

FROM PASSIVE TO ACTIVE NIHILISM: THE EXISTENTIAL PATH TO ÜBERMENSCH IN “A REPORT TO AN ACADEMY” AND “THE CHILDHOOD OF A LEADER”

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Abstract

Within the contours of existential theory, this paper offers a new reading of Franz Kafka's "A report to an Academy" and Jean-Paul Sartre's "The Childhood of a leader". Positioning "A report to an Academy" and "The Childhood of a leader" within the intersection of Nietzschean philosophy and existentialism, the paper aims to reveal the existential ideologies that underpin their narratives. Kafka's "A Report to an Academy", engages with the concept of the Übermensch, Red Peter's metamorphosis from an ape to a civilized being exemplifies Nietzsche's Übermensch through his self-overcoming and redefinition of identity, as he wields the will to power - - - moving towards a liberated, self-determined existence. Red Peter's ultimate achievement of a human identity through his successful integration into the human society epitomize the Nietzschean Übermensch. In "The Childhood of a leader", Lucien Fleurier moves beyond passive nihilism to embody the qualities of the Übermensch, demonstrating a capacity for self-overcoming and the establishment of a new, self-defined purpose. In "A Report to an Academy" and "The Childhood of a Leader", the progression from passive nihilism to active nihilism serves as a precursor to the realization of the Übermensch. The chief characters, Red Peter and Lucien Fleurier, each navigate the existential challenges of their respective worlds, transforming from states of despair to self-creation and empowerment. Their journey(s) highlight the dynamic interplay between passive nihilism to active nihilism, culminating in the Nietzsche's vision of the Übermensch - - - symbolized by the active assertion of will to power.

KEYWORDS: Übermensch, Active Nihilism, Passive Nihilism, Will to Power

Introduction

“A Report to an Academy” is a compelling short story by Franz Kafka, the influential German-speaking Bohemian Jewish writer renowned for his visionary fiction. Kafka, celebrated for his novella *The Metamorphosis* (1915), infuses his works with elements of realism and fantasy, probing themes of absurdity, alienation, existential anxiety, and guilt. In “A Report to an Academy”, Kafka intertwines fantastical transformation with deep explorations of human existence, identity, freedom, and the quest for life-enhancement. This narrative reflects Nietzschean themes, presenting a complex interplay of personal growth and

self-realization, which this research aims to illuminate by examining how Kafka's protagonist navigates the achievement of value-based goals amidst the labyrinth of human experience.

"A Report to an Academy" revolves around Red Peter, a former ape who narrates his extraordinary journey from captivity in the Gold Coast of Africa to his transformation into a human during a conference presentation. After being shot twice by a hunting party and transported to Europe in a cramped cage, Red Peter realizes that his escape from confinement hinges on adopting human behaviors. On the ship, he begins by struggling with tasks like drinking schnapps but soon masters these skills and learns to speak. Under the guidance of a crew member, he undergoes training to become a performer, ultimately choosing to embrace human life over remaining imprisoned. His narrative reflects a profound exploration of identity and adaptation, underscoring his decision to live as a human rather than return to his former existence.

"The Childhood of a Leader" is a significant work by Jean-Paul Sartre, the esteemed French philosopher, novelist, playwright, and key figure in existentialism. Sartre, whose influence extends across literary studies, sociology, and critical theory, is best known for his philosophical magnum opus, *Being and Nothingness* (1943), which explores existence, consciousness, and freedom. Published in 1939 as part of *The Wall*, a collection of short stories, "The Childhood of a Leader" delves into themes of human existence, authenticity, nihilism, and absurdity. The story traces the transformation of Lucien Fleurier from his childhood to adulthood, highlighting his evolution from a life marked by meaninglessness to one driven by a burgeoning sense of purpose and a disturbing embrace of anti-Semitic ideology, foreshadowing his potential rise as a formidable leader.

In "The Childhood of a Leader", Sartre delves into Lucien Fleurier's existential crisis through his relentless self-inquiry into his identity, epitomized by the recurring question, "Who am I?". Throughout the narrative, Lucien grapples with this question in various forms, repeatedly encountering new answers as he strives to understand himself. At a certain point, he experiences a period of stagnation and confronts his own sense of transcendental nothingness. Sartre frames Lucien's journey as a philosophical exploration of the threats and failures he faces while pursuing a fundamental purpose. In a desperate bid to resolve his existential quandary, Lucien ultimately turns to anti-Semitic fascism, claiming a misguided sense of inherent superiority over others, such as factory workers, as a means of validating his existence and imbuing his life with meaning.

Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch*, articulated in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, is a cornerstone of his philosophy of greatness, representing a comprehensive vision of human potential. Nietzsche asserts, "Man is something that shall be overcome. Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman – a rope over an abyss. What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end" (Kaufmann 126). This idea underscores the necessity of transcending one's current state to achieve the highest form of existence. The term *Übermensch*, often translated as "superman" or "overman" in English, signifies an evolving ideal rather than a fixed endpoint. Nietzsche views humanity as an immature stage in the journey toward self-actualization, advocating for individuals to realize their highest potential. The *Übermensch* is a dynamic, individualized process, varying from person to person, and emphasizes the role of ethical teachers in guiding individuals towards their unique potential.

Nietzsche's philosophy of the *Übermensch* lays the foundation for an exceptional mode of existence, advocating for the cultivation of a higher form of self. His approach to authenticity represents not a new faith but a novel way of living, urging individuals to seek their uniqueness rather than conform to predetermined standards. Nietzsche contends that traditional moral systems fail to offer a framework for developing truly authentic and great human beings. Instead, he posits that real greatness is achieved by distancing oneself from

societal norms, allowing individuals to create their own values and nurture their distinctiveness through continual challenges. Creativity, courage, and ambition are essential for self-enhancement. Nietzsche also recognizes the pivotal role of ethical teachers, whom he regards as liberators essential to self-discovery, stating, “can be nothing other than your liberators. And this is the secret to all cultivation” (Hollingdale 22).

Nietzsche employs the concept of nihilism as both a period of reconstruction and a manifestation of personal actualization, representing a breakdown of conventional moralities and ideals imposed by the “herd.” His writings, often fragmented and aphoristic, reflect the evolving nature of his concepts, leading to diverse interpretations. In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche portrays nihilism as an enigmatic notion that life is inherently meaningless and that the highest values are unattainable. This belief can lead to both passive nihilism, characterized by a stagnation in the self’s power and exemplified by Buddhism, and active nihilism, which enhances the self’s power through the deliberate creation of new values. Nietzsche describes passive nihilism as “the weary nihilism that no longer attacks; its most famous form, Buddhism; a passive nihilism, a sign of weakness,” where the spirit’s strength diminishes, rendering previous goals and values obsolete (Hollingdale 160). This form of nihilism, marked by inaction and a sense of nothingness, is intertwined with asceticism and a lack of purpose, ultimately leading to individual destruction.

Active nihilism, closely associated with Nietzsche’s concept of the *Übermensch*, entails specific values that underscore the significance of the individual’s present existence. It represents a form of strength arising from the realization that traditional, predetermined goals are no longer satisfying. As Nietzsche asserts, “[Nihilism] reaches its maximum of relative strength as a violent force of destruction – as active nihilism” (Hollingdale 17). This form of nihilism involves the intentional dismantling of outdated values to pave the way for the emergence of new ones. The process encompasses the reimagining, deconstruction, and reconstruction of values. Nietzsche contends that the present world is the only reality available for individuals to attain absolute power and freedom. Active nihilism, therefore, does not signify an end but serves as a transitional phase in which individuals recognize the absence of intrinsic meaning in the world and proceed to establish their own goals and ideals.

Literature Review

In Sandra Dewi Dahlan's article, “Self-Identity in a Report to an Academy by Franz Kafka and Pistol Perdamaian by Kuntowijoyo,” the existential transformation of the ape protagonist is examined through his adaptation to human ways and his development of self-consciousness. Dahlan notes that the ape “becomes a persona, a conscious self” (Dahlan 7) and highlights the absurdity of his decision to abandon his ape identity, stating, “The absurdity of the story culminates when a thinking process emerged and the main character decided to stop being an ape!” (4). The protagonist’s reliance on reason and strategic thinking to navigate human societal norms is crucial in his transformation. Dahlan emphasizes that the ape’s adaptation is driven by human expectations, asserting that “apes or humans are beings, what distinguishes them from one another is the mind, body, and soul” (9). The ape’s experience of imprisonment and subsequent training to mimic human behavior reflects the profound impact of societal conditioning on his identity, symbolizing his struggle with social dynamics and the compromise of his freedom and self-expression.

