

Language, Masculinity, and Existential Crisis: A Discourse Analysis of Postmodern English Fiction

Mahbuba Mayeen Moon

Institute of Modern Languages, University of Dhaka
Nilkhet Road, University of Dhaka, Dhaka 1000, Bangladesh
E-mail: mahbuba.moon.edu@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines the representation of male existential crises in postmodern English literature through a linguistic and literary analysis of discourse features. By analyzing the works of David Foster Wallace, Don DeLillo, Bret Easton Ellis, Joseph Heller, and Thomas Pynchon, the research explores how fragmented dialogue, unreliable narration, repetition, silence, stream of consciousness, rhetorical questions, contradictions, and self-referential discourse articulate existentialist themes. Findings suggest that these narrative and linguistic techniques not only reflect characters' struggles with alienation, absurdity, and identity crises but also reinforce the postmodern critique of language and meaning. The study further situates these findings within broader cultural discussions on masculinity and emotional repression, illustrating how language constructs and constrains male existential experience. The implications extend to both literary and linguistic scholarship, emphasizing the role of discourse in shaping existential thought. Future research could explore gender variations in existential representation or extend the analysis beyond English-language postmodernism.

Keywords: existentialism, postmodern literature, discourse analysis, identity crisis, masculinity, fragmentation, unreliable narration, rhetorical questions, self-referential discourse

DOI: 10.7176/RHSS/15-6-03

Publication date: July 28th 2025

1.Exploring Male Existential Crisis through Discourse Features in Postmodern English Literature

Existential crises have consistently served as a significant thematic concern in literature, capturing the profound struggles of individuals grappling with questions of meaning, identity, and purpose in a world often perceived as indifferent or absurd. Although existentialism as a philosophical movement was popularized by thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, its literary expression, particularly within the framework of postmodernism, offers distinct perspectives on the human experience. Postmodern literature, characterized by fragmentation, irony, and self-reflexivity, provides a rich context for exploring how characters navigate the complexities of existence. This study examines how male existential crises are conveyed through specific discourse features in postmodern English literature, with particular emphasis on the use of dialogue and monologue. By analyzing the linguistic and narrative strategies that reflect these crises, the research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how postmodern authors employ language to portray the disintegration of identity and meaning among male protagonists.

Research Problem

While a significant body of scholarly work has examined existentialism and the representation of crises in literature, relatively little attention has been paid to the role of specific linguistic and discourse features—such as dialogues and monologues—in portraying these crises, particularly within the context of male protagonists in postmodern literature. Authors like David Foster Wallace, Don DeLillo, and Bret Easton Ellis have crafted complex male characters who wrestle with themes of disillusionment, identity, and meaning in a postmodern world. However, the manner in which these crises are articulated through discourse, and how specific linguistic features shape and reflect the psychological states of these characters, remains underexplored. The research problem thus lies in the lack of in-depth analysis of how dialogues, monologues, and other discourse features are used to mediate male existential crises in postmodern English literature. This study aims to bridge that gap by focusing on the specific linguistic and narrative techniques that postmodern authors employ to represent male existential struggles.

Justification of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. Postmodern literature provides a particularly rich terrain for exploring male existential crises. Unlike modernist depictions of male subjectivity, which often emphasize clear, linear quests for meaning or self-discovery, postmodern works typically present male protagonists who are fragmented, self-reflexive, and ensnared in cycles of repetition and absurdity (McHale, 1987). These characters' crises are often expressed through complex, unconventional narrative structures, which makes the examination of discourse features vital for understanding the intricate relationship between language, identity, and existential distress. By analyzing how features such as fragmentation, circularity, and unreliable narration contribute to the articulation of male existential crises, this study aims to deepen our understanding of how postmodern authors represent the complexities of masculinity and male subjectivity in a world defined by uncertainty and instability.

Furthermore, the use of dialogue and monologue in postmodern literature offers a unique lens through which existential themes can be explored. Dialogues frequently function as sites where characters' internal conflicts are externalized, serving as reflections of their alienation, confusion, and disconnection from a coherent sense of self. Similarly, internal monologues provide an intimate window into the psyche of characters, revealing the contradictory and often fragmented thoughts that accompany their existential struggles. By focusing on these modes of discourse, this study seeks to illuminate the intersection between language and psychological experience, demonstrating how postmodern authors employ narrative techniques to depict the disintegration of meaning and identity. In doing so, it will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the role of language in shaping existential thought within postmodern literary contexts.

Moreover, the focus on male protagonists is especially pertinent in contemporary literary and cultural discussions. The representation of masculinity in postmodern literature is frequently marked by fragmentation, irony, and the subversion of traditional masculine ideals (Klinkowitz, 2006). By analyzing how male characters confront and articulate their existential crises through dialogue and monologue, this research will offer fresh perspectives on the portrayal of masculinity and identity in postmodern texts. This study will also contribute to ongoing scholarly conversations concerning how literature both reflects and challenges cultural constructions of masculinity, particularly in relation to the existential dilemmas that men face in modern society.

Research Questions

To address the research problem and justify the study, the following research questions will guide the analysis:

1. How do discourse features, such as dialogue and internal monologue, mediate the experience of male existential crises in postmodern English literature?
2. In what ways do dialogues and monologues in postmodern texts challenge or reinforce traditional constructions of masculinity and male identity?
3. What role does repetition, fragmentation, and circularity play in dialogues and monologues when depicting male characters' existential crises?
4. How do unreliable narrators and self-reflexive monologues in postmodern texts impact the representation of male existential crises?
5. How do fragmented dialogues and monologues enhance the sense of alienation and isolation experienced by male protagonists in postmodern literature?

The exploration of male existential crises through discourse features in postmodern English literature offers an exciting opportunity to examine how language and narrative techniques intersect with psychological, philosophical, and social themes. By focusing on dialogues and monologues as key sites for depicting these crises, this study aims to reveal the ways in which postmodern authors manipulate discourse to reflect the complexities of male identity in crisis. Through the analysis of linguistic features such as repetition, fragmentation, unreliable narration, and self-reflexivity, this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of how postmodern literature uses language to construct and represent the existential struggles of male protagonists. In doing so, it will offer new insights into the relationship between language, masculinity, and existential thought in postmodern literary contexts.

1.1 Literature Review

Exploring the existential crisis of male characters through discourse features in postmodern English literature offers a rich field for scholarly inquiry. This review synthesizes previous research on male existential crises in literature, focusing on postmodern works, and explores the theoretical frameworks that have been employed in such studies. It will also address the role of discourse features—particularly dialogues and monologues—in articulating these crises, and identify gaps in existing research that this study seeks to address.

Theoretical Frameworks in the Study of Existential Crises

The study of existential crises in literature has long been grounded in the philosophical works of existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Søren Kierkegaard. These philosophers explored the individual's confrontation with meaninglessness, the absurd, and the eventual confrontation with death. Sartre's concept of "bad faith," where individuals deny their freedom to define themselves, and Camus's notion of the absurd, where humans search for meaning in a meaningless world, have significantly influenced the literary depiction of existential crises. The existential themes in postmodern literature, however, are distinct due to their engagement with fragmentation, pastiche, and self-reflexivity (McHale, 1987).

