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EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE LOST GENERATION IN J. OKADA'S NOVEL *NO-NO BOY*

В американській літературі після Другої світової війни відбувається активне становлення азійсько-американської літератури, одним із найвідоміших представників якої є Джон Окада. Письменник, який на власні очі бачив жахи війни і примусову політику країни, що ламала долі людей, створює роман, який віддзеркалює розгубленість представників покоління «нісей», які знаходяться на роздоріжжі власної долі. Опублікований у 1957 р. **єдиний роман американсько**го письменника японського походження «Хлопець Ні-Ні», приписаний до «відомства» постколоніального дискурсу, азійсько-американських студій та етнічних/пост-етнічних розвідок в американському літературознавстві, дотепер так і залишається недослідженим. *Мета* цієї статті – спростувати цей усталений постулат і продемонструвати, що роман слід розглядати не у вузькому зв'язку зі становленням та розвитком американської літератури, створеної письменниками азіатського походження, а у зв'язку з подоланням тенденції до «гіперканонізації» обмеженої кількості творів, написаних WASP-американцями (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant). *Методи* дослідження – історико-літературний, порівняльний. В результаті дослідження з'ясовано, що роман Дж. Окади важливий тим, що в ньому, з одного боку, присутня екзистенціалістська проекція одного з ключових для європейської та американської літератур другої третини ХХ ст. образу «втраченого покоління», а з іншого абсолютно нові, не характерні цього образу риси. З огляду на них, цей роман виглядає не просто як азійсько-американська версія західного літературного напрямку, своєрідне «повторення пройденого» і завершенням певного етапу розвитку американської літератури, написаної письменниками азійського походження. Запропонований у статті підхід до аналізу цього роману з наголосом на його естетико-поетологічних особливостях виявляє значний вплив на них класичних естетичних принципів японського мистецтва, що при всій позірній «повторюваності» робить цей твір унікальним прикладом поєднання американських і японських літературних традицій.

Ключові слова: Дж. Окада, японсько-американська література, екзистенціалізм, абсурд, втрачене покоління, хлопець ні-ні, канон, філософсько-естетичні принципи, японське мистецтво

It is widely known that Jean-Paul Sartre as an iconic figure of his generation more than anyone else set the tone for intellectual activity both in post-war France and beyond. J.P. Sartre writings are traditionally studied in connection with his direct involvement in the flow of literary criticism and theory that was seething in post-war Europe and North America [Forrest, 2002; Bloom, 2001]. At the same time, J.-P. Sartre's philosophical ideas about the absence of a god as the Creator of human nature crystallized some theories widely discussed at

the beginning of the 21st century, in particular, postcolonialism[1] and, chronologically, more distant multiculturalism. We are of the opinion that this largely explains the appreciable quantity of works in contemporary American literary discourse in which existentialism as a philosophical and literary phenomenon is widely discussed.

It is believed that existentialist literature was well studied in the second half of the 20th century. The still non-established opinion that unites scholars in the field of existentialism in American literary is that, despite the fact that among a number of existentialist writers the names of J.-P. Sartre and A. Camus are the first to be proclaimed, the literary and aesthetic foundations of European existential literature were formed under the significant influence of American literature of the first third of the 20th century [Lehan, 1973]. Starting from the publication of the constitutive monographs of I. Hassan, S. Finkelstein, R. Lehan and a number of other American literary critics in the mid-20th century and until the revival of this issue in the works of literary critics of the 21st century [Spencer, 2021], this concept has not undergone significant adjustments.

Jean Bruneau, comparing the writings of French existentialists A. Camus, J.P. Sartre, S. de Beauvoir and American novels by U. Faulkner, J. Dos Passos, E. Hemingway, reveals a number of common features and calls existentialism the first literary movement in France, formed in response of the strong and outstanding influence of modern American novel [Bruneau, 1948, p. 66]. The author draws attention to the fact that existentialists were looking for literary means to express their philosophy, because the way of depicting reality inherent in a classic French or English novel did not satisfy their needs, as such a novel depicted a protagonist either by various forms of psychologism (Stendhal), or material details (Balzac). The American novel emphasizes action, portraying life in its original complexity and sometimes confusion [Ibid., p. 67]. The second feature of an American novel that attracts existentialists, J. Bruneau considers the author's pure objectivity towards his characters as well as characters to each other: if life is a series of meaningless actions, even the author cannot understand them, as well as the characters do not understand each other. The critic notes that for Sartre, protagonists must remain mysterious and incomprehensible, "to analyze them means to kill them" [Ibid., p. 68]. After all, the third distinguishing feature of the American novel, according to J. Bruneau, lies in the means of solving one of the most difficult problems of the novelist – representation of time, developed by Faulkner and Dos Passos. To depict an entire epoch, Dos Passos in the trilogy *U.S.A.* uses an experimental technique that allows him to create an infinite number of characters. Following this, Sartre in *The Reprieve* describes the germ of war in the lives of different people: Frenchmen, Czechs, workers, prime ministers, Mathieu, etc. The scholar finds tragedy as the second common element, but in Faulkner's writings it is connected with the impending doom of human life, and those of Sartre's with the rigors of freedom. Returning to the objectivity of the author, J. Bruno clarifies that it can be characteristic of an existentialist writer only partially, because the protagonist is increasingly aware of his existence and can express it only with the help of introspection; therefore, Sartre still describes thoughts, but not events, that is, he resorts to the means of a psychological novel. Thus, the literary critic decides that the existentialist writings obtained significant differences from the American novel of the early 20th century [Bruneau 1948, pp. 69–71].

