

**EXISTENCE THROUGH MOVIES OR FEAR OF DEATH: *THE MOVIEGOER* AND *WHITE NOISE***

FİMLER VEYA ÖLÜM KORKUSU ARACILIĞIYLA VAROLUŞ: *SİNEMA MÜDAVİMİ* VE *BEYAZ GÜRÜLTÜ*

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**Abstract**

Don DeLillo is one of the prolific writers of the postmodernist era in literature. He established his place in the literature with his award-winning book *White Noise*. The book describes the protagonist Jack Gladney's questioning of his own place in life through his identity. He evaluates the incidents around him constantly through the scope of skepticism. When it comes to Walker Percy, His first novel *The Moviegoer* was accepted as one of the most substantial works and awarded. This enabled Percy to be one of the echoed voices in Southern literature. Thus, he is considered a member of the New South movement which promotes the modernization of society and its attitudes within an industrial society. *The Moviegoer* describes a stockbroker, John "Jack" Binx Bolling's life, and his efforts to find a meaning or purpose in life. Binx is a protagonist that is fed up with mundane everyday life. He chooses to go to the movies to find out the meaning of life and to contribute a new perspective to the way he thinks about real life, reality, or existence. Considering the protagonists of *White Noise* and *The Moviegoer* and their situations in which they struggle to get meaning from life and certify their existence as free individuals, these two notable works have been analyzed through the existentialist philosophy, especially in the frame of the views put forward by Kierkegaard, Camus, and Sartre.

**Keywords:** Existentialism, Identity, Individual, Freedom, Free will.

**Öz**

Don DeLillo, edebiyatta postmodernist dönemin üretken yazarlarından biridir. Ödüllü kitabı *White Noise* ile edebiyattaki yerini sağlamlaştırmıştır. Kitap, başkahraman Jack Gladney'nin kimliği aracılığıyla hayattaki kendi yerini sorgulamasını anlatmaktadır. Çevresindeki olayları sürekli şüpheli bir şekilde değerlendirmektedir. Walker Percy söz konusu olduğunda, ilk romanı *The Moviegoer* en önemli eserlerinden biri olarak kabul edilmiş ve ödüllendirilmiştir. Bu da Percy'nin Güney edebiyatında yankı uyandıran seslerden biri olmasını sağlamıştır. Böylece, Percy, toplumun modernleşmesini ve sanayi toplumundaki tutumları destekleyen Yeni Güney hareketinin bir üyesi olarak kabul edilmiştir. *The Moviegoer* bir borsacı olan John "Jack" Binx Bolling'in hayatını ve hayatta bir anlam veya amaç bulma çabalarını anlatmaktadır. Binx, sıradan günlük yaşamdan bıkmış bir kahramandır. Hayatın anlamını öğrenmek ve gerçek hayat, gerçeklik ya da varoluş hakkında düşündüğü şekilde yeni bir bakış açısına katkıda bulunmak için sinemaya gitmeyi seçmektedir. *White Noise* ve *The Moviegoer*'in başkahramanlarının hayattan anlam çıkarmak ve özgür bireyler olarak varlıklarını belgelemek için mücadele ettikleri durumları göz önünde bulundurularak bu iki önemli eser, varoluşçu felsefe çerçevesinde, özellikle Kierkegaard, Camus ve Sartre gibi isimlerin ileri sürdükleri görüşler çerçevesinde incelenmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Varoluşçuluk, Kimlik, Birey, Özgürlük, Özgür İrade.

## Introduction

Existence and individual freedom have long been considered significant matters by existentialist philosophers whose different views aimed to present what it is to be a human being. Existentialism emphasizes the existence of free individual who is thought to be a free agent that can direct his life in pursuing his own will. Universal guidelines to determine the truth are seen to be absent as there only occur individual truths. That's why individual freedom calls for individual responsibility. Man must take responsibility for his decisions regarding any potential outcome whether satisfying or not since it is the only way to reach absolute unconstrained freedom. Individuals are supposed to make choices based on their opinions, experiences, attitudes, and morals. Those choices, in return, determine their personalities, quintessentially, their identities. The search for self and meaning through will, choice, and responsibility enables them to be independent beings who can curb ethical, moral, and societal impositions of their very society. In other words, they are so unrestrained that they themselves construct their own identities regardless of the standards imposed by society. Upon these crucial points, existentialist philosophy has been the subject of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Much as its roots date back to the Socratic dictum 'know thyself', modern-day understanding of existentialism is mainly framed around Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus. Apart from these philosophers and writers, there are many more to consider. Some of those philosophers identify existence with religion, more precisely God, some prioritize the individual himself and for some existence is related to something supreme but not God. Nevertheless, within the framework of this study, the philosophical views of Søren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus will be pivotal for their remarks will be drawn on the purpose of the novel's main characters' existential analysis. Their concepts of existence or being will be associated with the existential questioning the protagonists encounter with in the novels. At this point, it will be worthwhile to provide background information about these philosophers and their understanding of existence.