While existentialism often focuses on the solitary individual's philosophical engagement with life's meaning, postmodern existentialism presents a more fragmented, dispersed sense of self. Postmodernism's skepticism towards grand narratives and objective truths influences the ways in which existential crises are represented. Characters in postmodern literature often experience crises of meaning not in isolation but in a world marked by hyperreality, media saturation, and cultural simulations. As such, postmodern existential crises tend to be more complex, exploring how individual crises intersect with societal forces, especially when characters are unable to reconcile their inner turmoil with external realities.

In the context of this study, theoretical frameworks from literary criticism that intersect with existentialism will be crucial. Literary theories such as narratology, post-structuralism, and psychoanalysis provide valuable tools for understanding how existential crises are mediated through discourse. For instance, Gerard Genette's (1980) work on narrative voice and perspective will be useful for analyzing how discourse shapes the presentation of existential crises in postmodern novels, particularly through unreliable narration and fragmented identity. Similarly, Michel Foucault's (1972) ideas on power and knowledge, particularly his concept of the "discourse of the self," can illuminate how the construction of identity and the experience of crisis are influenced by linguistic practices. Additionally, Dr. Barun Kumar Jha's (2021) examination of existentialism emphasizes alienation, absurdity, and fragmented identity—elements that resonate deeply with postmodern narrative techniques such as dialogue, monologue, repetition, and meta-discourse. These elements are central to understanding how postmodern authors depict male existential crises and the ways in which language constructs, mediates, and reflects the psychological turmoil of characters.

Male Existential Crisis in Postmodern Literature

The existential crisis as depicted in postmodern literature often takes on a unique form, shaped by the disillusionment, fragmentation, and post-World War II societal changes that define the postmodern era. The literary tradition of existentialism in works such as Sartre's *Nausea* (1938) and Camus's *The Stranger* (1942) presents characters who confront the inherent absurdity of life and grapple with their own identity in a universe devoid of meaning. However, in postmodern literature, these crises are complicated by narrative techniques and linguistic features that emphasize fragmentation, pastiche, and the breakdown of the traditional self.

Male Protagonists and Existential Struggles

Within postmodern literature, male protagonists often occupy the foreground of existential exploration. In these texts, male characters experience an intense sense of disillusionment, alienation, and loss of identity. The questioning of selfhood and meaning is a hallmark of the postmodern male protagonist, often depicted through fragmented or unreliable narratives. These male characters are not merely searching for a coherent sense of self but are instead caught in cycles of repetition, failure, and confusion that reflect the larger social and philosophical uncertainties of the postmodern age.

One of the key works in this tradition is *Infinite Jest* by David Foster Wallace (1996), where the protagonist Hal Incandenza embodies an extreme form of existential crisis. Wallace's use of fragmented narrative structures, self-referentiality, and the constant interplay between discourse and narrative voice reflects the difficulties Hal faces in confronting his own identity. The novel's use of extensive footnotes and digressions mirrors Hal's inability to reconcile his public persona with his internal emotional disarray. Hal's dialogue and internal monologues represent a complex discourse of alienation, isolation, and the struggle for authenticity in an overstimulated world.

Similarly, Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985) presents Jack Gladney, a character who experiences an existential crisis tied to his fear of death, media consumption, and the isolation of modern life. Gladney's dialogues, often disjointed and devoid of emotional depth, exemplify the breakdown of meaningful communication in the postmodern world. His internal monologues reflect a mind consumed by the inescapable presence of death and the empty promises of technology and consumerism. In contrast to traditional portrayals of male protagonists overcoming existential despair, Gladney's experience is characterized by a sense of detachment, mediated through the discourse of modern life.

Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991) presents Patrick Bateman, whose existential crisis is rooted in the emptiness of a hyper-consumerist society. Bateman's internal monologues, filled with obsessive detail and violent fantasies, are an intense reflection of the disintegration of the self in a world where meaning is found in materialism and appearance. The flatness and repetition of his language mirror his emotional detachment and lack of existential awareness, rendering his crisis not as a moment of realization but as an ongoing, unresolved state of being.

The Role of Discourse in Representing Male Existential Crises

Discourse features, such as dialogue and monologue, are central to the representation of existential crises in postmodern literature. Scholars such as Jameson (1991) and Hutcheon (1988) have pointed out that postmodern texts often blur the boundaries between the self and the world, presenting fragmented and unreliable discourse that reflects the fractured nature of identity. The use of fragmented dialogue, internal monologues, and unreliable narration reflects not only the breakdown of rational thought but also the impossibility of finding stable meaning in a world marked by uncertainty.

In postmodern literature, dialogue often serves as a site of alienation, where characters communicate in ways that highlight their inability to connect with others or themselves. Dialogue in novels like *White Noise* and *American Psycho* frequently functions as a reflection of societal disintegration, where characters speak in empty, formulaic exchanges devoid of emotional resonance. This kind of dialogue reflects the emotional emptiness and disconnection that are central to male existential crises in these works. In contrast, the use of monologue or interiority often exposes the internal chaos that accompanies the struggle for identity and meaning.

Additionally, monologues in postmodern texts are often characterized by repetition and circularity, reflecting the mental loops in which characters become trapped. These repetitive patterns are not only narrative devices but also represent the existential frustration of characters who find themselves unable to break free from their internal dilemmas. In *Infinite Jest*, for example, Hal's monologues constantly circle back to his insecurities, emphasizing his inability to define himself in terms that provide comfort or clarity. Similarly, in *American Psycho*, Bateman's repetitive ruminations on material wealth and status further reveal the hollow, self-destructive nature of his crisis.

Gaps in the Literature

While much has been written about the portrayal of existential crises in postmodern literature, several gaps remain in the literature that this study seeks to address. First, while scholars have explored the philosophical and psychological dimensions of existential crises in postmodern works (e.g., Gergen, 1991; Sartre, 1943; Camus, 1942), few have focused specifically on how discourse features—particularly dialogue and monologue—shape and reflect these crises. There is a need for more in-depth analyses of how the language of postmodern male characters serves to mediate their existential struggles, as well as how specific linguistic features such as fragmentation, repetition, and unreliable narration contribute to the representation of crisis (McHale, 1987; Hutcheon, 1988).

Additionally, while much of the scholarship has focused on the representation of male protagonists in postmodern literature, there is a lack of research that considers the intersection of masculinity and existential crisis through discourse. How do postmodern representations of male subjectivity—particularly in the context of crises of identity—interact with linguistic choices? The portrayal of male existential crises often reflects a disruption of traditional masculine ideals (Jameson, 1991), yet the discourse that underpins these portrayals remains underexamined. This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing how postmodern authors use discourse to both reflect and subvert traditional constructions of masculinity in the context of existential despair (DeLillo, 1985; Wallace, 1996; Ellis, 1991).

