

Existential Characteristics in Ta Duy Anh's Works and The Ideological Influence of Franz Kafka

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Abstract

This study examines the existential themes in Ta Duy Anh's works, highlighting the influence of Franz Kafka's ideology. Through textual analysis and comparative literary review, it explores themes of loneliness, absurdity, and skepticism in Ta Duy Anh's narratives and their connection to Kafka's ideas. The research identifies specific instances where Kafka's existential themes are reflected and reinterpreted in a Vietnamese cultural context. It emphasizes the thematic parallels and stylistic adaptations Ta Duy Anh employs to make these existential concerns relevant to Vietnamese readers. The findings reveal a deep engagement with themes of alienation, absurdity, and skepticism, showcasing Kafka's significant influence on Ta Duy Anh and contributing to a broader understanding of cross-cultural literary influences.

Keywords: Franz Kafka, Ta Duy Anh, Existential Ideology, Comparative Literature, Ideology Influence

INTRODUCTION

Since the implementation of the Doi Moi (renovation) policy in Vietnam in 1986, there has been a significant influx of Western cultural influences into the country's literary domain. This policy marked a pivotal shift, facilitating extensive cultural and intellectual exchanges between Vietnam and the Western world. Consequently, the cohort of writers who matured post-1986 has actively incorporated these influences, revitalizing their literary works and adapting to the evolving cultural and social milieu.

The 1990s, in particular, witnessed a substantial increase in the translation and publication of Western philosophical, cultural, and literary texts. The introduction of seminal Western works previously unavailable to Vietnamese readers, broadening their intellectual horizons. Notable among these translations were "The Castle," "The Trial," and "Metamorphosis" by Franz Kafka. These texts gave Vietnamese writers and scholars new perspectives, fostering a deeper engagement with global literary currents.

The existential themes in Kafka's works, especially those exploring alienation, absurdity, and the human condition, have profoundly influenced the artistic philosophies of the post-1986 generation of Vietnamese writers. Among these, Ta Duy Anh has significantly integrated Kafka's existentialist motifs into his own literary creations. Born in 1959, T.D. Anh is recognized as one of Vietnam's most eminent contemporary writers. Anh's literary oeuvre garners significant attention from domestic and international audiences, attributed to his innovative artistic techniques, postmodern perspectives, and existential themes that evoke a Kafkaesque essence. This synthesis of Kafka's existentialism with Vietnam's specific cultural and social contexts has resulted in a distinctive and enriched literary corpus, reflecting local and global influences. The cross-cultural literary exchange initiated by the Doi Moi policy continues to shape and invigorate Vietnamese literature, contributing to a dynamic and diverse literary landscape.

The existential philosophy in F. Kafka's works has been discussed in several studies. Existentialism, while its roots can be traced back to the early 19th century, is primarily recognized as a 20th-century philosophical doctrine. Unlike other philosophical systems, existentialism lacks a codified set of rules, making it inherently difficult to categorize as a formal system. This philosophy examines the essence of human existence, emphasizing themes like the redundancy of the world, the individual's complete isolation, and the notion of free will, each subject to numerous interpretations. Soren Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre are esteemed as