One of the most authoritative contemporary American literary theorists Ihab Hassan, in his article "The Existential Novel" (1962) also notes that the trend popular in Europe originated in American literature of the previous century [Hassan, 1962, p. 795]. With regard to the existential novel itself, he deploys three main "basic propositions" regarding the literary foundations, hero, and form of the writing. The foundation, or world, of the existential novel, according to I. Hassan, is devoid of any assumptions about values, traditions, or beliefs. Offering an example from Walker Percy's novel *The Movie-Goer*, the scholar illustrates the assertion that the artistic world of many American writers, such as N.N. Mailer, J. Kerouac, P. Bowles, etc., is characterized by "universal mendacity" [Ibid., pp. 795–796].

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[1] In this aspect, theorists analyze the importance of the programs of J.P. Sartre, enunciated by Frantz Fanon [1963], one of the founders of postcolonial theory, in his "The Wretched of the Earth" (1961) and reconceived as a tool of support against colonialism, and an influx on postcolonial theorists, including in particular, G.Ch. Spivak and H. Bhabha.

I. Hassan's assumption about the function of the hero in the existential novel is as follows: "to create, like Sysiphus, meaning out of meaningless, being out of nothingness, dignity out of humiliation" [Hassan, 1962, p. 796]. However, he is, or rather seems to be, an anti-hero, and the scholar considers his main problem to be the problem of identity. In his opinion, this is the problem of freedom, since a person is faced not only with the choice of who to be now, but also how to exist in the future [Ibid.]. According to I. Hassan, the artistic form of the existential novel is mainly characterized by irony. He connects modern literature with the grotesque, and, citing the works of F. Dostoevsky as an example, notes that it is characterized by both terror and spiteful laughter. Similar to tragic and comic catharsis, the author introduces the concept of ironic catharsis, which implies the awareness of not only an irreconcilable conflict, but also the absurdity [Ibid., pp. 796–797].

However, the most frequently cited contributor into American literature of the existentialist era studies is Sidney Walter Finkelstein. The national features of American existentialism are presented in his monograph, most fully: aimless revolt, a subjective view of the problems facing the hero, a generation gap. Due to his thorough, comprehensive, conceptually succinct and, at the same time, expressive (Saul Bellow as the "self-appointed clown of American existentialist movement") analysis of many previously unnoticed aspects of American existential prose, he defined the direction of modern studies of existentialist literature; [Kilicci, 2010; Sanders, 2007; Wilcox, 2010]. In the monograph "Existentialism and Alienation in American Literature" (1965), the scholar examines the problem of alienation in American literature of the twentieth century as exemplified in the writings of F.S. Fitzgerald, W. Faulkner, H. Miller and other American authors of the second quarter of the 20th century. Analyzing T.S. Eliot's poetry, he considers the depiction of the acute horror of death, the meaninglessness of life, an approximation to an existential situation. However, he notes that the poet's philosophical views are rather "pre-existential", since they are distinguished by total alienation, allured to Classicism rather than Romanticism, a complete lack of desire for the joy of being [Finkelstein, 1965, pp. 190–193].

As S. Finkelstein sees it, John Dos Passos's style in the trilogy *U.S.A.* is also characterized by detachment, an approach to the depiction of characters that interested the French existentialists and influenced the novel *The Roads to Freedom* by J.-P. Sartre. In H. Miller's writings S. Finkelstein emphasizes the motif of man's loneliness in the world, rebellion without a goal and the desire for freedom inherent in animals, which, as Finkelstein points out, coincides with the existentialist interpretation of freedom. He believes that H. Miller is led to the camp of existentialists by the desire to find a human foundation on which one could build life and which could be opposed to a hostile and absurd world, but he does not recognize himself as an existentialist because existentialism is an expanded and established philosophy, and he is not interested in this [Finkelstein, 1965, pp. 205–209].