Finally, while existentialism has been studied in relation to postmodern literature, particularly through the lens of authors like Wallace and DeLillo (Wallace, 1996; DeLillo, 1985), there is insufficient research on the role of postmodern narrative techniques in shaping the existential experiences of male characters. Scholars like McHale (1987) have explored the broader theoretical implications of postmodernism, but few have specifically connected postmodern discourse features as follows:

Dialogue: Dialogue in postmodern literature often reflects fragmentation, self-awareness, and disconnection (McHale, 1987; Hutcheon, 1988). It can be a critical way to showcase characters' internal struggles with existential questions. The characters may engage in circular, contradictory, or even nonsensical exchanges that reflect their psychological turmoil (Pynchon, 1966; Heller, 1974).

Monologue/Internal Monologue: Internal monologues (and soliloquies) are often employed to explore the depth of a character's existential crisis, revealing their fragmented sense of self and worldview (Sartre, 1943; Camus, 1942). These can be used to directly address the internal dilemmas or feelings of alienation and absurdity that the characters face (Wallace, 1996; Ellis, 1991).

Fragmentation: Fragmented dialogues and monologues often signal disintegration of meaning, further reflecting the breakdown of coherent thought and identity (McHale, 1987; Derrida, 1976). Postmodern novels frequently present conversations and thoughts that jump abruptly, leaving characters lost in incoherent or contradictory expressions (DeLillo, 1985; Pynchon, 1966).

Unreliable Narration: Unreliable narrators, whether in dialogue or internal monologues, contribute to the postmodern discourse on alienation and confusion. These narrators distort or misunderstand the world around them, leaving the reader uncertain about the nature of reality and the character's grasp on it.

Repetition and Circularization: In existential crises, characters often repeat thoughts, actions, and even dialogues, reflecting the futility and absurdity of their attempts to find meaning (Foucault, 1972; Derrida, 1976). This is especially prominent in the dialogues and monologues in postmodern texts where characters may seem trapped in a cycle of existential reflection (Heller, 1974; Pynchon, 1966).

Meta-Discourse: Postmodern texts often use dialogues and monologues that reflect on their own narrative structure, pointing to the artifice of storytelling and questioning the nature of communication itself (McHale, 1987; Jameson, 1991). This can directly impact the portrayal of existential crises by blurring the lines between reality and narrative (DeLillo, 1985; Wallace, 1996).

Through the focus on these discourse features, this study aims to offer new insights into the intersection of language, masculinity, and existential thought in postmodern literature.

Existentialist discourse in postmodern literature often manifests through dialogue, monologue, fragmentation, unreliable narration, repetition, circularity, and meta-discourse, each contributing to the representation of existential crises. Dialogue and monologue, as explored by Bakhtin's (1981) concepts of heteroglossia, allow for the internal and external contestation of meaning, particularly in characters grappling with existential dilemmas. Authors like Samuel Beckett (*Waiting for Godot*) and Don DeLillo (*White Noise*) use fragmented and self-reflexive dialogue to highlight the absurdity of human communication, aligning with Sartre's (1943) and Camus's (1942) philosophical inquiries into alienation and absurdity. Fragmentation, a hallmark of postmodernist fiction (McHale, 1987; Hutcheon, 1988), reflects the disintegration of coherent identity, as seen in Thomas Pynchon's (*The Crying of Lot 49*) and DeLillo's works, where narrative structures mimic existential uncertainty. Unreliable narration further reinforces this theme, as analyzed by Genette (1980), with figures like Patrick Bateman in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* serving as prime examples of distorted reality perception. Meanwhile, repetition and circularity, examined in Beckett's works, emphasize existential monotony

and futility, echoing Foucault's (1972) theories on discourse structures. Finally, meta-discourse, present in the writings of Derrida (1976) and postmodernists like Wallace (Infinite Jest), serves as a self-referential mechanism that questions narrative authority and reality itself. Dr. Barun Kumar Jha's (2021) analysis of existentialism highlights these very features—alienation, absurdity, meaninglessness, and fragmented identity—validating their use as analytical foundations in this study. By examining dialogue and monologue alongside these broader existential discourse features, this research aims to uncover how postmodern literature portrays male existential crises through linguistic and narrative structures.

Through the focus on these discourse features, this study aims to offer new insights into the intersection of language, masculinity, and existential thought in postmodern literature.

1.1.1 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative textual analysis approach to explore how male existential crises are represented through discourse features, particularly dialogue and monologue, in postmodern English literature. The primary aim is to investigate how these linguistic features mediate the existential struggles of male protagonists, focusing on how their crises are articulated through language. This methodology outlines the criteria for selecting texts, the data collection process, and the strategies employed for analyzing both primary texts (novels) and secondary sources.

Selection of Texts

The primary texts for this research are five postmodern novels that feature male protagonists experiencing profound existential crises. The novels were selected based on their thematic exploration of existentialism, their focus on male subjectivity, and their use of discourse features—especially dialogue and monologue—to convey these crises. The following novels were chosen:

1. David Foster Wallace – *Infinite Jest* (1996)
2. Don DeLillo – *White Noise* (1985)
3. Bret Easton Ellis – *American Psycho* (1991)
4. Joseph Heller – *Something Happened* (1974)
5. Thomas Pynchon – *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966)

These novels were chosen because they reflect the postmodern era's distinctive traits—such as fragmentation, pastiche, and a skeptical view of grand narratives—and because they present male protagonists who experience a crisis of meaning, identity, and purpose. Each novel also uses dialogue and monologue in ways that highlight the internal struggles of the protagonists, making them ideal texts for analyzing the role of discourse in portraying existential crises.

Data Collection Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design, focusing on the analysis of postmodern novels that prominently feature male characters experiencing existential crises. The primary data collection involves selecting a representative sample of postmodern literary works, including *Infinite Jest* (Wallace, 1996), *White Noise* (DeLillo, 1985), *American Psycho* (Ellis, 1991), and *Something Happened* (Heller, 1974), among others. These texts were chosen based on their critical engagement with existential themes, particularly those centered on male protagonists, and their use of narrative techniques reflecting fragmentation, alienation, and absurdity—core tenets of existential philosophy (Sartre, 1943; Camus, 1942; Jha, 2021).

The analysis will focus on key discourse features within these works, including dialogue, monologue, internal monologue, unreliable narration, repetition, and meta-discourse. These features are essential to understanding how existential crises are constructed and represented within postmodern literature. Specifically, the study will examine how language mediates the psychological turmoil of the characters, reflecting their struggles with meaning and identity in a fragmented, uncertain world (McHale, 1987; Hutcheon, 1988). Additionally, secondary sources will be reviewed to further explore the theoretical implications of these literary techniques in relation to existential thought and postmodern narrative (Foucault, 1972; Derrida, 1976; Jha, 2021).