In “Aping the Ape: Kafka's Report to an Academy,” Ziad Elmarsafy explores the allegorical dimensions of the ape’s autobiography to reflect on the writer’s identity and the nature of self-expression. Elmarsafy suggests that Kafka's “Report” serves as a parable about both writing and the writer’s identity, noting that “the ‘Report’ is a parable about writing in general and about the writer’s identity in particular” (Elmarsafy 2). He draws a parallel between the ape's performance of self and the writer’s construction of a narrative persona,

emphasizing that the ape's act of distancing himself from both apes and humans symbolizes the writer's own struggle. Elmarsafy argues that "the ape stands for the dilemma of Kafka trying to present himself to his audience" (11), and points out that "the ape epitomizes, in his act, the impossibility of saying 'I' without qualification, and consequently the utter impossibility of writing an autobiography" (4). This comparison highlights the intricate relationship between language, identity, and performance in Kafka's narrative, revealing the existential complexities faced by both the ape and the writer in their quest for authenticity and self-expression.

In the article "The Critical Perspective of Animals in Some of Franz Kafka's Works," Hoang To Mai applies ecocriticism and postcolonial criticism to analyze the protagonist of "A Report to an Academy" and his exploitation under anthropocentric perspectives. Mai argues that "Red Peter's training, as well as that of his 'little chimpanzee,' is a metaphor for human ambition to transform nature" (Mai 4), symbolizing the broader impact of human endeavors on environmental conditions. She critiques the imposition of human cultural norms on Red Peter, noting his forced adaptation to human behaviors such as reading and smoking, and advocates for ethical responsibility towards nature. Additionally, Mai explores Kafka's portrayal of colonial experiences, suggesting that "the hunting of Red Peter in Africa and then crossing Europe to the domesticated has led many readers to think of colonial hunters of Africa who were then turned into slaves on another continent" (10). Red Peter's ambivalence towards human standards and his critique of the absurdity of civilization reflect Kafka's commentary on the dark, irrational aspects of humanistic and colonial practices, emphasizing environmental degradation and cultural imperialism.

In the article "The nature of man or the man of nature? – An eco-critical reading of Kafka," Sohini Dasgupta examines the brutal treatment of nature through confinement and training in Kafka's "A Report to an Academy." Dasgupta argues that human attempts to assert superiority over nature are metaphorically represented by imprisoning the ape, stating, "With the pride of reason and intellectual superiority, imprisonment and confinements of irrationality or nature become solely important" (Dasgupta 1). This transformation of the ape from a wild creature to a "civilized" being underscores the ethical implications of imposing human norms on nature. Dasgupta also explores the psychological dimensions of this transformation, linking it to Freudian concepts of the Id, ego, and superego, and noting that "Man's moving away from nature has caused the rift between the natural and the rational, all animals versus homo sapiens" (2). This disconnection from nature reflects existential angst and psychological struggles, as illustrated by the ape's lament, "I had no way out; but I had to make one for myself, for I could not live without it" (3), highlighting his surrender to societal control and loss of his natural identity.

Jacob Breeding's thesis, "The Power of Madness: A Foucauldian Reading Kafka's The Castle and Other Works," explores the concept of madness in Kafka's "A Report to an Academy." Breeding asserts that Red Peter's status as a "madman" arises from his failure to conform to societal norms, making him a "nuisance to the culture that must either be corrected or removed" (Breeding 4). The cage, which severely restricts Red Peter's movement, serves as a disciplinary tool to enforce conformity. As a captive, Red Peter learns to speak and imitate human behaviors to gain freedom, ultimately asserting his agency by adopting human language and customs. He declares, "I have achieved what I set out to achieve" (21), demonstrating his rebellion against societal constraints. Breeding argues that Red Peter's transformation and denial of slavery represent a form of madness that challenges and disrupts established social orders, positioning madness as both a tool for resistance and a means to transcend societal expectations.