The literature of existentialism of the 1950s is characterized by S. Finkelstein as imbued with the intense feeling of crisis. According to the scholar, alienation manifested in family and social relations becomes much more acute and becomes more widespread, the idea that a person cannot know another is cultivated as an eternal truth of life; Existentialist literature of this period shows how people torment each other in a chaotic, absurd world of violence, the dominant themes being sexual crime, physical cruelty, murder or suicide. An example of this in the monograph is the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, in which, as he believes, Tennessee Williams, although he does not utter it directly, understands that his characters and their problems are the product of a certain social and historical situation. In this, in turn, another tendency inherent in the existentialist writers of the 1950s shines through: they become more and more subjective, consider the problems facing their characters also in a purely subjective context, and see in their alienation a reflection of an "eternal human condition", or, in other words, "the existentialist predicament" [Finkelstein, 1965, p. 215].

S. Finkelstein compares the character of captain Mannix in William Styron's short novel *The Long March* with Camus's Sisyphus and declares the statement that reflects the opinion that in the world of madness and tragedy a person is faced with a choice: being and nothingness to be absolutely existentialist. The statement is contained in the letter written by Cass Kinsolving, the protagonist in Styron's psychological major novel *Set This House on Fire*. For the protagonist, this choice is clear, he decides to live, asserting his contempt for the world, and if his bet on freedom

requires him to kill another person, he must do it. This novel, as S. Finkelstein sees it, implies that in order to preserve oneself, one's individuality at least partially inviolable, one should withdraw into a private life, while protecting it if possible, from the interference of public life. In the situation when the world is a jungle an individual frees himself from it by an act of violence determined by the law of the jungle [Ibid., p. 219].

Another specific feature of existentialism literature, as explained by S. Finkelstein, is vividly manifested through to the problem of J. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* protagonist and consists in his perception of the world as such, created and appropriated by adults, and the refusal to live in such a world. In the literature of previous decades, the reflection of alienation in the family and the initiation of a gap between children and parents had to show a complex tangle of tense relations and grievances that arise in parents and trace the consequences of these disccrepancies in children. J. Salinger, according to the critic, introduces a new element – the alienation he portrays in children is in no way connected with any family relationships. The origins of this alienation are in empirical reality, and it already appears as a gap between two generations representing two stages of social development. As a result, Salinger's young characters develop the conviction that the broader world into which they must enter when they become adults is terrible, they do not believe the arguments of their elders, accumulated in the "education" of social experience. S. Finkelstein draws our attention to the fact that the youngest of them seek communication with their siblings, to them, and not to their parents, they approach with trust, they learn from them, because the elders are already quite experienced, they can analyze both their parents and themselves, they know that society is hopelessly spoiled, and desperately they are looking for a way out [Finkelstein, 1965, p. 223]. Alienation, as he asserts, has largely become not only the subject of American authors' oeuvre, but also the manner, the style of writing: the writer, so to speak, is alienated from his own essence. He cites John Updike's novel *Rabbit, Run* as an example and points out that the novel as a whole, although it is written in the third person singular, allows us to see that the difference between the alienation of the protagonist Harry and the alienation of the author lies only in the fact that J. Updike realizes his fortune. According to the scholar, the novel is detached from the problems of social life, the connection with which would help shed light on the questions posed by him, so we learn that the world is harsh, only because of the very manner of narration [Ibid., p. 245].

It is commonly agreed that the impact of philosophical-aesthetic existential thought in the literature of the United States is most clearly manifested in the works of Saul Bellow (*Dangling Man* (1944), *The Victim* (1947)) [Pifer, 1991; Flanzbaum, 2016], as well as in the later writings of the beat generation authors [Mailer, 1957; Ihde, 1967; Murmis, 1964]. Despite the fact that the list of American existentialist writers by the end of the 20th century was finally approved by Western literary studies, it cannot in any way be considered complete without the American writer of Japanese origin John Okada, the author of the novel *No-No Boy* (1957). The objective of the study is to refute this established postulate and demonstrate that the novel should be considered not in a narrow connection with the formation and development of American literature written by authors of Asian origin, but in connection with overcoming the tendency to "hypercanonization" of a limited number of works written by WASP Americans. Research designs are historic-literary and comparative. Since the 1980s and up to the present day, this landmark novel has been studied exclusively as one of the milestones in the formation of the Asian American literary tradition, in a way of cultivating its "otherness," "incompletely-Americanness." In this way, Gayle K. Fujita Sato in "*Momotaro's Exile: John Qkada's* No-No Boy" [Sato, 1992], in particular, sees in the image of Ichiro Yamada a Japanese-American version of the most famous fairy-tale hero in Japan and beyond, the boy Momotaro, and believes that "Momotaro's ogres, in contrast, were always clearly visible, undisguised adversaries, but this does not invalidate an application of the folk tale to Ichiro's situation. Between birth and battle, where the 'fairy tale' elements in here, is the world of human time and space where Momotaro is prepared for battle through the experience of family, and even the tale's extraordinary elements are more relevant than they first appear" [Sato, 1992, p. 244]. In early 21st century research, as can be seen in the monograph Rody C. "Imagination**.** Roots and Passages in Contemporary Asian American Fiction" this belief is transformed into an indisputable fact. In the second decade of the 21st century, Ozeki Ruth, a famous American writer, still evaluates his work in this aspect: "When you died