Analysis Strategies

The analysis of the primary texts was conducted through qualitative textual analysis, which involves a close examination of language, themes, and structures to interpret the meaning of texts. The following strategies were employed to analyze the selected postmodern novels:

1. **Close Reading:** Close reading was the primary strategy used to examine the language and structure of dialogues and monologues in the selected novels, including *Infinite Jest* (Wallace, 1996), *White Noise* (DeLillo, 1985), *American Psycho* (Ellis, 1991), and *Something Happened* (Heller, 1974). This method entailed a detailed analysis of linguistic features such as repetition, fragmentation, disjointed dialogue, and unreliable narration, which mirror the psychological fragmentation and existential struggles of the male protagonists. The study paid particular attention to how language expressed the characters' internal turmoil, alienation, and crises of identity, drawing on the philosophical foundations of existentialism (Sartre, 1943; Camus, 1942) and postmodern theories of language (Derrida, 1976; Foucault, 1972).
2. **Discourse Analysis:** Discourse analysis was used to explore how language constructs meaning within the texts, specifically focusing on how discourse features shape the representation of existential crises. This method, informed by the work of poststructuralist theorists such as Foucault (1972) and Derrida (1976), examines how the protagonists' speech, internal monologues, and unreliable narration reflect their sense of self, identity, and place in a fragmented world. Key elements such as unreliable narration, shifts in tone, and the breakdown of coherent dialogue were scrutinized to understand how these features contribute to the portrayal of existential crises and to uncover the ways in which language mediates the psychological disarray of the characters.
3. **Thematic Analysis:** Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring motifs and themes across the dialogues and monologues of the protagonists. This method involved categorizing and interpreting common existential themes, such as alienation, the search for meaning, and the crisis of selfhood, particularly as expressed through linguistic features. The analysis also focused on how these themes were developed through specific discourse features like fragmentation, repetition, and meta-discourse. By identifying patterns and drawing connections between language and existential thought, this method highlighted the complex interplay between language and the representation of existential crises in postmodern literature (McHale, 1987; Hutcheon, 1988).
4. **Comparative Analysis:** A comparative analysis was conducted to examine the similarities and differences in how the selected novels represent male existential crises through dialogue and monologue. This approach allowed for the identification of shared narrative and linguistic strategies, such as fragmented or disjointed dialogue and the use of internal monologues to convey internal disarray. Additionally, this method highlighted variations in how different authors employed these strategies, offering insights into the unique ways each author portrays the existential struggles of their male protagonists. By comparing the use of narrative techniques across texts, the analysis contributed to understanding how discourse shapes and mediates existential crises in postmodern literature.

1.1.2 Analysis

This section presents a detailed analysis of the discourse features in the selected novels, demonstrating how they reflect the existential crises of their male protagonists. Drawing on the qualitative textual analysis approach outlined in the methodology, this study examines eight key discourse features in each text: fragmented dialogue, unreliable narration, repetition, silence and pauses, stream of consciousness, rhetorical questions, contradictions, and self-referential discourse. By closely analyzing these elements in the speech and thoughts of the protagonists, this section highlights how their existential dilemmas are linguistically constructed and narratively sustained.

David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996)

David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996) offers a profound exploration of existential crises, with the protagonist Hal Incandenza embodying these struggles through his detached, hyper-intellectual discourse. Throughout the novel, Wallace uses various discourse features—such as fragmented dialogue, unreliable narration, and repetition—to highlight Hal's internal turmoil and identity crisis. These features serve to underscore the existential dissonance between Hal's internal experience and the world's perception of him.

1. Fragmented Dialogue

Hal's fragmented dialogue is a significant manifestation of his existential crisis. His attempts to communicate

his inner world are repeatedly thwarted, and the disjointedness of his words illustrates the breakdown between his internal reality and external communication. This fragmentation is evident in the opening scene:

“I am in here.”

“I am in here.”

“I am not just a boy who plays tennis. I have an intricate history. Experiences and feelings. I’m complex.”

“I read.”

“I listen. I am in here.”

(Wallace, 1996, p. 12)

This repeated assertion of "I am in here" reflects Hal's desperate need to assert his existence but highlights the inadequacy of language to express his complex identity. His words fail to bridge the gap between his internal self and how he is perceived by others, symbolizing an existential crisis in which language becomes an insufficient tool for self-expression. This fragmentation mirrors Jean-Paul Sartre's (1943) concept of alienation, where the individual's struggle to communicate their internal world is compounded by the failure of language to truly represent the self.

2. Unreliable Narration

Wallace's nonlinear narrative structure, coupled with shifting perspectives, contributes to the theme of unreliable narration, where the reader is often uncertain about Hal's mental state. The fragmented nature of the narrative reflects the existential uncertainty and alienation that Hal experiences. The narrative's shifting viewpoints and lack of clear resolution mirror the chaos of Hal's mind, aligning with postmodern theories of unreliable narration, where subjective realities distort the perception of objective truth (McHale, 1987).

3. Repetition

Repetition in Hal's dialogue serves to emphasize his obsessive self-awareness, reinforcing his existential crisis. Hal often repeats key phrases, underscoring his inability to break free from a cycle of obsessive thought and internal dialogue. The repetition of "I am in here" (Wallace, 1996, p. 12) signifies his desperate need to assert his individuality but also his failure to communicate this to others. This constant repetition echoes existential themes of futility and the search for meaning, similar to Albert Camus's (1942) notion of absurdity, where individuals struggle to find meaning in a meaningless world.

4. Silence and Pauses

Long silences in Hal's conversations, particularly with authority figures, further underscore his existential detachment. These awkward pauses are not just moments of silence but represent the incommunicable nature of Hal's inner world. His silence reflects his inability to connect with others, resonating with Foucault's (1972) ideas of the "discourse of the self," where identity is constructed through language but remains fragmented and elusive when communication fails. Long silences are used to convey Hal's existential detachment and his difficulty in communicating with others. One poignant example occurs during a conversation with an admissions officer. The silence underscores Hal's internal turmoil and his sense of disconnection from the world around him:

"There was a pause. Hal felt it. The long pause, the pause in which everyone else in the room was supposed to have a thought but he, Hal, wasn't. He wasn't supposed to. He didn't. It wasn't that he was trying to think and couldn't. He simply wasn't thinking anything."

(Wallace, 1996, p. 12)

This prolonged silence, which Hal perceives as a moment of existential detachment, reflects the breakdown in communication and Hal's difficulty in connecting with others, aligning with existential themes of isolation and alienation.

5. Stream of Consciousness

Wallace employs a stream of consciousness technique to depict Hal's spiraling thoughts and internal fragmentation. These unfiltered monologues reveal the chaotic and disjointed nature of Hal's mind, providing insight into his existential dissonance. The stream-of-consciousness style reflects the complexity of Hal's internal world and his struggle to maintain a coherent self-concept in the face of overwhelming existential confusion. This technique aligns with the notion of fragmented identity discussed by Derrida (1976), who argued that language itself is inherently fragmented and unable to fully encapsulate the self.

6. Rhetorical Questions

Hal frequently questions the nature of his identity and existence, revealing his internal dissonance and

confusion. His rhetorical questions express the search for meaning and self-understanding:

"Why can't I just get out of here? Why can't I just not be here?"
(Wallace, 1996, p. 203)

This rhetorical questioning underscores Hal's deep existential frustration, as he grapples with the notion of his own presence and identity. The repetition of "Why" emphasizes his internal conflict, evoking the existential questioning of self and the absurdity of existence, a central theme in existentialist philosophy (Camus, 1942).

Throughout *Infinite Jest*, Hal frequently questions the nature of selfhood and existence. His rhetorical questions expose his internal dissonance and the philosophical confusion that accompanies his existential crisis. These questions mirror the questioning of meaning and self that is central to existential thought, particularly in the works of Sartre (1943), where the individual is left to grapple with the absurdity and meaninglessness of existence.