Discussion

In “A Report to an Academy,” Franz Kafka illustrates a transformative journey towards self-enhancement and the pursuit of an authentic existence. At the start, the protagonist, an ape, recounts his life in a speech at a conference, revealing, “I felt more comfortable in the world of men and fitted it better” and “today now that I stand at the very peak of my career” (Muir 1). Captured and caged, Red Peter realizes that his survival hinges on transcending his former self, evolving from an immature ape into an exemplary human being. This transformation reflects the will to life-enhancement and the search for genuine existence, paralleling Nietzsche’s concept of the *Übermensch*. Nietzsche asserts, “Once you were apes, and even now, too, man is more than any ape...The overman is the meaning of the earth” (Kaufmann 10). Through self-articulation and a deep examination of identity, Red Peter achieves a higher level of self, embodying Kafka’s metaphor of the *Übermensch* as the ultimate path to authentic existence.

Red Peter’s transformation from an ape to a human being can be interpreted as an act of self-overcoming, aligning with Nietzsche’s assertion that “Man is something that shall be overcome” (Kaufmann 12). Rather than succumbing to despair, Red Peter actively seeks to redefine his reality within the constraints imposed upon him. Captured by a hunting crew from the Hagenbeck Firm on the Gold Coast, he suffers two gunshot wounds—one to his cheek, which earns him the name Red Peter, and another near his hip, leaving him with a permanent limp. As he is transported to Europe in a ship’s cage, he reflects, “For the first time in my life I could see no way out; at least no direct way out” (Muir 2). Realizing that escape would only lead to recapture and worsening conditions, Red Peter understands that as an ape, his fate would remain unchanged among the other captive apes. Thus, he recognizes that his only viable path is to adapt and transform himself to transcend his circumstances.

Courage is essential for achieving Nietzsche’s concept of the *Übermensch*, serving as a foundation for creativity and the pursuit of authenticity. Nietzsche asserts that “Every attainment, every step forward in knowledge, follow from courage, from hardness against oneself” (Hollingdale 26). In contrast to the typical nature of apes, Red Peter in Kafka’s story exhibits extraordinary attributes, demonstrating a remarkable level of bravery. He lives dangerously until he can redefine himself and establish his own ethical code. Red Peter’s resolve is captured in his declaration, “I had to find a way out or die” and “the place for apes was in front of a locker – well then, I had to stop being an ape” (Muir 3). His courage is reflected in his decision to leave behind his ape identity and seek freedom despite the risks, embracing the challenge of adapting to his new environment of captivity. This proactive confrontation of his circumstances and his effort to create personal values underscore his determination to achieve greatness through self-overcoming and authenticity.

Every accomplishment and advance in knowledge stems from courage and self-resistance, with external pressures and adversaries being essential for fostering cheerfulness, valor, and worthiness; similarly, the protagonist bravely embarks on a journey of self-examination and transformation, choosing independence or death, shedding his animal identity, and embracing a new way of life marked by submission to the challenges he faces.

The “flame of ambition” is a crucial trait for self-enhancement, as Nietzsche emphasizes the need for individuals to “set a new goal for themselves” on the path to becoming the *Übermensch*. For Red Peter, the ultimate goal is to gain independence, achievable only through integration into the human world. Captured and caged, he soon realizes that physical escape is impossible and that his ambition must shift to adapting to his new environment. He articulates this ambition in his speech to the academy, stating, “And so I learned things, gentlemen. Ah, one learns when one has to; one learns when one needs a way out; one learns at all costs” (6). Red Peter understands that achieving freedom requires

immense effort and determination, and by the end of his speech, he acknowledges his success in fulfilling his ambitions through a series of transformative events.

In "A Report to an Academy," Red Peter's examination of his strengths and weaknesses and his adaptation to human behavior reflect a profound act of creativity. Through keen observation, he learns to spit and smoke a pipe with proficiency, marking his progression towards self-enhancement and a new existence. His entry into the human world is symbolized by his ability to drink schnapps like a seasoned drinker and his first utterance of "Hallo!" in human language. Achieving the status of an average European, Red Peter embodies the traits of creativity, courage, and ambition, as he assumes a human-like lifestyle—hands in his pockets, a bottle of wine on the table, and resting on a rocking chair, while delegating his responsibilities to his manager. This transformation from a chimpanzee to a human being showcases how the concepts of creativity, courage, and ambition, central to Nietzsche's idea of the *Übermensch*, enable Red Peter to realize his hidden potential and achieve greatness.