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pivotal figures in existentialist thought, contributing significantly to its development and influence in modern philosophy. By the early 20th century, existentialist concepts had permeated various fields, including psychology and literature. Franz Kafka was among the prominent authors who engaged deeply with these existential themes. Maria-Zoica Balaban (2021) in the work titled "Franz Kafka and the Absurd Universe" stated: "Unlike Joyce, whose novel becomes esoteric, Kafka becomes the founder of an absurd novel. In Kafka's novel, the meaning is suspended in a world that is unable to understand and promote true ideals and values. Franz Kafka represents for 20th-century literature a point of reference, that of the introduction of the myth of anguish and the absurd in the realm of universal literature". Absurd is one of the typical characteristics of existential philosophy raised in F.Kafka's *The Castle*, *The Trial*, *Metamorphosis*. In another work, "The Kafkaesque and the Absurd – Fear and Hope in the Writings of Franz Kafka and Albert Camus", Lars Strahler-Pohl (2022) conducted a comparative study on Albert Camus and F.Kafka, focusing on the existential questions of human life in these authors. The study of Lars Strahler-Pohl highlights the mythical figure of Sisyphus, who has no hope, compared to Josef K. in "The Trial," who is tied to both hope and fear. By focusing on hope, fear, and silence, this article offers a new way to look at the Absurd and the Kafkaesque. Focusing on the existential ideas in the Kafkaesque world, Muhammad Adnan Akbar (et al.) (2022) mentioned that the Kafkaesque world vividly portrays the traumas inherent in the existential realm, with this study primarily focusing on the phenomenon of identity, which is perpetually in flux amid the ever-changing dimensions of the existential journey. Characteristics of existentialism, such as authentic and inauthentic existence and good and bad faith, are crucial binaries for evaluating a character's identity at any given moment. Existential ideas in Kafka's works are among the primary concerns of researchers worldwide. Md Jashim Uddin (2024) raised a question on existential crisis in F.Kafka's work and discussed the existential crisis in modern man's life reflected in F.Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. In F.Kafka's work, an existential crisis is frequent in modern life, stemming from feelings of meaninglessness and a sense of disconnection from oneself, others, and the world. This state of being can be triggered by various factors, such as the rapid pace of technological change, globalization, and societal pressures.

Researchers have extensively explored existential ideas in Kafka's works, highlighting his deep engagement with existential philosophy. Existentialism, a 20th-century doctrine, examines human existence, emphasizing themes like isolation, free will, and the absurd. Key figures like Kierkegaard and Sartre significantly influenced this philosophy. Kafka's novels, such as *The Castle*, *The Trial*, and *Metamorphosis*, embody existential themes, portraying a world filled with angst and absurdity. Studies by Maria-Zoica Balaban and Lars Strahler-Pohl emphasize Kafka's role in illustrating existential crises through characters facing hopelessness and fear. Muhammad Adnan Akbar and Md Jashim Uddin further discuss Kafka's depiction of identity flux and modern life's existential crises.

In Vietnam, the book *Franz Kafka: The Brainwasher of Humanity* discusses Kafka's influence on Vietnamese and international writers. H.B.Le (2018) asserts Kafka's influence on prominent writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez, John Maxwell Coetzee, Vladimir Nabokov, and Haruki Murakami. The researcher also points out that Kafka has inspired and influenced contemporary Vietnamese writers such as D.A Ta. T.H.A Thai asserts Kafka's influence in the works of contemporary Vietnamese writers, including D.A Ta: "Regarding Kafka, Ta Duy Anh is primarily influenced by the issue of human existence. His perceptions of alienation, the absurdity of the real world, and the distortion of human beings in the gears of modern society are recreated by D.A.Ta through a writing style that is both realistic and satirical. More distinctively, his perceptions of modern human loneliness and anxiety and his artistic creations are notable. In this regard, Kafka's influence on D.A Ta is very clear" (pp.100-101).

Numerous studies have analyzed the characteristics of existentialism in F. Kafka's works, particularly focusing on themes such as the consciousness of loneliness, absurdity, and skepticism. Several researchers have confirmed Kafka's influence on D.A. Ta. However, it remains to be systematically examined which specific aspects of Kafka's existential ideas impact D.A. Ta's writings and how these influences are manifested in his works. This study fills the gap in identifying the manifestations of existential thought in D.A. Ta's works, mainly focusing on the archetype of the lonely individual, the sense of absurdity, and skepticism. These elements will be analyzed for their similarities to the artistic sensibilities found in F. Kafka's literature.

METHODOLOGY

In this paper, we employ literary text analysis to examine the philosophical and artistic characteristics in D.A. Ta's works associated with existential thought. This method allows us to explore how existential themes are woven into his narratives, character development, and stylistic choices. Furthermore, we utilize comparative literature methods to draw parallels between the existential expressions found in the works of D.A. Ta and those of F. Kafka. By comparing and contrasting these two authors, we aim to highlight the similarities in their treatment of themes, such as the archetype of the lonely individual, the sense of absurdity, and skepticism. This dual-method approach provides a comprehensive understanding of how D.A. Ta's literary creations resonate with and reflect the existential motifs that are prominently featured in Kafka's oeuvre.

