
However hard the magistrate tries, he cannot make Meursault admit that all men have belief in God. When the magistrate says “all men believe in God,” Meursault thinks that “that was his belief.” Therefore, for Meursault everyone has his own right, his freedom to choose, and the magistrate chooses his own truth. Likewise, Meursault himself has the freedom to make his own preference, to believe in his own truth and to express it freely. That’s why he constantly refuses the magistrate’s endeavours to make him accept another belief. Meursault respects his ideas and belief and so expects the magistrate to act in the same way.

Consequently, what these two characters share in common is that they are both deprived of their physical freedom. What distinguishes the idea of freedom of choice presented in both novels is that while Pincher Martin tries to find excuses for his past deeds, and even blames God for his wrongdoings, Meursault remains rather silent and accepts what comes as a punishment in the end. Thus, compared with Pincher Martin, Meursault may be considered more like an existential man since he accepts the consequences of his actions, unlike Pincher Martin’s strong resistance against such an acceptance.

6. SUFFERING AS A PART OF THE WORLD

Existentialists claim that suffering or pain is a natural part of the world, so man must suffer without any complaint. Like death, suffering is inflicted on man by nature, and likewise it is another inevitable part of the world that man is condemned to and must bear. As for Golding’s novel, throughout the novel Pincher’s suffering is exhibited in almost every part of it: in the opening scene, his suffering in the water (p.1-2), afterwards, his suffering on his self-created island while he is trying to build a dwarf and struggling with stones (p. 61-65). Later, some other pains (p. 122,140-143). However, the greatest of his pains are related to his past, which haunts him in various parts of the novel. But, as all existentialists do, Pincher Martin admits that he has to suffer since it is a part of this world.

In chapter eleven of the novel, when Martin feels that he was poisoned, he says: “Stings. Poison. Anemones poisoned me. Perhaps mussels are all right after all. (…) Everything is predictable. I knew I should suffer and I have.”(166). He is very conscious of the fact that his suffering is the result of his past life, it is a part of this life actually, and so it must be accepted. Hence, though at times he thinks it to be unfair and accuses God for his past deeds, he still accepts the fact that he has to suffer and he does so, as he relates in the fragment above.

Although Meursault’s reaction, in the face of the idea of suffering as a part of the world, is almost the same with Pincher Martin’s, his ideas are not given directly, but are conveyed to the reader through Meursault’s attitudes. In other words, rather than direct words like Pincher Martin’s, only some implications can be found in relation to Meursault’s ideas. The first instance which reveals that suffering is a natural part of the world for him is displayed during his mother’s death. It is even seen much earlier, when he gets the news of his mother’s death from the home. Upon hearing the news, he shows no sign of sadness and does not shed a tear which may support the idea that this event, though a cause of suffering
normally, is a natural part of the world with all its pain and suffering. Therefore, he reacts to it as he does to a normal event. During the funeral he again remains indifferent to the event. In addition, there are several other examples of his similar reaction after the funeral. For instance, just the day after the funeral Meursault says: “It occurred to me that anyway one more Sunday was over, that Maman was buried now, that I was going back to work, and that, really, nothing had changed” (24). These words of him signify that his mother’s death has actually made no difference in his life. This is not because he is indifferent to her death, but because he knows that death and suffering are natural parts of the world, which everyone will experience one day. Therefore, it is meaningless to fuss about it or to exaggerate it. So, he silently accepts it without making any complaints.

What bears similarity between the two novels is that the main characters of both novels are aware of the fact that suffering is a natural and inevitable part of the world like death, and so must be faced. Although both of them suffer because of what they did, Pincher Martin because of his past deeds and Meursault because of killing the Arab, their reaction to their suffering is different. Meursault, after trying to find a way to escape, becomes totally aware of the fact that this is the punishment that he has to face and accept as a result of his action. Therefore, he endures it silently and waits for his coming death sentence. Contrary to this, Pincher Martin does not remain silent before his death. In spite of the fact that he admits that he deserves suffering, he resists till the end claiming that God gave him the right to choose and thus accusing God of his own past deeds and wrongdoings. So, at the end of the two novels these two men’s attitude towards the idea of suffering bears difference: one accepting silently, the other resisting stubbornly.