The role of a model is crucial for realizing one's full potential and achieving authenticity. In "Schopenhauer as Educator," Nietzsche emphasizes the importance of artists and ethical teachers in inspiring us to cultivate and discover our own path to health, noting that "they can be nothing other than your liberators. And that is the secret to all cultivation" (R. J. Hollingdale 149). In Kafka's "A Report to an Academy," the protagonist receives guidance from ethical teachers who significantly influence his journey toward self-enhancement. During his imprisonment, he faces internal conflict and initially struggles with the schnapps bottle. An early ethical teacher appears, demonstrating how to uncork and drink from the bottle, offering step-by-step instructions to Red Peter: "A man post himself before me with the bottle and give me instructions" (Muir 5). This teacher, through patient instruction and correction, helps Red Peter learn the ways of humans, and with keen enthusiasm, he masters the art of drinking schnapps like a seasoned professional.

Red Peter's growing confidence in his capabilities is bolstered by the increasing interest and recognition from others regarding his progress. As his future prospects appear promising, he employs multiple teachers to further his development. He remarks, "I engaged teachers for myself, established them in five communicating rooms, and took lessons from them all at once by dint of leaping from one room to the other" (6). This period in the narrative illustrates Red Peter's engagement with several educators simultaneously, reflecting his burgeoning intellect and the heightened demand for knowledge as he attains a higher level of self-realization. By setting up five communication rooms and absorbing lessons from various teachers concurrently, Red Peter gains crucial insights into human culture. His successful attainment of a refined self, aligned with Nietzsche's notions of the *Übermensch*—embodying creativity, courage, and ambition—is further facilitated by the significant contributions of these ethical teachers in his journey towards life enhancement.

Friedrich Nietzsche characterizes passive nihilism as a perspective that interprets nihilism as the cessation of the search for meaning, embodying a pessimistic stance that deems life as devoid of worth. Passive nihilists, according to Nietzsche, are marked by a lack of will to construct their own values and purposes, representing a "decline and recession of the power of the spirit" (R. Hollingdale 17). This form of nihilism is associated with a weakened will, an inability to generate meaning, and a tendency to retreat from the world. In contrast, Nietzsche introduces the concept of active nihilism, which involves a critical reassessment and reconstruction of values. Active nihilists do not merely dismantle old values but are committed to creating new ones. Nietzsche describes this as reaching its apex of strength "as a powerful destructive force" (22). Active nihilism parallels Nietzsche's

philosophy of the *Übermensch*, as both advocate for the pursuit of a higher purpose defined by the individual, transcending previously held dogmas.

Jean-Paul Sartre's short story "A Childhood of a Leader" intricately explores Nietzschean nihilism through the character of Lucien Fleurier, illustrating his shift from passive to active nihilism. Nietzsche characterizes passive nihilism as a form of existential resignation, where an individual perceives the world as fundamentally meaningless and existing only in a state of futility: "A nihilist is a man who judges that the real world ought not to be, and that the world as it ought to be does not exist. According to his view, our existence (action, suffering, willing, feeling) has no meaning: this 'in vain' is the nihilists' pathos – an inconsistency on the part of the nihilists" (12). Initially, Sartre portrays Lucien as embodying passive nihilism through his recognition of life's inherent meaninglessness, the collapse of traditional morality, and the absence of new values to replace the old ones. As Lucien grapples with his own identity, he embarks on a quest to uncover his true self, only to descend into existential despair. Ultimately, he confronts the unsettling realization: "Now I have it! ... I don't exist" (Alexander 22). Lucien concludes that true self-realization lies in embracing his own "nothingness," rejecting his former philosophy professor's assertion that doubt inherently affirms existence, as per Descartes's famous dictum.

Lucien's conviction extends beyond his personal belief in his own nothingness; he becomes equally persuaded that the entire world is void of existence. He perceives that people are oblivious to their own existential emptiness and concludes that an extraordinary act is necessary to reveal this truth. Resolute in his despair, Lucien resolves to pen a statement declaring his non-existence and to end his life as a dramatic assertion of "the nothingness of the world in full light" (23). He harbors the hope that his self-inflicted death will profoundly impact those around him, illuminating their own existential void. Upon returning to his hometown of Férolles from Paris, Lucien's demeanor is marked by deepening depression and a pervasive sense of futility. He views himself as a scandal, an irredeemable aberration, and anticipates that any future responsibilities will scarcely redeem his existence. In this state, he perceives his life through a shrouded lens of desolation and passively resigns himself to the obliteration of value and meaning.