RESEARCH RESULTS

THE SENSE OF LONELINESS IN D.A.TA'S WORKS AND ITS SIMILARITIES TO F. KAFKA'S

In D.A. Ta's literary works, readers encounter characters who experience profound loneliness and abandonment in absurd and inescapable circumstances reminiscent of Kafka's renowned trilogy, including *The Castle*, *The Trial*, and *Metamorphosis*. D.A. Ta's narratives are deeply influenced by Kafka's existentialist ideology, reflecting themes of alienation, absurdity, and the often futile search for meaning in an indifferent world.

In the novel *The Repentant Angel*, D.A. Ta intricately portrays characters experiencing varying degrees of alienation and solitude. The narrative centers on an unborn child enveloped in fear and anxiety about potential abandonment, who hears numerous distressing accounts of other unborn children: one preserved in alcohol after birth, another terminated before full formation. The hospital, which should serve as a haven of safety and life preservation, is depicted as a grim slaughterhouse filled with harrowing images of crime, violence, blood, shouting, and crying. Each nascent life, ideally welcomed with warmth by family and medical staff, instead encounters the absurdities of rejection, abandonment, infanticide, preservation in alcohol, or perpetual darkness. This depiction starkly embodies Kafka's existential dread, illustrating the human condition as inherently isolated and subjected to incomprehensible forces.

In another work, D.A. Ta crafts a Kafkaesque atmosphere imbued with lonely characters. The novel *Searching for Characters* features individuals such as Chu Quý, a journalist; Dr. N; writer Trần Bản; and Thảo Miên, a high-class prostitute. Chu Quý's father's execution during land reform precipitated a childhood marked by hardship and emotional deprivation. Chu Quý engaged in numerous liaisons with prostitutes to escape hunger, disease, fear, and retribution, resulting in a venereal disease that further isolated him, rendering him unable to approach women despite his yearning for love and intimacy. Obsessed with the murder of a shoeshine boy, he ventures to G street to investigate, only to be engulfed in an environment of suspicion, rejection, and alienation. The residents of G Street ostracize him, perceiving him as a pervert, swindler, and thief. He fails to establish connections with the locals, and his friends, Dr. N and writer Bản, increasingly distance themselves. Enveloped by rejection and rumors, Chu Quý succumbs to fatigue, confusion, anxiety, and despair. The absurdity lies in his immersion in rumors, leading to self-doubt and a lost sense of identity. This mirrors Kafka's existential themes, where the protagonist's search for truth and connection is met with overwhelming isolation and absurdity.

Concomitantly, Thảo Miên exemplifies another solitary character in the novel of *Searching for Characters*. Following the dissolution of her previously content family, Thảo Miên becomes a high-class prostitute on G Street. Before encountering Chu Quý, her relationships were purely exploitative, driven by personal desires for money and sex. Upon meeting Chu Quý, the two solitary individuals quickly bond, sharing a hopeless love. Despite their affection, Thảo Miên loses faith in men and love, while Chu Quý, burdened by psychological and physiological shame, lacks the fortitude to transcend the somber shadows of his soul. At the pinnacle of loneliness and tragedy, Thảo Miên transforms herself into a torch, abandoning herself and severing all ties with the world and Chu Quý. This culmination of despair and self-destruction is a powerful reflection of Kafka's influence on D.A. Ta, showcasing the existential struggle against an uncaring universe.

In D.A. Ta's literary creations, the sense of loneliness is a prominent theme, echoing the existential isolation found in F. Kafka's narratives. Both authors explore alienated characters who exist in fragmented, disconnected relationships. In Kafka's trilogy—*The Castle*, *The Trial*, and *America*—characters navigate a mysterious and unpredictable world, facing absurd challenges and societal alienation. Similarly, D.A. Ta's characters experience profound loneliness, grappling with an indifferent world and confronting the absurdities of modern life. This shared exploration of loneliness and alienation underscores the thematic resonance between the two authors' works.