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Acknowledged as the father of existentialism, Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was a Danish philosopher and a theologian. He drew up themes of self-expression, free will, death, subjectivity, and religion. He mainly concerned with how one's existence is linked with society and its practices. For that reason, he believed that for an individual to lead a meaningful life one must be free. The rules of society mustn't bound him. By undertaking the responsibility, he must constantly act upon his free will, otherwise, he will not be able to apprehend his own convictions. If one does not express his ideals in action, he cannot retain the power of his thoughts. Despair is a notion that represents the balance of spirit or a lack of consciousness of being self. For Kierkegaard, despair also signifies a sin which reflects the Socratic notion of ignorance. Paul W. Kurtz points out the importance of despair in one's life:

Man is the only being who is aware that he is going to die and who can comprehend his historicity and finitude. Man stares into the abyss of nothingness: *le néant*. And in this light his loneliness takes on full meaning. His feelings of dread and anxiety express a generalized fear, not toward this, that, or any other object, but about the human condition itself (Kurtz, 1961-1962, 481).

Kurtz's statements also indicate Kierkegaard's thoughts on death and time. He believed that the ultimate aim in life should be 'earnestness' because by being earnest individuals may think of death, which entails them realizing the value of their presence by pursuing their search in them. Kierkegaard argued that thinking of death as an end of everything or an equalizer is not suitable as when one can grasp the finality of his time, he will try to hold on to life more and to exist as a free individual. For Kierkegaard, despair also means ignoring one's relation with God. Losing faith in one's agency or existence in this life may cause one to divert from

moral values. This kind of human state reflects the very disjuncture between independence and identity. Therefore, he put focus on the importance of a leap of faith. He argued that one could only be religious on the condition that they are willing to do it. In his philosophy religion plays an essential role in ethics and morality. These statements by Ihde briefly reflect his ideas:

It was in the center of man's freedom that he could find his style of life; whether that of the stage of aesthetic existence or the life of a playboy and seducer; whether in the life of the ethical hero who makes his decisions seriously in relation to the absolute either/or of good and evil according to a universal moral law; or whether one decides upon the religious stage of life which transcends both pleasure seeking and boundness to the law (Don Ihde, 1967, 21).

Another significant matter in Kierkegaard's philosophy is that subjectivity is truth. Kurtz clarifies this verdict saying one can only edify through his inner, private, and subjective knowledge (Kurtz, 1961-1962, 476). In the end, it is the individual who creates his life, and his personality by acting through his independence and responsibility.

When it comes to Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), he was a French novelist, playwright, and philosopher who is notable for his well-known statement "Existence precedes essence." in *Existentialism is a Humanism*. This statement implies his philosophy by pointing out individuals are free and make their own choices to create the meaning of their lives. They make themselves exist. He was an atheist, so he put forward the idea along with Nietzsche that God is dead. This kind of loss sense leads to the realization of man's abandonment. As there is no divine, universal guideline, man has to make his own moral choices and act upon them to achieve salvation. However, this gives rise to anguish. As he said man is "condemned to be free", Sartre intends to say that the very contradictory nature of man forces him to be free and undertake the responsibility for his own actions on no account of the result. Consequently, this creates the recognition of the choices people have and even they are responsible for how they feel since to Sartre, "We are left alone without excuse." However, this paradoxical nature of freedom and responsibility culminates in anguish, and ultimately causes one's despair. In Sartre's philosophy, despair means being obstinate against the offerings of the world beyond our control, which points out that against all our efforts, other people or external events may ruin it. To sum up, it can be inferred individuals cannot rely on anything beyond their control but their own actions since there is no reality except for action.