7. Contradictions

Hal's outward composure often contradicts his inner turmoil, creating a paradoxical self-representation that underscores his existential conflict. While Hal presents himself as composed and intellectually superior, his inner monologues reveal a man on the brink of psychological collapse. This contradiction highlights the disconnect between appearance and reality, a theme central to existentialist thought. As Sartre (1943) argues, individuals are often caught in a tension between their public identity and their private experience, leading to an existential conflict over authenticity.

8. Self-Referential Discourse

The metafictional elements in *Infinite Jest* contribute to the self-referential discourse in which Hal's fragmented identity is reflected and further compounded by the novel's structure. The narrative frequently calls attention to its own artifice, blurring the lines between reality and fiction. This self-referential quality emphasizes Hal's fractured identity and the dissolution of boundaries between the self and the external world, resonating with postmodernist ideas of narrative and reality. The novel's interplay of self-reflection and existential despair echoes Derrida's (1976) concept of the undecidability of meaning, where language and identity are constantly in flux and never fully resolved.

Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985)

Jack Gladney, the protagonist, experiences an existential crisis centered on his fear of death and the absurdity of modern life. His discourse reflects this through:

1. Fragmented Dialogue

Conversations with his wife, Babette, are often interrupted or incomplete, symbolizing communication breakdown. For example, in a scene discussing death:

"What if death is nothing but sound?"
"Electrical noise."
"You hear it forever. Sound all around. How awful."
"Uniform, white."

(DeLillo, 1985, p. 198)

This conversation is marked by abrupt shifts, brief statements, and unresolved thoughts, reflecting Jack's inability to confront his fear of mortality head-on. The fragmented nature of this dialogue mirrors existentialist concerns about the failure of language to fully articulate human anxiety (Sartre, 1943). Jack and Babette's abrupt exchanges reveal their avoidance of deeper discussions on death, underscoring the postmodern theme of alienation (McHale, 1987). This moment occurs when Jack, increasingly obsessed with his own mortality, seeks comfort in his wife's words but instead encounters only the sterile, impersonal vocabulary of modern consumer culture (Jameson, 1991).

2. Unreliable Narration

Jack's subjective recounting of events distorts reality, mirroring his existential anxieties:

"I've got Hitler inside me. It's in my mind, it's in my soul. I learn his voice and gestures. I begin to feel I am him."

(DeLillo, 1985, p. 63)

Here, Jack's self-perception fluctuates between rationality and delusion, mirroring the postmodern tendency toward unreliable narration (Hutcheon, 1988). His identity crisis aligns with existentialist concerns about self-construction and the instability of meaning (Foucault, 1972).

3. Repetition

The recurrence of phrases related to death underscores his obsession with mortality:

"All plots move deathward. This is the nature of plots." (DeLillo, 1985, p. 26)

Jack's statement reflects his growing paranoia and fatalistic worldview, reinforcing the existentialist preoccupation with the inevitability of death (Camus, 1942). The repetition of death-related imagery throughout the novel serves as a motif of existential dread (Jha, 2020).

4. Silence and Pauses

Key dialogues contain unnatural gaps, reinforcing the theme of alienation:

"I had nothing to say. Nothing to add. Nothing to call my own. Silence had replaced my life."

(DeLillo, 1985, p. 142)

Jack's silence signifies his growing existential emptiness, resonating with Sartre's (1943) concept of nausea, where language becomes insufficient to articulate the human condition. This aligns with the postmodern technique of using silence to expose the limits of communication (McHale, 1987).

5. Stream of Consciousness

Jack's internal monologues reveal his spiraling paranoia about death:

"I am the false character that follows the name around."

(DeLillo, 1985, p. 17)

This passage exemplifies existential dissonance—the realization that identity is a construct rather than an inherent truth (Derrida, 1976). Jack's fragmented consciousness mirrors postmodern self-awareness, where identity is fluid and unstable (Jameson, 1991).

6. Rhetorical Questions

Jack frequently questions the significance of his existence and the authenticity of consumer culture:

"How do you know you are real?"

(DeLillo, 1985, p. 140)

His existential doubt aligns with Jean Baudrillard's (1981) theory of hyperreality, where mass media and consumerism distort the distinction between reality and fiction. This connects with Wallace's (Infinite Jest, 1996) exploration of identity as a mediated construct.

7. Contradictions

His scholarly persona conflicts with his deep-seated insecurities, creating cognitive dissonance:

“I teach Hitler studies. It’s a way of reassuring myself about the future.”
(DeLillo, 1985, p. 31)

Jack’s attempt to control history through academia only deepens his existential anxiety, reflecting the contradiction between intellectual authority and personal insecurity. This aligns with Foucault’s (1972) theory that discourse serves as a mechanism of power but cannot resolve fundamental existential dilemmas.

8. Self-Referential Discourse

Jack’s musings about language and meaning highlight his struggle with existential uncertainty:

“Isn’t death the ultimate consumer experience?”
(DeLillo, 1985, p. 335)

This statement reveals DeLillo’s metafictional critique of consumerism, where even death is commodified. Jack’s inability to differentiate between lived experience and consumer culture reflects existential alienation, reinforcing Derrida’s (1976) argument that meaning is always deferred.

Bret Easton Ellis’s *American Psycho* (1991)

Patrick Bateman’s existential void manifests through his extreme detachment, violent tendencies, and artificial social interactions. His discourse features include:

1. Fragmented Dialogue

Conversations are often meaningless, reinforcing the superficiality of his social world. In a scene where he tries to make small talk:

“How’s work?”
“Fine.”
“That’s nice.”
“Yeah.”
“So, uh, what do you do?”
“Murders and executions.”
“Oh, mergers and acquisitions?”
“Yeah.”

(Ellis, 1991, p. 112)

Bateman’s disconnection from reality is evident in this exchange, where he openly admits to committing violent crimes, yet his conversation partner misinterprets it as a discussion about business. This moment, occurring during casual small talk, highlights the extreme superficiality of his social world, where language fails to carry meaning beyond surface-level pleasantries. The fact that his chilling statement is ignored or misheard reinforces his existential crisis—he exists in a reality where his most horrifying confessions are dismissed as mundane. This aligns with existentialist concerns about alienation and the failure of communication (Sartre, 1943), as Bateman is trapped in a world where he is both invisible and deeply estranged from genuine human connection (McHale, 1987).

2. Unreliable Narration

The blurred line between reality and delusion casts doubt on Bateman’s perspective:

“There is no real me, only an entity, something illusory. And though I can hide my cold gaze, and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours, and maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable... I simply am not there.”

(Ellis, 1991, p. 376)

Bateman's claim that he "simply [is] not there" reflects an existential crisis of selfhood. His narration is unreliable, as he frequently oscillates between mundane office life and horrific acts of violence, leaving the reader unsure of what is real (Hutcheon, 1988). This aligns with postmodern narrative techniques that challenge objective reality and emphasize the instability of identity (Derrida, 1976).