7. ALLUSIONS TO MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS

As is known Existentialist writers make use of myths and mythological characters frequently. Particularly these two writers, Golding and Camus in their works have employed this as a narrative technique: they have taken well-known mythological characters or stories and have used them as bases for their own works or stories. Therefore, in both of the novels there are similarities between the main characters and some mythological figures. While in The Stranger there is one basic allusion to the mythological figure, Sisyphus, Golding’s Pincher Martin makes several allusions to mythological characters such as Prometheus, Atlas, Ajax and Sisyphus, and also some allusions to mythological stories like the confrontation between Zeus and Prometheus, and the story of Sisyphus’s eternal punishment.

Albert Camus wrote The Stranger and The Myth of Sisyphus as companion pieces. As Camus himself says The Stranger does not explain anything, in other words, it is not an explanatory novel, but only describes. So, Camus writes The Myth of Sisyphus as an explanatory companion piece for the novel. Hence, such an influence of this mythological figure on the main character of the novel is inevitable. This influence is not seen very clearly or directly in the novel, but there are many implications of it the most significant of which is the mechanical living or routine life of Meursault, which is mostly seen in the first
part of the novel. As Meursault is an office clerk living in a succession of presents, a habitual or monotonous life is inescapable for him. To illustrate, he usually eats his meals at Céleste’s restaurant, and takes the streetcar to work. This deadening repetition in his life is very similar to the one in the following example from *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

Rising, streetcar, four hours in the office or the factory, meal, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm (…). But one day the “why” arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. (…) Weariness comes at the end of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 1972: 12-13 qtd. in Baker).

Therefore, this fragment from *The Myth of Sisyphus* represents the idea of mechanical living and the life described in this fragment bears a great similarity to Meursault’s monotonous life. In addition, if Sisyphus is taken as a mythological character and if his punishment is considered, the notion of a relationship between the two can be strengthened. Because, both men’s lives seem aimless: Meursault living in a vicious circle without any goals or projects for the future, and Sisyphus rolling up the stone to the top of the mountain only to see it roll down again. Another resemblance between the two characters, Meursault and Sisyphus is that they both accept this situation without any complaint or questioning. For instance, when Meursault’s boss asks him if he wants to work in Paris, he simply says “No.” Then, the boss asks the reason of his refusal, and Meursault says he is happy with his life in Algiers, which means that he has no complaint about his present life. As for Sisyphus, he endures a similar situation, which is perhaps harder than Meursault’s: rolling up the rock to the top of the mountain eternally, but, he never complains or questions it. So, their silent acceptance of their situation is the second point which bears a resemblance between the two.

Similarly, Golding in his *Pincher Martin*, uses several mythological figures – such as Prometheus, Atlas, Ajax and Sisyphus – in order to reflect the situation of contemporary man. The first two of these characters are directly mentioned in the novel, however, the other two are only conveyed through some implications. Implying the punishment given to him he declares that he is a hero like Prometheus and Atlas (164). It is known that Atlas’s punishment is to carry the heavens on his shoulders without being allowed to put it down. When it comes to Prometheus, he steals the fire in order to use it for the benefit of man. As a result he is punished by Zeus by being chained on a rock where a vulture tears a piece from his liver everyday. Pincher’s situation is almost the same being imprisoned on that rock without food and water (188). Also, the confrontation between Pincher Martin and God through the end of the novel is the reminiscent of the confrontation between Prometheus and Zeus. Here, Pincher Martin wants to emphasize that though he is punished, he is still an eternal hero like Prometheus and Atlas, thus will survive till the end.