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Albert Camus (1913-1960) was a French writer, dramatist, and philosopher even though he did not consider himself an existentialist. He is associated with absurdism defined in different terms by different philosophers. As for Camus, absurdity reflects the conflict between the expectation of a desired universe and the actual universe which appears differently. This composes conflict in individuals' life as one's desired rationality does not dovetail with the experience of irrationality in real life. This kind of conflict is overcome through a leap of faith for Kierkegaard by accepting the irrationality in the frame of our own choices. However, for Camus, this crisis can be coped with the acceptance of absurdity in case of any meaningless and desperate situation. One must be open to any kind of nonsensical, irrational event in life, yet not give in or succumb to it. So, by not submitting the absurdity one creates the value out of their rebellion due to the commitment to personal and social values, which quintessentially reifies one's existence. For Camus, religion does not provide values for individuals and societies, on the contrary, it presents pseudo-solutions against the absurd reality of life. He thinks relying on religion is an act of cowardice in contrast to the act of rebellion that strengthens one's existence; therefore, he pleads that one should stick to life rather than death by recognizing that life's meaninglessness can only be coped with making life worth living.

Modern existential philosophy discloses after some critical events like war, industrialization, and social change in society. Such paradigm shifts lead society to divert from

their customary traditions in terms of the way they think and live their own lives. As a result, social values begin to change entailing to diversify individual attitudes towards life and their manners in society. In other words, with every change or development, man finds himself living in an unstable society that also bristles with varied ideas and living styles. This kind of paramount change in society eventually has an impact on individuals' own lives. When individuals cannot keep up with those changes, they find themselves at unease. Should we put it differently, they start to be surrounded by a feeling called 'alienation' and strive for identity construction in the direction of their own lives. In this context, Don DeLillo's *White Noise* and Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer* stand as prolific examples.

Don DeLillo was born in 1936 in the USA. He graduated from Fordham University, New York in 1958. His first novel, *Americana*, was published in 1971. Before that he wrote some stories for the *Epoch* magazine while working as a copywriter. However, after *Americana*, he chose to be a full-time writer. It is the story of a man who works in a television company searching for "real" America. Starting with his first book, his books are generally seen as interrogation and examination of everyman's daily, ordinary life with a touch of comedy. After *Americana*, he published *End Zone* (1972), *Great Jones Street* (1973) and *Ratner's Star* (1976). But his breakthrough happened with his widely known book *White Noise* (1985). The book, which was adapted into a film in 2022, won the National Book Award for fiction, a highly praised award among American writers. This book, which is to be examined in this paper, tells a story of a man who is a professor in Hitler Studies and is exposed to an airborne toxic event with his family. The protagonist, Jack Gladney, is married to Babette, his fourth wife. They have four children. There is always a meddling consumerism hovering over their hardships in their family life. Their life changes when an industrial accident occurs, and an airborne toxic event takes place. It is a deadly, black, chemical cloud that roams in the air and their lives. Somehow, this cloud is a representation of the invading but invisible white noise, surrounding their life. After his first great success and award, DeLillo kept producing. His works mainly shaped around postwar America and its society. DeLillo won the National Book award with this book in 1985. After *White Noise*, *Libra* (1988), and *Mao II* (1991) were published. After *Mao II*, which gave him PEN/Faulkner Award in 1992, he wrote *Underworld* (1997), *The Body Artist* (2001), *Cosmopolis* (2003; film 2012), *Falling Man* (2007), *Point Omega* (2010), *Zero K* (2016), and *The Silence* (2020). Almost every one of his books contains criticism of consumerism, intellectualism, terrorism, digital technology, the family, death, and the power of violence. Besides his book, DeLillo also has several plays, a screenplay for a film called *Game 6* (2005), and the short-story collection *The Angel Esmeralda: Nine Stories* (2011). Lastly, for his lifelong success in 2013, DeLillo was awarded the Library of Congress Prize for American Fiction, and in 2015, the National Book Foundation awarded DeLillo its Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters.