THE SENSE OF ABSURDITY IN D.A.TA'S WORKS AND ITS SIMILARITIES TO F. KAFKA'S

The sense of absurdity profoundly present in D.A.Ta's works allows readers to connect this feeling with Kafkaesque absurdity. Each character represents a fate subjected to different forms of exile. The character of Chu Quy's father in *Searching for Characters*, for instance, is unjustly accused and endures being easily tied up and led away like a buffalo. After his exile in prison and undergoing relentless interrogations, he returns as someone drained of vitality. This scenario resonates deeply with Kafkaesque absurdity, where institutions, courts, and invisible powers deny the father any opportunity to defend himself or speak out, instead compelling blind compliance. His soul is tormented with unanswered questions, embodying a profound sense of loneliness, anxiety, and fear within both space and time. The absurdity continues as an inescapable reality: the innocent are imprisoned while the guilty roam free. The recurring question, "Has anyone returned?" haunts the narrative, reflecting the futile human effort to forge relationships amidst relentless, cruel fate. This Kafkaesque influence is also apparent in D.A.Ta's short stories *Reincarnation* and *My Father's House*, where the father figure is perpetually consumed by an inexplicable anxiety, self-exiled within his own world.

The characters in D.A. Ta's works are always filled with an inexplicable anxiety, imbued with Kafkaesque absurdity. Dr. N of *Searching for Characters* holds a position that many people dream of. However, he has secluded himself in a private world that is unknown even to his wife. His routine of waking up at four in the morning and retreating to his office plunges him into a painful state haunted by past events. Despite his prestigious life and material abundance, he cannot escape his guilt. He constantly lives in anxiety, fearing that someone will discover his true origins. His refusal to seek out or acknowledge his twin brother in an attempt to preserve his own "honor" has left him living in perpetual torment and obsession. Dr. N's inner world is filled with anxiety as he faces nightly dreams about his father. Every night, the tribunal of his conscience convenes, causing him great suffering. On one hand, he wants to preserve his own honor and that of his adoptive family. On the other hand, he is tormented by the fact that he has deceived everyone and been cruel and indifferent towards his biological brother. He lives in a state of constant anxiety, fearing that the truth will be discovered and the subsequent fallout when his deception is revealed.

F. Kafka's absurdity is characterized by portraying a senseless, irrational world where characters face overwhelming and often incomprehensible forces. In F.Kafka's works, such as *The Trial* and *The Castle*, individuals are subjected to absurd bureaucratic systems and arbitrary, opaque authorities that deny them justice, understanding, or any meaningful resolution. The characters are often caught in nightmarish situations where their efforts to seek clarity or redemption are met with futility and alienation. This absurdity reflects the existential crises Kafka explores, highlighting themes of isolation, the quest for meaning in a seemingly indifferent universe, and the pervasive sense of guilt and anxiety.

In the work of *The Trial*, Josef K. is arrested and prosecuted by a remote, inaccessible authority, with the nature of his crime never revealed. The legal system is depicted as an inscrutable, labyrinthine nightmare that thwarts any attempt at rationality or justice. Similarly, in *The Castle*, the protagonist K. struggles against the enigmatic bureaucracy of the Castle authorities, encountering a series of frustrating and nonsensical obstacles in his quest to gain access and fulfill his role as a land surveyor. Kafka's absurdity emphasizes the disconnection between individuals and the systems that govern their lives, highlighting the human condition's existential despair and illogical nature.

In essence, Kafka's absurdity underscores the existential themes of alienation, the absurdity of existence, and the struggle to find meaning in a world devoid of clear purpose or justice. His characters' perpetual battles against incomprehensible and indifferent forces serve as a metaphor for the human condition, capturing the essence of existentialist thought.