in 1971 of a heart attack, at the age of forty-seven, you still thought your novel was a failure, and I'm truly sorry about that, and I'm writing this now to tell you that it wasn't. *No-No Boy* has the honor of being the first Japanese American novel, and among the first of what has become an entire literary canon of Asian American literature. You broke the ground for us, John Okada, and now, in 2014, we're celebrating you again. I just wish you were alive to enjoy this moment" [Ozeki, 2014].

One of the main reasons why Okada's interpretation of the intellectual, problematic and thematic content of existentialist literature did not receive a substantive analysis is that American literature written by authors of Asian origin was, in general, perceived by literary critics as marginal and secondary for a long time. Indeed, early Asian American literature, with its sometimes almost documentary autobiography, with its focus exclusively on the depiction of the life of the Asian community in the United States, with the artistic construction of characters that were perceived by Western literary discourse as flattened[2] and incomplete and the specificity of the narrative, did not fit in the canons of the literary mainstream.

One cannot fail to see that in J. Okada's novel, on the one hand, there is a reflection, or even a direct iterance of ideas, problems, images, story lines of existentialist literature. On the other hand, as it will be further illustrated, we can see completely groundbreaking, unconventional for this literature features appear in this text.

According to the strict generational classification of people of Japanese ancestry who lived in North America developed by Japanese Americans and adopted by socio-historical studies, the term *nikkei* refers to the first generation of Japanese immigrants who lived in North and South America, *issei* refers to immigrants who arrived in the Hawaiian Islands and the American continent at the end of the 19th – the first quarter of the 20th century. These generations remained strongly connected to their homeland and its traditions, since emigration to the USA was mainly assessed as a passing phase caused by the difficult financial standing of the family. In contrast to the *issei*, who felt like being a connecting link between countries and epochs, the second generation – *nisei* – suffered their role in American society much more tragically. Their representatives had a strong reason for this – Pearl Harbor. The most famous battle of WWII in North America, in which the US army was defeated by Japan, had a devastating effect on both the mentality of Americans and on the fate and fortunes of Japanese communities in the United States, which burst into the tide of anti-Japanese sentiments, the violent mass relocation of Japanese Americans into internment camps and the emergence of a social phenomenon called "No-No Boy". The "No-No Boys" were young American citizens of Japanese descent who answered "no" to two so-called "loyalty questions" asked of them during World War II: "Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?" and "Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any and all attacks by foreign and domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or disobedience to the Japanese Emperor, or any other foreign government, power, or organization?"

The twenty-five-year-old *nisei* protagonist of John Okada's novel *No-No Boy* returns home after two years in an internment camp and consecutive two years in prison, which he was sentenced to as a result of the fact that he, like many other Japanese-backgrounded citizens of the United States, answered negatively to both questions. This novel is not autobiographical. John Okada himself served in the US Air Force and left military service after World War II as a sergeant. His novel, revealing the tragedy of the Japanese population of the United States, that were deported en masse to camps and prisons during the war, was, however, negatively perceived by the Japanese American community. Apparently, the Japanese, who just got the opportunity to return from the camps, were not ready either to press on with the investigation of the causes of the tragedy, and even more so to demand justice from the United States government, nor to recall that not by all Japanese the USA was treated like the motherland they were ready to protect. As a result, the novel fell into oblivion among John Okada's contemporaries and was rediscovered only in the 1970s of the 20th century on the wave of resonant post-colonial debates that

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[2] Unlike modernist artists, for whom flattening became a special artistic technique developed under the influence of Japanese and Chinese art, Euro-Atlantic literary critics neglected the suggestive scope of what seemed to them to be an ordinary two-dimensional image.

explored the issues of culture, migration, race, gender, and identity. Contemporary Asian American literary studies recognize *No-No Boy* as a classic Asian American novel that created a "painful and disturbing portrait of postwar Japanese American life" [Yogi, 1997 p. 137]. We believe that it was recognized as such first and foremost because it was the first book questioning matters painful for an entire generation of *nisei*, both those who fought on the side of the United States and those who refused. Question one: does "*a big country with a big heart*" [Okada, 1976, p. 95], as one of the female characters portrays it, have the right to turn the lives of a large part of its inhabitants into a tragedy? Question two: is it enough to defend it from enemies and give it your leg in parts (or your life in its entirety) so that it will finally recognize you and your family as its law-abiding citizens?