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Walker Percy, a southern person born and raised, was born on May 28, 1916, in Birmingham, Alabama, U.S. and passed away on May 10, 1990, in Covington, Louisiana. He is recognized for his writing about the New South, a postwar movement that took place in the U.S. It aims to modernize the southern part of the U.S. and its societies with its cultures. As a movement, it rejects the habits of the Old South, such as racial segregation or slavery, and tries to integrate the South with the rest of the USA. Growing up partly in the Old South and partly in the New South, Percy took this subject into writing in some of his books. Also, while growing up, he was an orphan and lost both of his parents in different incidents. He received his B.A. from the University of North Carolina in 1937 and his M.D. from Columbia University in 1947. At first, he was a pathologist, so he took up the writer as a profession later in his life. What drives him toward the writing profession is that he did a lot of reading during an illness period that took a long time to heal. During his readings, he was heavily influenced by European



existentialists. Under their influence, he began writing journals that contain philosophical, psychological, and literary themes. After his journal experiments, he published his first novel *The Moviegoer* (1961), and it was a great success. The book won a National Book Award in 1962. It was a book about a stockbroker trying to escape from the real world. The stockbroker's name was Binx Bolling from New Orleans, and he is to escape from the dullness of real life. He seeks the lacking pleasure in the relationships with his secretaries and movies. He constantly goes to the movies to distract himself, but it is a vain effort as the "malaise" continuously tags him. It is a term clarified by Percy meaning a disease of despair born of the rootless modern world, so the book can be regarded as an existentialist work of literature. After *The Moviegoer*, Percy wrote *The Last Gentleman* (1966), *Love in the Ruins: The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time near the End of the World* (1971), which is a science-fiction novel about the treatment of "malaise"; *Lancelot* (1977); *The Second Coming* (1980); and *The Thanatos Syndrome* (1987). These are his fiction books, and he wrote some non-fiction books such as *The Message in the Bottle* (1975) and *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book* (1985).

### 1. *White Noise* and *The Moviegoer*

The protagonist and the narrator in *White Noise*, Jack Gladney, is a middle-aged professor in the department of Hitler Studies at the College-on-the-Hill. Even though he founded the department himself and has a tremendous amount of knowledge about Hitler's life and history, he cannot speak German which is a lurking fact among his colleagues in the college. He appears and behaves differently in college than at home with his family. At the college, he is seen as a spectacular, notable, and authoritative person, yet at home, he is a caring, gentle, and easygoing father and husband. He had multiple marriages before Babette and has children from his previous marriages. He thinks his previous wives were conspirational and he did not have an absolute trust in his marriages; however, he sees Babette as a protective, confident, good-natured, and intelligent woman. Much as Jack seems like a powerful man who has put his life in order, he in fact holds existential anxieties the most prominent of which is fear of death. Even though Jack has had this fear for some time, this is severely triggered when he finds out he was exposed to toxic chemicals due to the Airborne Toxic Event. In this analysis, Jack's existential anxieties shaped around fear of death and his efforts at identity construction will be examined.

It is ostensive that Jack has a constant, interruptive fear of death almost surfacing through any daily occasion. He wants to lead a traditional life in which everything is easy and clear to grasp. He has a stable and ostentatious job and a family in which he tries to set some familial traditions like every Friday they watch tv together just as Leonard Wilcox put it in these words "He exhibits a Kierkegaardian "fear and trembling" regarding death and attempts to preserve earlier notions of an authentic and coherent identity by observing the tribalistic rituals of family life" (Wilcox, 1991, 348). Unfortunately, this kind of pretense in a post-modern society in which technology has quite advanced and infiltrated through individual's very personal lives and everyone is forced to adapt snappily, he finds himself at unease being more attentive to daily events and making meaning out of everything, which in return leaves him in a skeptic state of being. Through the end of the story, during a conversation between Jack and Murray, who is a professor at the College-on-the-Hill as well as in the department of American environments, the reason why Jack wanted to establish the Hitler Studies department discloses as an attempt to hide behind a powerful renowned historical character. While they are talking about death, as clearly expressed by Murray:

It's totally obvious. You wanted to be helped and sheltered. The overwhelming horror would leave no room for your own death. 'Submerge me,' you said. 'Absorb my fear.' On one level you wanted to conceal yourself in Hitler and his works. On another level, you wanted to use him to grow in significance and strength (Delillo, 1999, 450).