The sense of absurdity is profoundly present in D.A. Ta's works, allowing readers to connect this feeling with Kafkaesque absurdity. In both authors' works, characters endure different forms of existential exile, facing unjust accusations and relentless interrogations. For instance, in D.A. Ta's *Searching for Characters*, Chu Quý's father is unjustly accused and suffers a Kafkaesque fate, being led away like a buffalo, drained of vitality when he returns. This scenario mirrors Kafka's world, where institutions deny characters any chance to defend themselves, instead forcing blind compliance. The characters in both authors' works are tormented with unanswered questions, embodying profound loneliness, anxiety, and fear. Similarly, Dr. N, another character in the novel, embodies Kafkaesque absurdity in the same novel as D.A. Ta. Despite his prestigious position, he secludes himself in a private world unknown to his wife. His routine plunges him into a painful state, haunted by past events. Dr. N's internal world is filled with anxiety as he constantly fears his true origins will be discovered. His refusal to acknowledge his twin brother to preserve his "honor" results in perpetual torment and obsession. Every night, his conscience torments him, reflecting his deceit and cruelty towards his biological brother. Similar to Kafka's characters, this sense of inescapable absurdity and existential crisis underscores the thematic resonance between D.A. Ta and Kafka's works.

THE SENSE OF SKEPTICISM IN D.A.TA'S WORKS AND ITS SIMILARITIES TO F. KAFKA'S

Skepticism is a prominent existential theme in F. Kafka's works, reflecting the inner turmoil and anxiety of individuals in modern society when confronted with technocratic crises. This skepticism, as a mental state of resistance to absurd and ironic situations, is a defining characteristic of Kafka's characters. They continuously question their circumstances to understand the absurd situations they encounter and make sense of the grim reality that surrounds them. This persistent inquiry underscores the existential struggle to find meaning and clarity in a seemingly irrational and indifferent world.

In the novel *The Castle*, the character K. expresses skepticism about human relationships and himself. In the span of just one week, despite his best efforts, K. cannot integrate into the life and community there. Observing the lives of the villagers, he wonders where the castle is and what the people inside it are like. Who is Klamm, and how can he influence their lives so much that they fear and obey him? Kafka constructs K. as a Don Quixote-like figure—a knight-errant from Cervantes' famous novel—someone rational among deluded, ignorant people but who is seen as odd and abnormal, ultimately ostracized and isolated.

In his quest, K. also questions his own existence. He traveled a long way, leaving his hometown behind, arriving as a land surveyor appointed by Count West West, but the local authorities gave him no work, believing there was some mistake. The village head affirmed that they did not need a surveyor, and only much later did they assign him to serve at the school, although the teachers claimed they did not need him. K. recognizes that his presence is superfluous and wonders if his redundant existence is why people reject him. He doesn't know where to go or what to do; the castle and its people neither need him nor release him. He is imprisoned, monitored, and mercilessly crushed, unaware of where his future lies. K.'s skepticism about the castle, those around him, and himself gradually reveals the corruption of society and all the characters in the novel. The story ends with an image of a person being rejected and dazed after losing love, work, and homeland.

For Joseph K. in *The Trial*, skepticism is even more pronounced as he tries to understand and escape the hanging sentence over him. His skepticism is shown through his ignorance of his crime and how to evade the trial. Everything began on his 30th birthday when two strangers claiming to be from the court came to supervise him. Throughout the novel, K. continually questions what crime he committed, one of the two questions that remain unanswered until his death.

After learning of his indictment, K.'s life changes, although he remains free to work and travel. The process of understanding his case leaves Joseph confused and exhausted. The nature of the court and the trial is vague; no one knows who the judge is, the case's severity, or his crime. Everything remains an unsolved mystery even when the story ends.