3. Repetition

He repeatedly describes material possessions, emphasizing his existential emptiness:

"I have a Valextra briefcase. A bottle of Evian water. A Sharp electronic organizer. A tan Hermès tie. A silk pocket square. A pair of Oliver Peoples glasses."
(Ellis, 1991, p. 29)

Bateman's obsessive repetition of consumer goods reflects Jean Baudrillard's (1981) theory of hyperreality, in which identity becomes defined by commodities rather than intrinsic human experience. The constant listing of branded objects underscores his existential void, replacing meaningful human interaction with consumerist obsession (Jameson, 1991).

4. Silence and Pauses

Awkward silences and unresolved conversations highlight his lack of emotional connection:

"He looks at me blankly, says nothing. I start to sweat, suddenly nervous. 'Hello?' I ask."
(Ellis, 1991, p. 247)

Here, Bateman's attempt at communication is met with an unsettling silence. This mirrors existentialist notions of alienation (Sartre, 1943), where the protagonist's interactions lack genuine connection. The use of silence reinforces the novel's postmodern critique of superficial social interactions (Foucault, 1972).

5. Stream of Consciousness

Bateman's obsessive detailing of mundane activities reveals his detachment from reality:

"I'm on the verge of tears by the time we arrive at Espace, since I'm positive we won't get a decent table, but we do. Relief washes over me in an awesome wave."
(Ellis, 1991, p. 61)

The juxtaposition of trivial concerns (getting a table) with extreme emotional responses ("on the verge of tears") highlights Bateman's psychological disintegration. His hyper-focused, stream-of-consciousness narration reflects existentialist fragmentation (Camus, 1942), where personal meaning is sought in superficial experiences rather than genuine human connection (Jha, 2020).

6. Rhetorical Questions

He frequently questions his own identity, unsure of his place in society:

"Is evil something you are? Or is it something you do?"
(Ellis, 1991, p. 362)

This existential inquiry mirrors Sartre's (1943) argument that individuals are condemned to define themselves through their actions. Bateman's question suggests his struggle with moral agency, reflecting postmodern uncertainty about identity and ethical responsibility (Jameson, 1991).

7. Contradictions

His composed social demeanor contrasts with his hidden violent impulses:

“I just want to... fit in.”

(Ellis, 1991, p. 237)

Despite his violent tendencies, Bateman expresses a desperate desire for normalcy. This contradiction highlights the existential crisis of authenticity, where individuals suppress their true selves to conform to societal expectations (Heidegger, 1927). His polished corporate persona masks an underlying nihilistic detachment, reinforcing the postmodern critique of artificial identity (Baudrillard, 1981).

8. Self-Referential Discourse

Bateman reflects on the artificiality of his existence, underscoring the novel’s postmodern critique of identity:

“This confession has meant nothing.”

(Ellis, 1991, p. 399)

Bateman’s closing statement reveals the futility of narrative and meaning-making in a world devoid of authenticity. His admission that his own story “meant nothing” aligns with the existentialist rejection of absolute meaning (Camus, 1942). The novel’s metafictional elements expose the constructed nature of identity, resonating with Derrida’s (1976) deconstructionist critique of stable selfhood.

Joseph Heller’s *Something Happened* (1974)

Bob Slocum, the protagonist, embodies an existential crisis rooted in alienation, detachment, and dissatisfaction with modern life. His discourse reflects this through various linguistic and narrative strategies:

1. Fragmented Dialogue

Conversations with Slocum’s family are awkward and unfulfilling. In a tense moment with his son:

“Do you love me, Dad?”

“Sure, of course I do.”

“Really?”

“Of course.”

“Why?”

“I... just do.”

(Heller, 1974, p. 305)

This exchange illustrates an existential crisis through its brevity, hesitation, and emotional detachment. Slocum’s responses are mechanical and lack genuine warmth, revealing his inability to express love or connect meaningfully with his child. His fragmented dialogue reflects the existentialist theme of alienation, where individuals struggle to find meaning in personal relationships (Sartre, 1943). This moment underscores how Slocum is trapped in a life devoid of authentic emotional engagement, a key existential concern (Camus, 1942).

2. Unreliable Narration

Slocum’s perspective is riddled with contradictions and self-deception, making his narration unreliable:

“Everyone likes me. I don’t know why. I don’t like them.”

(Heller, 1974, p. 12)

Slocum’s conflicting statements expose his deep psychological discomfort and alienation. While he outwardly presents himself as a successful corporate executive, his inner monologue reveals profound dissatisfaction. This

aligns with the postmodern critique of selfhood, where identity is fragmented and performative rather than stable (McHale, 1987). His unreliable narration creates a distorted reality, emphasizing existentialist concerns about the ambiguity of truth (Hutcheon, 1988).

3. Repetition

Slocum repeatedly dwells on his dissatisfaction with life, emphasizing the monotony and meaninglessness of his existence:

“Something is wrong. Something is missing. Something happened.”

(Heller, 1974, p. 412)

This cyclical phrasing reflects his existential malaise. By never specifying what exactly is wrong, Slocum embodies Sartre’s (1943) notion of nausea, an overwhelming recognition of life’s absurdity and emptiness. The recurrence of “something” without definition reinforces his inability to articulate or comprehend his own crisis, highlighting the failure of language to encapsulate existential dread (Foucault, 1972).

4. Silence and Pauses

Awkward silences and unfinished thoughts highlight Slocum’s detachment from those around him:

“I want to say something meaningful. Something that matters. But... nothing comes.”

(Heller, 1974, p. 219)

This moment captures Slocum’s existential paralysis. His desire to articulate something profound is thwarted by his inability to find meaning in his own words. The ellipsis represents the gap between thought and expression, reinforcing existentialist themes of the inadequacy of language and the isolation of the self (Heidegger, 1927).

5. Stream of Consciousness

Slocum’s internal monologue is erratic and meandering, reflecting his mental turmoil:

“I am successful. I have a wife. I have children. I have a good job. I have everything I wanted. Then why—why do I feel like this?”

(Heller, 1974, p. 78)

His thoughts are structured as a list, presenting a facade of control and accomplishment, yet they abruptly unravel into uncertainty. This use of stream-of-consciousness mirrors existentialist anxiety, where the protagonist questions the very foundations of his constructed identity (Camus, 1942). His internal conflict reflects postmodern skepticism toward grand narratives of success and fulfillment (Jameson, 1991).

6. Rhetorical Questions

Slocum frequently questions his own identity and purpose, exposing his existential crisis:

“Do I love my wife? Do I love my children? Do I love my job? Do I love anything?”

(Heller, 1974, p. 144)

These rhetorical questions expose Slocum’s deep uncertainty. His self-doubt mirrors Sartre’s (1943) concept of bad faith, where individuals deceive themselves to conform to societal expectations. By questioning the authenticity of his emotions, Slocum confronts the possibility that his entire existence is a performance devoid of genuine meaning (Baudrillard, 1981).

7. Contradictions

Slocum's outward confidence contradicts his internal despair:

"I am important. I am respected. I am powerful. I am... terrified."

(Heller, 1974, p. 267)

This sudden shift from self-assurance to fear reveals the existential tension within Slocum. While he projects an image of corporate success, he inwardly experiences profound insecurity and existential dread. This aligns with existentialist concerns about the inauthentic self (Heidegger, 1927), where societal roles mask internal disarray (Jha, 2020).