Nevertheless, it can be inferred from the whole story that Jack also is aware of this intention as in the beginning, he shares with his wife, Babette, how he had his name, J.A.K. Gladney, and his persona as a professor in Hitler Studies. Upon the advice of the chancellor, he invents initials, which he asserts, resemble 'a tag' worn 'like a suit'. He is well aware of that he is constructing his professional identity not only through the brand invention of initials but also through his dressing style with the glasses with thick black heavy frames and dark lenses. Moreover, he acknowledges saying that "Hitler gave me something to grow into and develop toward, tentative as I have sometimes been in the effort" (DeLillo, 1999, 23). As stated by Katrina Harack, "We form a sense of self by reacting to the world around us and seeing ourselves as situated amid places of significance" (Harack, 2013) which Jack attains through Hitler Studies. During the initial stages of the airborne toxic events in the novel's second chapter, Jack's son Heinrich reports the latest developments. Heinrich alleges that the wind will bring the toxic chemical towards where they live and Jack more than one time insists, without any substantial proof, that "it won't come this way" (DeLillo, 1999, 170) repeating several times.

However, Gladney knows in the deepest of his heart that he is "the false character that follows the name around." (DeLillo, 1999, 24). When examined from the existential perspective, it is considerably apparent that Jack has a fear of death resulting from both that he does not necessarily believe in God, and he lacks a meaningful purpose in life. Not believing in God leads him to despair in terms of Kierkegaardian philosophy at the end of which he cannot find relief or pursue a leap of faith. The same situation can be regarded as an abandonment in Sartre's view in which one realizes that no divine entity approves our choices in life. For these reasons, Jack may feel the burden of being free, and instead of doing what he wants, he mostly pays attention to others' recommendations and conclusions and shapes his identity accordingly. He realizes, especially after the airborne toxic event, that his life will come to an end at one point. With this reality in mind, he constantly looks for things that enable him to situate at the moment or link him to present life. Sometimes these are palpable things such as his credit cards "MasterCard, Visa, American Express" (DeLillo, 1999, 158) dressing style, and the kinds of data shown on the screen approving his, identity, existence, or living, and sometimes they are just noises coming out of technological devices like tv and radio. These things ensure the relation of his own existence with the place, the external world. The feeling of being in between the technology-driven society and the desire for a traditional simpler one causes Gladney to lose his ability to grasp the understanding of life, even life and death. After sharing his personal information such as daily habits, and eating order, the SIMUVAC officer in front of the computer informs Jack that he was exposed to the toxic chemical shown on the screen of the computer and he is going to die at an uncertain time. This confrontation shakes him since this situation happened against the conscious actions he has taken for his own life and despite his habits of a healthy life. This moment specifically constitutes Camus' concept of absurdity which demonstrates Jack's expected positive rationale does not match this irrational experience. Upon this intricacy of learning that his existence is confined to the sum total of data displayed on the computer's monitor, he becomes unreceptive and proceeds to a skeptical mood, questioning his unanticipated estrangement and the meaninglessness of life:

I stood absolutely still. If they thought I was already dead, they might be inclined to leave me alone. I think I felt as I would if a doctor had held an X-ray to the light showing a star-shaped hole at the center of one of my vital organs. Death has entered. It is inside you. You are said to be dying and yet are separate from the dying, can ponder it at your leisure, literally see on the X-ray photograph or computer screen the horrible alien logic of it all. It is when death is rendered graphically, is televised so to speak, that you sense an eerie separation between your condition and yourself. A network of symbols has been introduced, an entire awesome

technology wrested from the gods. It makes you feel like a stranger in your own dying. (DeLillo, 1999, 222).

It is not confounding that after this kind of alienation from oneself and the environment or in other words reality itself, Jack wants to warrant his existence and thinks of his academic gown and dark glasses. Even though he knows those tools make him a false character, being a head of historically eminent studies allows him to situate himself as a powerful being. His search for secure identity results in his perpetual interpretation of his external environment. As can be readily concluded that “his [DeLillo’s] work reveals an insidious destabilization of the subject that has to do with a lack of personal investment in spaces and resulting failure to form a cohesive identity.” (Harack, 2013, 305-306). In his article “Life and Meaning” Dilman searches for the meaning of life by analyzing Tolstoy’s character Ivan. What he concludes for Ivan has the potential truth for Jack Gladney though the situations differ. He argues that “... alienated character. By this I mean that it is not really his life; not the life he would live if he were himself if he were true to himself. This notion of not being oneself, not being true to oneself, is a difficult notion...” (Dilman, 1965, 331). Jack is not true to himself, he tries to construct a solid, powerful identity which he does not seem to believe wholeheartedly. Having no cohesive identity causes him to feel insecure about his existence as a being and despite his efforts to constitute traditional family life in which nothing is complex, in contrast, everything is comprehensible; he cannot cope with postmodern instabilities and rapid changes. As a result, he is forced to confront despair, anguish, and abandonment in the absurdity of life in the 20th century.