As K. delves into his case, he uncovers the corruption and true nature of the judicial system as a bureaucratic, corrupt entity. According to the painter Titorelli, bribing officials may not absolve K., but it could offer temporary safety. This irrational judicial system indiscriminately accuses individuals like K. and the merchant Block. On an ordinary day, K. is suddenly declared guilty by self-proclaimed court officials without knowing his alleged crime, even up to his death. He grows skeptical of those around him, as they all seem aware of his supposed guilt but do not disclose his offense. In some way, they are all connected to the court and actively assist in perpetuating this fictional case against him. Even though the court is omnipresent at the top of buildings, the first time K. sought the court, he did not know its location until he reached the rooftop of a building he did not recognize. Similarly, when visiting Titorelli's, upon opening a back door, K. faced the judicial court. In this situation, K. is skeptical of himself and everything around him, from the judicial court to the people, because there is no real case. The entire world asserts his guilt without knowing what he did wrong to judges, lawyers, his uncle Albert, and his cousin.

In the novel *Searching for Characters*, D.A. Ta places the protagonist, Chu Quý, in a completely unfamiliar setting to investigate the death of a shoeshine boy. Upon arriving in G District, he finds himself a stranger among the local residents. Chu Quý faces countless uncertainties from those around him, such as vendors, Mrs. Cúc, and the black-faced man. These uncertainties surround him, leaving him a solitary and vulnerable individual, unable to control his fate. He could be killed, exploited, or falsely accused at any moment. As he embarks on his journey to uncover the death of the shoeshine boy, the protagonist traverses numerous neighborhoods in search of answers. However, all he receives are indifferent shakes of heads from strangers and ever-changing speculations about Chu Quý's identity. These speculations catch Chu Quý off guard, as he is alternately viewed as a swindler, a thief, and even a pervert in the eyes of the residents of G District.

Faced with incredibly rich, detailed, and vivid rumors, Chu Quý begins to doubt himself without knowing where they originated. Confronted with the crowd effect, Chu Quý gradually starts questioning his identity: Who am I? Do I still exist? He asks the street vendor to slap him hard in the face, as if to verify whether he is still alive, exists, or has transformed into someone unknown to him, just as the rumors suggest.

The protagonist doubts the reality unfolding before him, tormented by three main uncertainties: Who murdered the shoeshine boy? Who is the family's enemy? What did Thảo Miên do in the mansion that night? These questions multiply and become increasingly mysterious to him: Who killed the boy? Why did they do it? Who is the family's enemy? What is the origin of this enmity? This state of skepticism persists throughout the work, as all these questions remain unanswered.

In another work by D.A. Ta, *Repentant Angel*, there is also an existential skepticism about human values and morality in society. Set in a maternity and pediatric hospital, the author uses the character of a young boy to encapsulate reality through the stories he hears. Each story depicts tragic lives, with the primary victims being children or unborn fetuses. The dark reality causes the boy, who harbors eager anticipation for life and a desire to be human, to become bewildered by the fates of his peers. The unborn child listens to the heartrending stories of real life, such as that of a journalist named Giang, who became pregnant after a business trip with her boss to Ha Long. Initially, she could have refused, but ultimately, she voluntarily submitted to her lecherous boss to secure a ticket for career advancement. She is tormented by the decision to keep or abort the pregnancy, as Giang cannot determine whether the baby is her boss's or her husband's. Another tragic story about the human condition is that of Mrs. Phước, a scavenger woman in a migrant labor area. Originally a rural woman, she fled to the city to escape abuse for not bearing a son. In the city, she slept with four laborers and bore four children. Mrs. Phước is both pitiable and blameworthy; she is a victim of abuse, poverty, and outdated beliefs (preference for sons over daughters), but she is also culpable for treating her children as commodities to profit from, showing coldness as her children are taken away to be soaked in alcohol. Confronted with this harsh

reality, the child, the central character in *Repentant Angel* feels fear and skepticism about the meaning of life, wishing to reject being born.

