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THE POETICS OF NIGHT IN EASTERN AND WESTERN LITERATURE: AN EXISTENTIAL READING

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Abstract

The image of night has long occupied a central position in world literature as one of the most profound and symbolically charged poetic concepts. Across different literary traditions, night functions not merely as a chronological or natural phenomenon, but as a multidimensional aesthetic category connected with silence, fear, loneliness, spiritual contemplation, metaphysical inquiry, and existential crisis. In both Eastern and Western literary consciousness, the poetics of night reveals the inner world of the individual and reflects humanity's philosophical attempts to understand existence, mortality, alienation, and transcendence. This article explores the existential interpretation of the night motif through a comparative analysis of Eastern and Western literary traditions.

Keywords: Poetics of night, existentialism, loneliness, metaphysical contemplation, absurdity, ontological crisis, Eastern literature, Western literature, mythopoetics, literary discourse, alienation, spiritual transcendence.

From the perspective of mythopoetics, night represents a liminal space situated between reality and transcendence, consciousness and subconsciousness, life and death. Since ancient times, darkness has been associated with mystery, chaos, hidden truth, and spiritual transformation. In literary discourse, therefore, night often becomes a symbolic environment in which the individual confronts the deepest layers of the self. Existential philosophy further intensified the semantic possibilities of this image by



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interpreting night as a metaphor for ontological loneliness, anxiety, and the human search for meaning within an indifferent universe.

In Eastern literature, particularly within Sufi and classical poetic traditions, night is predominantly associated with spiritual meditation, mystical love, and metaphysical awakening. The works of Alisher Navoiy and Jaloliddin Rumi demonstrate that night is not simply darkness but a sacred temporal dimension in which the soul becomes capable of approaching divine truth. Silence and solitude during the night create a spiritual atmosphere that allows the lyrical subject to transcend material existence and enter into mystical communion with the Absolute. In Sufi poetics, loneliness is therefore not interpreted negatively; rather, it serves as a condition for spiritual purification and self-discovery.

In many Eastern poetic texts, night symbolizes the purification of the soul through suffering and longing. The lover's separation from the beloved, frequently depicted in classical ghazals, acquires a metaphysical dimension in which earthly love transforms into divine aspiration. Consequently, existential pain in Eastern literature often leads toward spiritual illumination instead of despair. The darkness of night becomes a metaphorical veil through which hidden truths and inner realities are revealed. Thus, Eastern literary thought tends to interpret night within a metaphysical and transcendental framework.

In contrast, Western modernist and existential literature frequently portrays night as a symbol of alienation, absurdity, and ontological instability. The catastrophic social transformations of the twentieth century, including industrialization, war, urban isolation, and the collapse of traditional belief systems, significantly influenced the literary representation of darkness and solitude. Within existentialist philosophy, human beings are depicted as isolated individuals abandoned in a silent and indifferent universe. As a result, night in Western literature often becomes the poetic embodiment of existential anxiety and metaphysical emptiness.



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The works of Franz Kafka illustrate how darkness and enclosed nocturnal spaces intensify feelings of fear, estrangement, and psychological fragmentation. Kafka's protagonists frequently experience a sense of helplessness and disorientation within obscure and oppressive environments. Night, in this context, symbolizes the collapse of rational order and the individual's inability to establish meaningful communication with society or existence itself.

Similarly, Albert Camus interprets night through the philosophy of the absurd. According to Camus, the universe remains silent toward human suffering and existential questioning. This silence becomes especially pronounced within nocturnal settings, where the individual confronts the terrifying absence of ultimate meaning. Night therefore functions as an existential landscape that exposes the tragic contradiction between humanity's desire for purpose and the indifference of existence. The novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky also demonstrate the psychological and moral dimensions of night imagery. In his works, darkness intensifies internal conflict, guilt, spiritual suffering, and ethical crisis. Nocturnal scenes often coincide with moments of confession, psychological breakdown, or moral revelation. Consequently, night becomes a psychological mirror reflecting the fragmented consciousness of the modern individual.

The existential interpretation of night may also be examined through phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches. Phenomenology considers night not merely as an external setting but as a lived human experience shaped by perception, memory, fear, and emotional consciousness. Hermeneutically, night functions as a symbolic text through which literature interprets the hidden dimensions of existence. In this regard, the poetics of night reveals cultural differences in humanity's perception of solitude, spirituality, and metaphysical reality.

From a comparative literary perspective, both Eastern and Western traditions employ night as a universal symbol of inner human experience; however, their philosophical



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orientations differ substantially. Eastern literature generally conceptualizes night as a pathway toward metaphysical harmony, divine unity, and spiritual transcendence. Western literature, particularly existentialist and modernist texts, tends to portray night as a representation of alienation, absurdity, existential fear, and ontological crisis. These differences emerge from distinct cultural, religious, and philosophical paradigms shaping Eastern and Western concepts of the human condition.

Furthermore, the linguistic and poetic structures associated with night imagery also vary across traditions. Eastern literary discourse frequently employs symbolic metaphors, mystical imagery, and transcendental motifs, whereas Western texts often emphasize psychological realism, fragmented consciousness, and existential symbolism. Despite these differences, both traditions use the poetics of night to investigate the fragile and paradoxical nature of human existence.

In conclusion, the image of night remains one of the most universal and philosophically productive literary archetypes in world literature. Through existential interpretation, night becomes a poetic mechanism for exploring loneliness, metaphysical anxiety, spiritual longing, and the human search for meaning. The comparative analysis of Eastern and Western literary traditions demonstrates that although both civilizations associate night with the hidden dimensions of existence, their artistic and philosophical understandings of solitude and transcendence diverge significantly. Therefore, the poetics of night serves not only as an aesthetic category but also as a reflection of humanity's enduring existential concerns.

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