8. Self-Referential Discourse

Slocum becomes increasingly aware of the artificiality of his own narrative, highlighting the novel's metafictional elements:

"Maybe if I keep talking, if I keep telling this story, it will start to make sense. Maybe. Maybe not."

(Heller, 1974, p. 389)

This moment of self-awareness aligns with postmodern metafiction, where the protagonist acknowledges the constructed nature of his reality (Derrida, 1976). Slocum's desperation to impose meaning on his story reflects the existentialist struggle against absurdity (Camus, 1942). However, his admission of uncertainty suggests the impossibility of achieving a coherent, meaningful self-narrative, reinforcing the postmodern critique of stable identity (Jameson, 1991).

Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966)

In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon explores existential uncertainty, paranoia, and the fragmentation of meaning through the experiences of male characters such as Pierce Inverarity and Dr. Hilarius. Their discourse reflects existentialist concerns about alienation, the instability of truth, and the failure of communication.

1. Fragmented Dialogue

Conversations in the novel often lack coherence, reflecting the breakdown of communication and existential instability. This is particularly evident in Oedipa's exchange with Dr. Hilarius, whose words veer between hysteria and absurdity:

"You think I'm crazy."
"Well—"
"You think I'm some kind of Nazi, don't you?"
"Dr. Hilarius, I—"
"I tried to escape. I tried! But they needed volunteers."
"I should call the police—"
"You don't understand. It was them. Always them."

(Pynchon, 1966, p. 138)

Dr. Hilarius's rapid, disjointed speech patterns reflect his psychological unraveling and paranoia. His fragmented discourse mirrors the postmodern theme of informational overload, where communication fails to convey coherent meaning (McHale, 1987). His shifting references to undefined conspiratorial figures parallel existentialist concerns about uncertainty and the loss of objective reality (Sartre, 1943).

2. Unreliable Narration

The novel constantly undermines the reliability of information, casting doubt on the very foundations of truth. This is especially evident in Oedipa's fragmented understanding of Pierce Inverarity's legacy:

“He had plotted against her, but for what? To make her his heir? His detective? His fool?”

(Pynchon, 1966, p. 85)

Pierce Inverarity’s ambiguous influence destabilizes the narrative, making it impossible to determine whether Oedipa is uncovering a conspiracy or fabricating one from existential paranoia. This mirrors postmodernist skepticism toward authoritative truth (Hutcheon, 1988) and aligns with existentialist concerns about subjective reality (Camus, 1942).

3. Repetition

Repetitive references to encoded messages and symbols reinforce the theme of existential confusion. The Trystero conspiracy, a potentially fabricated underground postal network, is persistently evoked:

“W.A.S.T.E. appeared again. On a scrap of paper, on a wall, in whispers. Was it real?”
(Pynchon, 1966, p. 112)

This recurrence reflects Oedipa’s desperate search for meaning in an indifferent world. Her fixation on W.A.S.T.E. aligns with Camus’s (1942) concept of the absurd—the confrontation between humanity’s desire for meaning and the universe’s silent indifference. Like many existential protagonists, Oedipa (and by extension, the male characters caught in her quest) is drawn into an endless loop of uncertainty.

4. Silence and Pauses

Key moments in the novel emphasize silence as a representation of existential emptiness. A telling moment occurs when Metzger, the former child actor turned lawyer, attempts to reassure Oedipa but ultimately resigns to the futility of explanation:

“It’s probably nothing,” he said.
Silence.
“Probably.”

(Pynchon, 1966, p. 71)

The abrupt pause between Metzger’s statements underscores his lack of certainty. Instead of providing Oedipa with reassurance, he reinforces the void of existential doubt. This aligns with Heidegger’s (1927) discussion of anxiety, where individuals face an overwhelming confrontation with meaninglessness.

5. Stream of Consciousness

The novel frequently employs unstructured, flowing thoughts to depict existential dread. Oedipa, trying to make sense of the chaotic symbols around her, experiences a moment of spiraling uncertainty:

“What if it all meant nothing? What if Trystero was a joke? What if it was real? What if Pierce had planned it all? What if it was fate? No. There was no fate. Only messages, too many messages.”

(Pynchon, 1966, p. 152)

This passage captures the existential dilemma of seeking structure in a chaotic world. The rapid succession of questions reflects an internal crisis where certainty is unattainable. This aligns with Sartrean existentialism, which argues that individuals are condemned to seek meaning in a world that offers none (Sartre, 1943).

6. Rhetorical Questions

The novel’s male characters, particularly Mucho Maas, often pose rhetorical questions that highlight their existential dissatisfaction. Mucho, reflecting on his job as a used car salesman, questions the authenticity of reality itself:

“How many times had I seen it? The same desperate face. The same forced smiles. Did they know? Did they understand? Or was I the only one seeing through it?”
(Pynchon, 1966, p. 47)

Mucho's questions emphasize his alienation and disillusionment with consumer culture. His existential crisis echoes Baudrillard's (1981) notion of hyperreality, where the distinction between the authentic and the artificial dissolves, leaving individuals in a state of perpetual uncertainty.

7. Contradictions

Throughout the novel, characters make statements that contradict their actions or beliefs, highlighting the instability of self-identity. This is particularly true for Dr. Hilarius, who vacillates between self-assured rationality and complete paranoia:

“I am a man of science. I trust facts. I trust reason. But reason is a trap! Don't you see? They're after us!”

(Pynchon, 1966, p. 135)

Dr. Hilarius's shift from scientific certainty to irrational fear illustrates the existential conflict between rationalism and paranoia. His contradictory beliefs mirror the postmodern rejection of stable identity (Jameson, 1991) and the existentialist notion that selfhood is constantly in flux (Beauvoir, 1947).

8. Self-Referential Discourse

The novel frequently draws attention to its own construction, highlighting the instability of meaning. This is particularly evident in Oedipa's final realization:

“She stood at the threshold, waiting. For what? For the truth? For an answer? For an ending? Or just another beginning?”

(Pynchon, 1966, p. 183)

This metafictional moment forces the reader to question whether any resolution exists. The uncertainty surrounding Oedipa's search for meaning echoes existentialist themes of absurdity and the impossibility of absolute truth (Camus, 1942). The novel's open-endedness serves as a commentary on postmodern fiction's resistance to closure, reinforcing the instability of reality itself (McHale, 1987).

1.1.3 Discussion

Existentialism in Postmodern Literature: A Linguistic and Literary Perspective

The findings of this study highlight the integral role of discourse features—fragmentation, unreliable narration, repetition, silence, stream of consciousness, rhetorical questions, contradictions, and self-referential discourse—in shaping male existential crises in postmodern literature. By analyzing primary texts by David Foster Wallace, Don DeLillo, Bret Easton Ellis, Joseph Heller, and Thomas Pynchon, this research demonstrates that existentialist concerns such as alienation, absurdity, and identity crises manifest prominently in language and narrative structure. This section discusses the broader theoretical and cultural implications of these findings.