Kafka's characters exhibit profound skepticism towards the judiciary, the concept of fairness, and the rule of law, often questioning the rational existence of the self in the face of numerous absurd situations. In contrast, the characters in D.A.Ta's novels are perpetually confronted with existential doubt regarding the meaning of life and their own existence. This skepticism arises amidst a reality characterized by pervasive bleakness, cruelty, indifference, and apathy.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of existential themes in the works of F.Kafka and their influence on contemporary Vietnamese author D.A.Ta reveals profound intertextual resonances in three significant areas: the sense of loneliness, the sense of absurdity, and the sense of skepticism. This comparative analysis highlights how F.Kafka's existentialism permeates the literary fabric of D.A. Ta's narratives, offering a nuanced understanding of human existence in modern society.

F.Kafka's portrayal of existential loneliness is one of the most striking features of his work. His characters are often isolated in their struggles against incomprehensible and indifferent systems. In *The Trial*, Josef K. is alienated from those around him, unable to communicate his plight or find solidarity. This profound isolation, a hallmark of Kafka's existentialism, finds a parallel in D.A. Ta's characters. In *Searching for Characters*, Chu Quý's father experiences a similar isolation. Unjustly accused and drained of vitality by an oppressive system, he returns to a community that no longer feels familiar. This existential loneliness, deeply rooted in F. Kafka's narratives, is echoed in the Vietnamese context, where characters navigate their own alienating realities. The parallel in D.A. Ta's work underscores the universal nature of existential loneliness, transcending cultural and temporal boundaries.

Kafka's sense of absurdity is vividly illustrated through his depiction of irrational and opaque bureaucracies. In *The Castle*, the protagonist, K., encounters a bewildering and incomprehensible system that renders his efforts futile. The absurdity of existence, a central theme in Kafka's work, also manifests in D.A. Ta's narratives. In *Searching for Characters*, the protagonist's attempts to uncover the truth about a shoeshine boy's death are met with a series of absurd and unpredictable challenges. The local community's reactions are inconsistent and often irrational, reflecting Kafkaesque absurdity. Furthermore, D.A. Ta's depiction of Chu Quý's father, who is unjustly imprisoned and unable to defend himself against an invisible authority, mirrors the absurd predicaments faced by Kafka's characters. This sense of absurdity highlights the inherent unpredictability and irrationality of the human condition, a theme that resonates strongly across both authors' works.

Skepticism in F. Kafka's work often pertains to the reliability of justice, the legitimacy of authority, and the meaningfulness of existence. His characters frequently question the logic and fairness of the systems they are ensnared in. In *The Trial*, Josef K. continuously grapples with the absurdity of his arrest and prosecution, embodying Kafka's skeptical view of institutional justice. This existential skepticism is mirrored in D.A. Ta's narratives. In *Repentant Angel*, the protagonist confronts a reality filled with moral ambiguity and ethical decay. The central character, a young boy, is bewildered by the cruelty and indifference he witnesses, leading him to question the nature of human existence and morality. Similarly, in *Searching for Characters*, the protagonist's journey is fraught with skepticism as he faces a convoluted reality where truth is elusive and human intentions are suspect. This pervasive skepticism underscores a critical engagement with existential themes, reflecting Kafka's influence on D.A. Ta's literary exploration of modern human dilemmas.

In examining the influence of Kafka's existentialism on Tà Duy Anh's works, it becomes evident that the thematic parallels are profound and multifaceted. The sense of loneliness, the sense of absurdity, and the sense of skepticism are pivotal elements in both authors' literary landscapes. Kafka's existential themes transcend cultural boundaries, resonating in D.A. Ta's portrayal of contemporary Vietnamese society. This intertextual dialogue enriches our understanding of existentialism as a global literary and philosophical movement, demonstrating its relevance and adaptability across diverse contexts. Through this comparative analysis, we gain

deeper insights into the universal human condition, as articulated by Kafka and reinterpreted by D.A. Ta, illuminating the enduring power of existential thought in literature.

This paper does not comprehensively address the influence of F. Kafka on contemporary Vietnamese literature. Instead, it focuses on the impact of Kafka on D.A. Ta, which serves as a specific example of Kafka's enduring presence in Asian countries, including Vietnam. The widespread reception of Kafka in Vietnam and the factors contributing to his lasting influence present intriguing research questions. These topics warrant further investigation in subsequent studies.

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