One of the implied mythological characters is Ajax, who rapes the virgin princess Cassandra, becomes shipwrecked on his journey from Troy, boasts that he has saved himself without help from gods, and then is killed by infuriated
Poseidon. If Martin’s seduction of many women and his attempt to rape Mary are considered, his similarity to Ajax is reinforced. In addition, he is shipwrecked like Ajax when his ship is torpedoed in the middle of the ocean. Almost towards the end of the novel Pincher Martin himself declares that he is Ajax by desperately crying out: ‘Ajax! Prometheus!’ ” (192), and thus trying to find refuge in another mythological figure. The last mythological character, who is implied in the novel, is Sisyphus. After being imprisoned on that rock, Pincher Martin decides to build up a man with stones to use as a signal to be rescued. During his construction of the dwarf his struggle with the stones reminds the reader of Sisyphus’s struggle to roll the stone up to the top of the mountain as an eternal punishment. This struggle of Pincher Martin is presented in the following fragment:

There was a broken rock below his hands, (…). He climbed down and wrestled with a great weight. He made the stone rise on an eagle; he quivered and the stone fell over. He collapsed and lay for a while. He left the stone (…). He found an encrusted boulder lying in a rock pool and pulled it up. He got the stone against his stomach, staggered for a few steps, dropped the stone, lifted and carried again. He dumped the stone on the high point above the funnel and came back. There was a stone like a suitcase (…). He put his back against the suitcase and his feet against the other side of the trench. The suitcase grated, moved. He got a shoulder under one end and heaved. The suitcase tumbled in the next trench and broke. [He] pulled and hauled. Then there were two rocks on the high part, one with a trace of blood. (…) He found a third stone but could not get it up the wall of the trench. By the time he had dragged it to the others his hands were broken. (…) He lay down across the three stones and let them hurt him. (…) He got up, put the second stone laboriously on the third and the first on the second. The three stones measured nearly two feet from top to bottom. (…) Immediately he began to crawl away down the hill. The crawl became a scramble. (…). He put one last stone on the others, one big as his head (61-65).

As is seen above, Pincher Martin’s struggle with the stones is very similar to Sisyphus’s punishment. What is also common for both struggles is that they are futile. Because, Sisyphus will go on rolling up the rock eternally without an aim, likewise Picher Martin’s all efforts to make a dwarf in order to be saved will prove to be meaningless since he will in one way or another die by being annihilated by the black lighting. Sisyphus already knows his situation, and accepts it by trying to find happiness in his situation. However, Pincher Martin is not satisfied with his situation and tries everything to get out of it only to see that it is in vain. Nevertheless, he remains as a rebel almost till the end of the novel where he is annihilated and reduced to a pair of lobster claws.

Therefore, the use of mythological characters, especially the use of Sisyphus at the basis of the two novels is another significant existentialist concern that bears similarity between the two novels. Along with the similarity comes a slight difference in relation to the use of mythological figure, Sisyphus: while Camus’s Sisyphus (Meursault) continues his struggle in his mind, and eventually accepts the situation he is in by trying to be happy with it towards the end of the novel; Golding’s Sisyphus (Pincher Martin) refuses to endure such a situation, and so resists till the moment he dies.

**CONCLUSION**

Although Existentialism as a term is very difficult to define due to its unsettled principles, in different periods, in one way or another, it has
been employed by various authors from world literature, including Friedrich Nietzsche, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Franz Kafka, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Among these authors, dealing with Existentialism, particularly two from the twentieth century are the main concern of this study, each with a novel representing the main concerns of existentialist philosophy: William Golding’s *Pincher Martin* and Albert Camus’s *The Stranger*; both of which have been analysed comparatively in order to exemplify the major concerns of existentialism from two different literary perspectives, one by an English and the other by a French author.

To sum up, when analysed comparatively it is seen that both William Golding’s *Pincher Martin* and Albert Camus’s *The Stranger* embody all these major concerns of existentialist philosophy, sometimes with slight differences and in most parts reflecting many affinities. Also it is evident that William Golding was affected by Albert Camus’s *The Stranger* in terms of the existentialist philosophy it handled while he was creating his own novel called *Pincher Martin*. Despite the interaction between the two authors and their novels, the authors of the two novels present the same subject from two different literary perspectives.

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VAROLOŞÇU FELSEFE İŞIĞINDA GOLDING’İN PINCHER MARTIN’İ VE CAMUS’NUN THE STRANGER’I


Anahtar Kelimeler: Varoluşculuk, Ölüme Karşı Direnme, Yabanclaşma, İnsanın Kaderine Terkedilişi