The first deep and convincing analysis of J. Okada's novel was made by Elaine Kim, a professor at the University of California, a renowned expert in the field of Asian American studies. In her famous 1982 monograph "Asian American Literature. An Introduction to the Writings and their Social Context", that has become the forerunner of an impartial systemic literary analysis of Asian American literature, the author argues that, first and foremost, *No-No Boy* is a novel about the rebellion of the *nisei* against the *issei* generation [Kim, 1982, p. 148]. In it, the critic highlights weakness as a key feature of all the images in the novel. The Japanese community is weak and divided, "torn apart by the almost hysterical desire of its members to be accepted as genuine Americans, no matter what the cost" [Ibid., p. 149], the brothers Ichiro and Taro Yamada, who inherited their father's weakness [Ibid., p. 151], Ichiro's friend, war veteran Kenji Kanno, who is losing his leg inch by inch, America itself in the novel is disjointed and unhealthy [Ibid., p. 153]. The disunity and destructive impact of American racism on Japanese American community and its members are depicted through the incompleteness of each individual character: what Ichiro lacks is compensated for by Kenji, Freddy, and Bull [Ibid., p. 156]. However, it is hard to fully accept the critic's belief that most of the characters in the novel are not fully developed. In our opinion, this statement is only partially true – when it comes to some secondary figures (Emi, Ichiro's father and younger brother). To a large extent, it is attributed to the fact that the emphasis of the study of the novel *No-No Boy* above all is made on the fact that this is the first Japanese American novel, which defined a new stage in the development of Asian American literature, depicting the young generation of Japanese Americans, who fully embody the conflict of both components of their double identity. However, it is worth shifting the perspective away from such an obvious and tempting national and cultural problems involved in the novel. In this case, firstly, the theme of the Lost Generation that became the leitmotif of the writings of early 20th century European and American modernist authors seen through the prism of existentialism philosophy, comes to the fore. Secondly, the specificity of revealing the characters of Kenji, Freddy and Ichiro manifests itself much brighter in the existentialist philosophical and literary projection.

The direct impact of J.-P. Sartre's and A. Camus's artistic and aesthetic world on the poetics of J. Okada's novel is both in the direct definition of Ichiro Yamada as "the intruder", given to him already on the first pages of the novel, in the replication of story lines (Ichiro's escape from his mother's funeral to go dancing with a girl instead of a memorial service is a turpitude for a Japanese son, even the protagonist of A. Camus's novel *The Outsider* does not violate public norms so defiantly), and in the everlasting sense of utter absurdity of the surrounding reality. Absurd is the behavior of Ichiro's mother, stubbornly unwilling to admit Japan's defeat in World War II. It is difficult to explain Eto Minato's ostentatious hatred towards Ichiro ("*Rotten bastard. Shit on you*" – Etocoughed up a mouthful of sputum, and rolled his words around it: "*Rotten, no-good bastard*" [Okada, 1976, p. 4]) solely because Eto agreed to fight against Japan, and Ichiro did not. Absurd and senseless is Ichiro's mobbing and stalking by drunken African Americans, who finally vented their insult for their own eternal oppression ("*persecution in the drawl of the persecuted*") on those who found themselves in an even more humiliating circumstances: "*Go back to Tokyo, boy. ...Jap-boy, To-ki-yo, Jap-boy, To-ki-yo...*" [Ibid., p. 5]. The selective attitude of the American administration towards its citizens also cannot be explained logically, that is why there is no answer to the question addressed to the judge: "*... you couldn't have loyal Japanese when Japan is the country you're fighting and, if so, how about the Germans and Italians, that must be just as questionable as the Japanese, or we wouldn't be fighting Germany and Italy?*" [Ibid., p. 31].

Ichiro, who is trying to understand himself in his countless interior monologues, recalls with bitter irony these court proceedings, which determined fates of people like him. In these memories, not only the judge, who "*looked like Italian and had a German name*" looks senseless [Ibid., p. 32], but also his own fellow citizens who, in a desperate desire to escape prison and internment, agreed to renounce their ethnic background: "*Maybe I look Japanese and my father and mother and brothers and sisters look Japanese, but we're better Americans than the regular ones because that's the way it has to be when one looks Japanese but is really a good American. We're not like the other Japanese who aren't good Americans like us. We're more like you and the other, regular Americans. All you have to do is give us back our home and grocery store and let my kid brother be all-city like me. Nobody has to know. We can be Chinese. We'll call ourselves Chin or Yang or something like that and it'll be the best thing you've ever done, sir*" [Ibid., p. 33].