Similar to DeLillo’s *White Noise*, the protagonist, and the narrator in Walker Percy’s award-winning novel *The Moviegoer* is called by different names: Binx, Jack, and John. In this paper, Binx is going to be used to refer to the protagonist. Binx is a stockbroker who works in a branch of his uncle’s brokerage company. He is a veteran shot from his shoulder during the Korean War. This incident shapes his way of thinking deeply and pushes him to question his existence and its meaning. He is sick of the everydayness of life; therefore, he has the desire to avoid it. Throughout the book, he avoids everydayness in two ways: flirting with secretaries and going to the movies. Firstly, he takes his secretaries on dates, however, with the flow of the events he stops seeking pleasure through flirting so as in his ordinary life. Binx doesn’t have a large family around but a stepcousin and an aunt. He is close to his stepcousin Kate since her mother, his aunt, raised both of them. Their relationship goes deep for both and end up getting married in the end. Their marriage happens when Binx decides flirting around is not a proper way to live or find meaning so he chooses to settle down. John “Jack” Binx Bolling tries to find meaning with the help of movies. Quite often he wanders around the neighborhood and talks to people to get familiar with everyday life then he goes to the cinema talks and gets acquainted with the staff, lastly, he watches the movie. All of this is to get a better grip on life’s reality and be a part of that special discourse. He finds comfort in the memories of movies, movie characters, and actors as he relates them to real life.

From the novel’s very beginning, one of the themes becomes apparent as ‘a search’ through which Binx desires to understand the universe and his own being in it. For him, search means “... what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life” (Percy, 1961, 15). His search highlights the ways to get rid of mediocrity. By doing the search, Binx feels himself different than other people in his society. Pursuing the search can be identified with his ‘action’ which helps an individual to posit and to make sense of his existence. To Binx, when someone does the search, he is onto something and the opposite means despair. Much as he oscillates to answer whether his search is about God or not, he expresses:

For, as everyone knows, the polls report that 98% of Americans believe in God and the remaining 2% are atheists and agnostics—which leaves not a single percentage point for a

seeker. For myself, I enjoy answering polls as much as anyone and take pleasure in giving intelligent replies to all questions (Percy, 1961, 16).

After that he raises the question:

Am I, in my search, a hundred miles ahead of my fellow Americans or a hundred miles behind them? That is to say: Have 98% of Americans already found what I seek or are they so sunk in everydayness that not even the possibility of a search has occurred to them? (Percy, 1961, 16).

All these statements, later he is going to confess, point out that he does not have a religious faith. This void of religion in his own life could slightly be related to Kierkegaardian 'sickness of spirit' which grows in our deepest parts even without our awareness and causes us to feel hopeless against the happenings in our mortal lives. Here, it would be more appropriate to refer to Sartre's abandonment which implies Nietzsche's expression that 'God is dead'. Later in the novel, Binx concludes that it is impossible to prove God or rule him out, and "the only sign is that all the signs in the world make no difference" (Percy, 1961, 137) and one must be responsible for his own actions, determine the way his life proceeds.

Without religious values in his life, Binx opts for the little way implying "not the big search for the big happiness but the sad little happiness of drinks and kisses, a good little car and a warm deep thigh." (Percy, 1961, 127). However, whenever he goes after those moments of little happiness, most of the time he is surrounded by 'malaise' defined by him as "the pain of loss. The world is lost to you, the world and the people in it, and there remains only you and the world, and you no more able to be in the world than Banquo's ghost." (Percy, 1961, 113). This composes a never-ending cycle. As a result of malaise, he feels desperate which causes Binx to seek for little ways to stave off the burden of spirit. "Whenever I take leave of my aunt after one of her serious talks, I have to find a girl" (Percy, 1961, 211) says Binx paving the way for the circle not to come to an end. He perceives his existence as meaning nothing and feels alienated from the world and the society he is in despite all the efforts of search and making meaning out of life.