For Nietzsche, a passive nihilist reacts against dominant moralities and seeks to alleviate personal suffering amid the world's inherent chaos. Nietzsche observes, "Life's eternal fruitfulness and recurrence caused anguish, destruction, and the will to annihilation" (R. Hollingdale 35). In the chapter "Lucien's Infancy," Lucien is bewildered by the constructed nature of gender roles, contemplating whether societal norms could be altered—such as imagining a reversal of gender roles between his parents if they wore each other's clothes. He questions the fixity of gender, pondering its malleability. Lucien's existential crisis extends to his interactions with nature; when he engages with a chestnut tree in the garden, the tree's unresponsiveness to his attempts at communication, even when provoked, reinforces his disillusionment. He generalizes this passivity to other plants and objects, ultimately concluding that "things were stupid, nothing truly and really existed" (Alexander 10). Thus, Lucien dismisses both physical objects and societal norms as non-existent, reflecting a profound nihilistic rejection of established values and realities.

Active nihilists undertake a critical deconstruction of existing moral systems, recognizing them as human constructs rather than universal truths. Rather than succumbing to despair, they transcend traditional values, forge their own, and aspire to a higher state of existence. This transformative approach aligns with Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch*. Nietzsche asserts, "I teach the No to all that makes weak—that exhausts. I teach the Yes to all that strengthens, that stores up strength, that pride" (R. Hollingdale 128). In Sartre's narrative, Lucien undergoes a shift from passive to active nihilism. He delves into Freud's

psychoanalysis and experiences a profound clarity, declaring that “everything became clear to him” (Alexander 27). Lucien gains a renewed understanding of his identity, moving beyond his previous state of existential despair and sleepwalking behavior. He embraces a higher purpose, respecting the complexity of his unconscious self and resolving to harness his latent energy towards more constructive objectives, thus embodying the active nihilist's quest for self-overcoming and personal growth.

Lucien actively defines his own purpose, aspiring to become a leader and engage in self-overcoming to transcend his limitations and achieve a higher existential state. He envisions a future where people, such as workers in his family's factory, respect him. He reflects, “workers in the family factory ... would be waiting for me, at attention ... That's a leader, he thought” (74). Lucien desires the exclusive right to lead, asserting, “I exist ... because I have the right to exist” (75). Furthermore, his friend Lemordant plays a crucial role as an ethical guide, introducing him to the political vision of the anti-Semitic Camelots and helping him overcome his alienation from contemporary society. Lemordant identifies his disaffection as a result of being “uprooted” (61). Embracing Nietzsche's philosophy of the Übermensch, Lucien evolves from passive nihilism to active nihilism. He matures into a confident leader, symbolized by his new mustache, and emerges as “a man left, a leader among Frenchmen” (61), reflecting his transformation and fulfillment of his ambitions.

Conclusion

This paper embarked on an exploration of Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the Übermensch in Kafka's “A Report to an Academy” and the theme of nihilism in Sartre's “The Childhood of a Leader.” Through a comprehensive literary analysis, the paper highlights existential themes and Nietzschean ideals such as spiritual freedom, authenticity, self-discovery, and the will to power. In “A Report to an Academy,” Red Peter's quest for a healthier existence and autonomy, driven by creativity, courage, and ambition, vividly embodies Nietzsche's vision of the Übermensch. His transformation from an ape to a being capable of navigating human norms reflects a Nietzschean ideal of self-creation and value formation. The protagonist's journey of self-overcoming—where he transcends his primal origins to forge a new identity grounded in his will to power—demonstrates Nietzsche's call to rise above conventional moral frameworks and establish self-defined principles. Conversely, Sartre's “The Childhood of a Leader” delves into the nihilistic experience, charting Lucien's evolution from passive nihilism to active nihilism. This transition highlights a profound rejection of established societal values and an existential struggle to derive meaning in an indifferent world. Sartre's narrative starkly exposes the destructive potential of nihilism through the protagonist's refusal to accept any social order, revealing the precarious balance between the yearning for freedom and the void of existence. The paper reveals the role of Red's and Lucien's shift from passive nihilism to active nihilism—characterized by the deliberate dismantling of old values to forge new ones—resonating deeply with Nietzsche's philosophy, underscoring the centrality of the will to power in reimagining one's existence.

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