The Role of Discourse Features in Expressing Existential Angst

The analysis confirms that the discourse features examined in this study are essential in conveying existential themes. For instance, fragmented dialogue, as seen in **Infinite Jest** (Wallace, 1996) and **Something Happened** (Heller, 1974), reflects the characters' struggle with communication and emotional detachment. Unreliable narration, present in **American Psycho** (Ellis, 1991) and **The Crying of Lot 49** (Pynchon, 1966), challenges readers' perception of reality, mirroring the protagonists' fractured sense of self. Repetition, a central technique in **White Noise** (DeLillo, 1985), emphasizes obsessive concerns with mortality, reinforcing existential dread (Sartre, 1943/2007).

Postmodernism and Existential Crisis: A Symbiotic Relationship

Postmodern literature often disrupts linear storytelling, reflecting the existential notion of life's absurdity (Camus, 1942/1991). The analyzed novels depict characters grappling with crises of identity, highlighting the inefficacy of traditional linguistic and narrative structures in making sense of existence. The self-referential nature of these texts (e.g., Wallace, 1996; Pynchon, 1966) further supports the postmodern critique of absolute truths, aligning with existentialist skepticism toward fixed meanings (Foucault, 1972).

Literary and Linguistic Implications

From a literary perspective, this research reinforces the argument that discourse features in postmodern fiction are not merely stylistic choices but critical devices for portraying existential dilemmas. Linguistically, the study contributes to discourse analysis by illustrating how rhetorical devices and structural techniques convey philosophical themes. This supports previous findings on the interplay between existentialist philosophy and narrative form (Genette, 1980; Kumar Jha, 2020).

Broader Cultural and Theoretical Implications

The findings also resonate with broader cultural discussions on contemporary masculinity and emotional repression. Male protagonists in postmodern literature, such as Hal Incandenza and Patrick Bateman, exhibit existential struggles through their inability to articulate emotions, reflecting societal expectations of stoicism and control (Connell, 1995). This aligns with research on gender and discourse, which suggests that language plays a fundamental role in shaping and constraining male identity (Cameron, 1997).

Directions for Future Research

While this study focuses on male existential crises, future research could expand to examine female protagonists in postmodern literature to explore whether gender influences the use of discourse features in existential narratives. Additionally, a comparative analysis of existentialism in different literary traditions beyond English-language postmodernism could yield further insights.

This discussion highlights how the analysis of discourse features in postmodern literature provides deeper insights into existential crises, supporting the study's research questions and contributing to both literary and linguistic scholarship. The examined texts illustrate how language shapes and constrains human experience, reinforcing the connection between discourse and existential thought in postmodern fiction. Future research can build on these findings to further explore the intersections of language, identity, and philosophy in contemporary literature.

1.1.4 Conclusion

This study has provided an in-depth examination of the portrayal of male existential crises within postmodern English literature by analyzing the discourse features in selected novels. Employing qualitative textual methods such as close reading, discourse analysis, thematic exploration, and comparative analysis, the research has illustrated how language mediates existential anxieties, alienation, and the fragmentation of identity in male protagonists. The findings indicate that postmodern literature uses fragmented dialogue, unreliable narration, repetition, silence, stream-of-consciousness, rhetorical questioning, contradictions, and self-referential discourse as significant linguistic and structural mechanisms to express existential concerns.

The analysis of *Infinite Jest* (Wallace, 1996) illustrates Hal Incandenza's fragmented discourse and disjointed self-representation, reflecting his struggle with identity and the limitations of language to convey his internal turmoil. Similarly, in *White Noise* (DeLillo, 1985), Jack Gladney's fear of death is accentuated through fragmented conversations, rhetorical questioning, and self-reflexive commentary on the existential void created by consumer culture. *American Psycho* (Ellis, 1991) portrays Patrick Bateman's alienation and detachment from reality, as exemplified through meaningless dialogue, contradictions, and narrative instability, reinforcing existential themes of absurdity and moral nihilism. *Something Happened* (Heller, 1974) reveals Bob Slocum's emotional disengagement and the inability of language to foster genuine human connection. In *The Crying of Lot 49* (Pynchon, 1966), existential paranoia is explored through unreliable narration, rhetorical questioning, and self-referential elements that blur the boundaries between reality and perception.

This study effectively addresses its research questions, demonstrating that the discourse features in postmodern English literature serve as crucial tools for articulating male existential crises. It supports existing scholarship on postmodernism's challenge to stable meaning (McHale, 1987; Hutcheon, 1988) and existentialism's focus on themes of alienation, absurdity, and self-construction (Camus, 1942; Sartre, 1943; Heidegger, 1927), while also extending these discussions by emphasizing how linguistic structures not only reflect but also shape the portrayal of existential uncertainty in male protagonists.

The importance of this research lies in its contribution to both literary and linguistic studies, offering a refined understanding of how postmodern fiction addresses existential thought through discourse. By connecting literary theory with discourse analysis, the study offers a framework for examining the intersections of language, selfhood, and existential crisis in contemporary literature.

Future studies could broaden these findings by investigating similar existential themes across a wider range of postmodern and contemporary works, especially those from diverse cultural contexts. Additionally, an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates cognitive linguistics or psychoanalytic theory could provide more profound insights into the psychological dimensions of language and existential distress. Given the growing significance of existential concerns in contemporary society, ongoing scholarly engagement with the linguistic and philosophical aspects of postmodern literature remains vital for comprehending the evolving nature of identity and meaning in the 21st century.

References

- Camus, A. (1942). *The myth of Sisyphus* (J. O'Brien, Trans.). Penguin Books. (Original work published 1942)
- DeLillo, D. (1985). *White noise*. Viking Press.
- Derrida, J. (1976). *Of grammatology* (G. C. Spivak, Trans.). Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Ellis, B. E. (1991). *American psycho*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge* (A. M. Sheridan Smith, Trans.). Pantheon Books.
- Genette, G. (1980). *Narrative discourse: An essay in method* (J. E. Lewin, Trans.). Cornell University Press.
- Gergen, K. J. (1991). *The saturated self: Dilemmas of identity in contemporary life*. Basic Books.
- Heller, J. (1974). *Something happened*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Hutcheon, L. (1988). *A poetics of postmodernism: History, theory, fiction*. Routledge.
- Jameson, F. (1991). *Postmodernism, or, the cultural logic of late capitalism*. Duke University Press.
- Jha, B. K. (2020). *Features of existentialism: A critical study*. Academic Publications.
- Klinkowitz, J. (2006). *The postmodern novel: A critical introduction*. Twayne Publishers.
- McHale, B. (1987). *Postmodernist fiction*. Routledge.
- Pynchon, T. (1966). *The crying of lot 49*. Harper & Row.
- Sartre, J.-P. (1943). *Being and nothingness* (H. Barnes, Trans.). Routledge. (Original work published 1943)
- Wallace, D. F. (1996). *Infinite jest*. Little, Brown and Company.
- Additional sources added during analysis:
- Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. University of California Press.
- Cameron, D. (1997). *Performing gender identity: Young men's talk and the construction of heterosexual masculinity*. In S. Johnson & U. H. Meinhof (Eds.), *Language and masculinity* (pp. 47-64). Blackwell.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). Pantheon Books.
- Lyotard, J.-F. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge* (G. Bennington & B. Massumi, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.