The sense of absurdity is heightened when the reader is shown a short scene of President Roosevelt visiting a Japanese internment camp ("concentration camp" according to Japanese Americans), during which the American military was officially divided into "security risk" (Japanese Americans) and "loyal" (all the rest), and the latter kept the former at gunpoint to avoid assassination. Despite the fact that a reader observes this scene through the eyes of Ichiro's interned father, it lacks evaluative judgments and is entirely built on syntactic parallelism, where the repetition of the anaphoric "and" and the saturation of verbs ("had gone", "had come", "had been present", "spoke", "departed") record the sequence of actions, imitating black-and-white frames of a wartime actuality shots. The conciseness of the figurative figures of speech gives a reader the opportunity to independently assess the atmosphere permeated with fear and hatred in the USA after Pearl Harbor, which bereft the Americans of their common sense, "…*when the president named Roosevelt had come to the camp in Kansas and all the American soldiers in the camp who were Japanese had been herded into a warehouse and guarded by other American soldiers with machine guns until the president named Roosevelt had departed*" [Okada, 1976, p. 121]. And in this it can be traced a genetic connection with the Japanese artistic canon, in particular, with the embodiment of the aesthetic principles of "kanso" ("simplicity") "yūgen" ("*subtle, elusive depth of things*"), which exclude the subjective experience of the character and are intended to generate in the reader not an individually defined emotion, but insight. It is this black-and-white scene that gives depth to the ostensibly decoratively prosperous Kenji Kanno's family story and explains why Ichiro is not the only one who feels like an outsider in post-war American society. The friend of him Kenji, a respected war veteran who lost a leg in action, feels no more American than the protagonist. He is as discombobulated and lonely as Ichiro himself: "*Kenji sipped his coffee gingerly. 'So, what are your plans?' – 'Haven't got any.' – 'That makes it nice' – 'Does it?' – 'Sure' – 'Why?' – 'I haven't any either'*" [Okada, 1976, p. 59]).

The traditional characteristics of American existentialist literature described by S. Finkelstein – aimless revolt, a subjective view of the problems facing the hero, a generational gap – are fully represented in D. Okada's novel. The depiction of a generation gap between children and parents as a distinctive feature of existentialist literature in J. Okada's novel is localized on Ichiro's family. Kenji's family is seemingly quite healthy and prosperous. His father, unlike Ichiro's parents, does not dream of leaving for Japan and has adapted to the American way of life. Kenji's family is generally so similar to the American one. In the evenings, his father watches baseball on TV, his entire large family gathers for weekends, and his oldest grandchildren are named one of the most common American names – Tom and Eddy. But copying the external side of the American model of behavior, the elder Kanno no less than his parents realizes that he is Japanese. That is why, during the war, the news that his son did not fight with the Japanese turned out to be the greatest happiness for the old man: "*But with training over, Kenji had written that he was going to Europe, and the next letter was from Italy, where the Americans were fighting the Germans, and he found relief in the knowledge, partly because Kenji was fighting and he knew that was what his son wished and partly because the enemy was German, not Japanese*" [Ibid., p. 122]. The detached attitude of the head of the family to both warring parties – the Americans and the Germans – is seen through the simplified and generalized wording "*the Americans fought the Germans*", and in this we can read the suggestively present meaning of the arguments of the Kanno family members: "*as long as Kenji does not shoot at his people (the Japanese), this is someone else's war*".

The image of the Lost Generation in J. Okada's novel is replenished not only with the image of Kenji, the veteran who, like E.M. Remark's, E. Hemingway's, and R. Aldington's characters, was mutilated and devastated by the war physically and morally so much that already meeting Ichiro for the first time in the university campus, he shares his thoughts about committing suicide: "*No, it's not painful at all. Talking about it (leg – O.M.) doesn't hurt. Not having it doesn't hurt. But it hurts where it ought to be. Sometimes I think about killing myself*" [Okada, 1976, p. 61]. Despite the fact that his exceptional heroism was fully celebrated by the American government – he was awarded the "Gold Star", one of the highest military awards of the USA, he was given a new car and ensured the opportunity to continue his education – he is tormented by the fact that neither his bravery, nor even the lost leg helped protect his large family from internment. His resentment towards the country in which he was born, but was never recognized as a full-fledged citizen, is manifested as an ironic reduction of his military merits: "*A medal, a car, a pension and even an education. Just for packing a rifle. Is that good?*" [Ibid., p. 60], as well as in the emphatically contemptuous attitude towards Americans, which can be read both in the use of the ironic personified image "Uncle Sam" when explaining to Ichiro who gave him a car [Ibid., p. 59] and in the pronoun "they" in relation to their WASP-compatriots ("*they gave me a medal*").