Binx feels isolated in the society. Max Webb argues in his article:

The first paradox is that Binx is in his society but not of it. He is at once a typical insider and a classic outsider. As an insider, he lives in his natal city, works in a family business, spends a good deal of time with friends and family connections, and has no enemies. He has, in short, as fixed a position in his society as it seems possible to have. Yet, he finds himself a man almost without identity. Alienated from his culture, he feels that his most fortunate circumstance is that he regains the ability to see his life as a stranger might, freshly and from the outside (Webb, 1979).

This isolation is also related to movies that have a substantial place in Binx's life, who himself admits that he is a moviegoer. Going to the movies means 'certification' for him. As he explains:

Nowadays when a person lives somewhere, in a neighborhood, the place is not certified for him. More than likely he will live there sadly and the emptiness which is inside him will expand until it evacuates the entire neighborhood. But if he sees a movie which shows his very neighborhood, it becomes possible for him to live, for a time at least, as a person who is Somewhere and not Anywhere (Percy, 1961, 60-61).

It is shown that he feels estranged and is not mingled within society. He uses movies and actors to interpret the occasions around him and he places his existence daily through movies. Even though he describes both his and others' actions and appearances through actors from the movies. To illustrate, he resembles his attitude toward his girlfriend to Gregory Peckish. He



then describes himself mistaking the reality with Peckish's in the movie "I am a tall black-headed fellow and I know as well as he how to keep to myself, make my eyes fine and my cheeks spare, tuck my lip and say a word or two with a nod or two." (Percy, 1961, 65), yet he is not aware of the fact that through those characters in the movies, he tries to construct a false identity. He is supposed to believe that with movies he can control the environment and determine his own existence among others. It can be inferred that movies take Binx away from the society which he himself does not want to succumb its traditional ethical and moral values.

As for values, his aunt Emily stands for the traditional values in society and wants to impose these values onto Binx such as to live in dignity, to have responsibility among gentlefolk, and not to shirk obligations. Even though Binx does not intend to accept the impositions, he eventually gives in for him to continue his search is not possible because of everydayness, which is the enemy of the search, a channel to construct an identity towards one free will. Throughout the novel, he cannot take the responsibility for his own choices. From an existentialist point of view, one who cannot take the responsibility for his actions is not a free individual. Feeling both an insider and outsider in society, Binx succumbs to the impositions of his aunt, in a larger context, the society. This fluctuation of his societal position does not help Binx make his own choices. In the end, he goes to medical school as his aunt expected him to do, gets married to his cousin, Kate, upon her insistence, and leads a life like a common, mediocre man without being able to direct his life according to his free will. This ostensibly picturizes Camus' notion of the absurdity of life. Binx intended to lead his way toward his own values, understandings, and choices, however, he experienced the irrationality of life. In the end, he has to accept society's norms that he once thought meaningless. As Dufrenne (1965, 55) asserts man needs man and cannot ignore the society and has to abide by the values of the society whether consciously or not. To him, man proceeds with his own awareness as an individual and consolidates his place (individuality) within society both culturally and historically.

### Conclusion

The study explains that individuals' struggles to establish their existence and their identity in a society have long been the focal point. Through radical changes or paradigm shifts throughout time and society, individuals seek for answers to their questions of individual freedom, existence, and free will. Thereby, it was presented that both *White Noise* and *The Moviegoer* delineate the existential crisis protagonists face. They try to construct their identities to either adapt to society or pursue their free will. In any case, they are forced to make choices. Their choices determine their place in life. Analyzing Kierkegaard's, Sartre's, and Camus' philosophical views, this study concluded that both protagonists question their position and individual identities, and constantly interpret their surroundings to grasp the meaning of life. Even though the contexts of the novels differ, it can be prominently suggested that Gladney's and Binx's lives cannot get away from their surroundings. As existentialist philosophers asserted, taking no conscious action does not help them comprehend the meaning of their existence and life. When they do not have the ability or chance to make unrestrained choices, they are influenced by the society and the present circumstances. This threatens their individual freedom, and they succumb to the impositions of the people around them when they are unable to pursue their own life goals. For this purpose, this study showed both characters showed having existential crisis oscillating between their own will and society's impositions though the contexts differ.

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