Ichiro's friend "no-no boy" Freddie Akimoto, who pursues a debauched life after being released from prison, can also be attributed to the Lost Generation. Unable to find a job and his place in a life full of hatred of people, he unconsciously, unlike the noble and sensitive Kenji, is looking for ways to settle scores with it, embodying the above-noted by S. Finkelstein haphazard rebellion by provoking the already embittered environment into endless conflicts. In the end, he dies in a car accident, fleeing from a drunken brawl. Ichiro's brother Taro, who was not mobilized for the war because of his youth, also becomes a representative of the Lost Generation in this novel. He hates his mother for the fact that all her years of life in the United States she did not make the slightest effort to understand and begin respecting this country, his brother for his weakness of will, and his father for his lack of character. Hatred and despair force him to join the army and thus correct Ichiro's mistake: "'It's been nice', he said and he might have been on the verge of tears. 'I got things to do'. He stood and looked down at Ichiro, wanting to speak but not finding the words in himself to tell his brother that he had to go in the army because of his brother whose weakness *made it impossible for him to do otherwise and because he did not understand what it was about his mother that haunted him day and night and pulled his insides into meaningless bits and was slowly destroying him. And it was because of these things and because he was furiously mixed up that he had to cut himself free and spare himself the anguish of his brother which he knew must be there even if he was a stranger to him, and maybe that was still another reason why he was going*" [Okada, 1976, p. 67].

Along with the fact that the image of the Lost Generation in the novel is significantly elaborated and complicated, in the theme of the Lost Generation J. Okada places new accents related to the racial bias of American society and discrimination, showing that whatever the military merits of Japanese Americans, they will not help them become "insiders" in America. Freddy says about this: "*Before the war, the Japs got what the white guys didn't want. Now, if we want work, we take the jobs the good Japs don't want*" [Ibid., p. 203]. His remark is full of bitter sarcasm, and the disparaging meaning of the word "Japs" is only emphasized by the mocking definition "good" and explains the main thing – the disdainful attitude towards the Japanese in America is unchanged, while the division of the Japanese in the mind of the white American into "good" and "bad" only strengthens it.

Asian American literature of the first half of the 20th century, as we have seen, is characterized by attempts to develop essential components of traditional Asian culture within the framework of new artistic forms and methods. In this aspect, the iteration of A. Camus's funeral episode, driven by the Japanese American author J. Okada to the extreme (the escape from Ichiro's mother funeral ceremony in a Buddhist temple and invitation Emi to the dancing club) looks not only as an Asian American version of the Western literary school, a kind of a "carriage return" and the completion of a certain stage of the development of American literature written by the authors of Asian origin. This novel is not a "carriage return" because the protagonist, who survived the loss of his closest friends (physically) and brother (spiritually), did not just escape his own destruction. The finale of the novel, in which Ichiro, deprived of all

family, friendship, and love ties, feels the limitlessness of his freedom due to the realization of the immensity of the world around him, much more convincingly than the previous literature of the Existentialism, acts as a projection of the author's break with both the Asian American canon and reinterpretation of the classical artistic tradition in general.

However, this is neither the only nor the exclusive point. The Japanese literary canon as an artistic unconscious guides the poetics of Okada's text. Its foundation is largely formed by the philosophical and aesthetic principles of traditional Japanese art, among which fidelity to tradition, respect for ancientness, classics, etc. are one of the main ones. This is clearly seen in the writing of the Japanese author Kōbō Abe immensely influenced by existential philosophy as well. Scholars have repeatedly pointed out not only the consonance of the artistic manifestation of the ideas of existentialism. For example, when comparing the writings of J.-P. Sartre's *Nausea* and Kōbō Abe's *The Woman in the Dunes* (1962), one can see how freedom is born through the process of thinking, and this process is conditioned by the rejection of the past. Of course, the final concept of freedom in the writings is built on different philosophical and aesthetic traditions, but the idea that a person isolates itself from the world around it, realizing his non-involvement and alienation from it, obviously resonates. Critics also found direct correspondences of images, counterpoints, artistic details, etc. It is sufficient to pay attention to the minor characters, deprived of proper names. Jumpei Niki calls his friend from the real world nothing other than Möbius strip, and the woman who embars him, just Woman. Antoine Roquentin in *Nausea* by J.-P. Sartre calls one of the secondary characters The Autodidact. What is also important is that the mentioned minor characters are antagonists of the philosophy, the bearers of which are the protagonists, representing socialist ideology. And in general, Kōbō Abe's Möbius strip is an image identical to The Autodidact of the novel *Nausea* by the French writer.

These are two just briefly represented instances. There are other identities as well. It is important to understand here that for a Western artist, originality, unhackneyed artistic vision, and creative freedom are of key importance (in this regard, we should recall how these virtues of an artistic endeavor are conveyed through the Gospel parable "*And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But the new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved*"). For a Japanese artist, the "traces" of previous texts are one of the forms of implementing the aesthetic principle of sabi (respect for tradition, veneration of previous masters, admiration for antiquity) and demonstrating his artistry. The same is when it comes to J. Okada's novel. We are neither dealing with replication and iteration the Euro-Atlantic literary tradition, nor with literary "mimicry," but with the emergence of that artistic and aesthetic unconscious that in literary studies is called the canon. His novel, like Kobo Abe's *Woman in the Dunes*, is the quintessence of the idea proclaimed by the medieval poetess Li Qingzhao in her *Essay on Ci* about artistic form as "an old bowl for new wine" [Dashchenko, 2015], that is, about the artist's ability to fill the well-known, long-familiar with new senses. The substantial presence of Japanese aesthetics in Western literature is not a new phenomenon and was most distinctively manifested in the work of Imagist poets. This aspect has been deeply studied in contemporary national literary studies. Thus, Japanologist G. Lipin in one of his works "Japaneseness *Versus* Japonism: Modernization In Anglo-American Poetry Of The Early Twentieth Century" [2018], devoted to the study of this issue, emphasizes that in an effort to distance themselves from the "mimetic-expressive principle," modernist poets sought ways to change and renew the nature of verse: " In search of a new poetic language, a new system of images, they developed ways of interiorizing the artistic form of Japanese haiku, a genre that became a kind of artistic matrix for them. … They paved the way for new poetry. This was caused by the cumulative effect of numerous implantations of Japanese poetics and aesthetics, the development on new literary soil of the characteristic possibilities of these poetic forms." [Lipin, 2018, p. 48]. And he further explains the poetics and nature of the presence in the poems of the Imagists of both the aesthetic category of satori and the poetic integration into English-language poetry of the simplicity and precision of language characteristic of haiku: "These were the features that they openly declared in their manifestos (prefaces to poetry collections and in individual essays) and in their innovative work they sought to instill in English-language poetry the quintessence of artistic truth that they saw in the genre of Japanese haiku" [Ibid., p. 49]. In his another publication "'Walden' by Henry Thoreau and

Japanese aesthetics of transcendence" (2019), the scholar examines the influence of Japanese culture on the book "Walden" by the American writer and transcendentalist philosopher H.D. Thoreau and comes to the conclusion that the aesthetic and poetic basis inherent in the haiku genre (sabi, wabi, kurumi, hosomi, shibumi, etc.) is uniquely revealed in the chapter *Sounds*, which is an artistic synthesis of prose, poetry and philosophy [Lipin, 2019].

Thus, for English-language literature, the aesthetic principles that formed the Japanese artistic tradition were a conscious borrowing, a search for paths to a new sophisticated literature through the "inoculation" of Japaneseness. In J. Okada's novel, the Japanese artistic and aesthetic canon is revealed unconsciously, it shines through the existential aesthetics. It not only reflects a reconsideration of the Lost Generation in American existentialist literature, it is the first to read that the nature of existentialist literature can have its origins in the Japanese artistic and aesthetic canon as well. And this makes J. Okada's novel an absolutely unique phenomenon in American literature. And only with this in mind can one truly read the novel *No-No Boy* anew.

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EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE LOST GENERATION IN J. OKADA'S NOVEL *NO-NO BOY*

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John Okada is one of the most famous representatives of Asian American literature, that received a powerful impetus for development after World War II. The writer was one of the first to depict the premises and consequences of the complex self-identification that Japanese Americans had to go through during and after World War II. The writer, who saw the horrors of war and the forced policy that broke the fates of people of the country with his own eyes, creates a novel that reflects the confusion of the representatives of the "*nisei*" generation, who find themselves at a crossroads in their own destinies. Published in 1957 *No-No Boy*, the only novel by an American writer of Japanese descent, is now attributed to the "jurisdiction" of postcolonial discourse, Asian American studies and ethnic/post-ethnic studies in American literary criticism, remain unexplored. Today, this is the writer bearing incontestable status of one of the forebears of Japanese American literature, fathers of the Asian American literary canon. *The objective* of the study is to refute this established postulate and demonstrate that the novel should be considered not in a narrow connection with the formation and development of American literature written by authors of Asian origin, but in connection with overcoming the tendency to "hypercanonization" of a limited number of works written by WASP Americans. Research *methods* are historic-literary and comparative. As a result of the research, it has been found out that J. Okada's novel is important not only because it contains an existentialist projection of the Lost Generation, one of the key images for the European and American literatures of the second third of the 20th century. But it adds completely new features that are not characteristic of this image. Its significance lies in the fact that its poetics reveals a genetic cohesion with the classical Japanese philosophical and aesthetic tradition. Taking this into account, J. Okada's novel is presented not simply as an Asian American version of the Western literary school, a kind of "carriage return" and the milestone of a certain stage in the development of American literature written by authors of Asian origin. The study of this novel with an emphasis on its aesthetic and poetic features reveals a significant influence of the classical aesthetic principles of Japanese art, which, despite its apparent replication, makes this writing a unique example of the penetration of a new artistic construing of the philosophical framework of existentialism into the American existential literary canon.