

## UNVEILING EXISTENTIAL DESPAIR: A KIERKEGAARDIAN STUDY OF ANGER, SUFFERING AND DEATH IN HEDAYAT'S *THE BLIND OWL*

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### Abstract

*Human life is characterized by sorrow, suffering, and affliction. Pain and anguish often form the foundation of existence, with the potential to either strengthen an individual or lead them into despair and desolation. This qualitative research examines the portrayal of human life in The Blind Owl through the lens of Kierkegaard's existential philosophy. Hedayat, the novelist vividly conveys the protagonist's profound suffering and existential dread. He captures the bleakness and isolation of human existence, marked by aimlessness, despair, and an encroaching darkness that leaves little room for hope. He focuses on themes of loneliness, abandonment, estrangement, animosity, despair, frustration, disillusionment, failed romantic relationships, and existential futility. His characters experience an intense sense of hopelessness, helplessness, alienation, and the absurdity of life, consistently surrounded by these emotions. Findings of research indicate that profound suffering and sorrow can drive individuals towards alienation and existential turmoil, often leading them to see death as an escape from their pain. This research contributes to existing scholarship on existentialism by offering insights into the themes of sorrow, isolation, and existential despair present in Hedayat's work.*

**Keywords:** *The Blind Owl*, Human existence, Alienation, Anguish, Death, Existential Suffering

### Introduction

Sadegh Hedayat is a renowned Persian author. His writings have been translated into numerous languages and they enjoy recognition globally. One prominent theme in Hedayat's work is the notion of alienation, characterized by a focus on lonely characters, and disjointed consciousness fragmented minds. His narrative captures fragmentation, self-division, and self-alienation—experiences emblematic of his era—and reflects these themes through a narrative that serves as a mirror for the divided Iranian self of the time. Hedayat's innovative approach in representing the unconscious provides a direct insight into his characters' minds, establishing his notable position in Persian literature. His literary nonconformity, paralleling his personal and professional life, expresses his political and social discontent (Jahanbegloo, 2008). Hedayat is widely celebrated for his notable work *The Blind Owl*. Approaching his work, *The Blind Owl* from an existential perspective reveals Hedayat's distinctive style, characterized by a deeply personal expression of inner confusion and distress. His unique style, infused with nihilistic undertones, sets him apart from his contemporaries, as *The Blind Owl* vividly encapsulates human alienation, despair, and existential dread. *The Blind Owl* evokes a sense of dual belonging yet convey a homelessness of the mind, reflecting his complex relationship with identity and place. Human life, estrangement, desolation, and existential emptiness take center stage in the novel. Humanity, as the novelist depicts it, is akin to a lost, wandering dog traversing a barren universe without purpose. This metaphor captures the isolated, rejected, and estranged individual—trapped in darkness with no glimpse of hope.

Hedayat skillfully conveys the bleak and futile state of human existence, illustrating pervasive themes of purposelessness, isolation, and the encompassing darkness that often overshadows human lives. His characters cope with flawed romantic connections, unfulfilled desires, and the unsettling void of existence, embodying feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and absurdity. In *The Blind Owl*, Hedayat (1937) presents the haunting narrative of a young opium addict whose mental anguish intensifies following the loss of a mysterious lover. *The Blind Owl* is presented as an internal monologue articulated in the first person, with the storyteller serving as the main character. It follows a haunting pattern of recurring symbols—a sinister old man, four dead horses, and a hidden urn of poisoned wine—that drive the protagonist toward hysteria and existential collapse. The narrator rejects belief in God, deeming only himself fit to understand his suffering and identity. In his final days, he inscribes memories on his bedroom walls, confiding solely in his shadow. Plagued by trauma and invoking death imagery, he shares life stories—joy, marriage, faith—feeling abandoned by God amid personal and societal struggles. His defiance fosters self-love, ultimately driving him to renounce faith. He experiences profound isolation, choosing to live on the city's outskirts to detach from society. He immerses himself in solitary activities and confides only in his shadow, feeling alienated from people, God, and nature. He endures unending suffering, describing it as incurable and worsened by temporary relief from pills. He expresses deep inner torment, including the anguish of losing a mysterious girl and feeling isolated without genuine connection. Comparing life to a scorched wood stump, he conveys his relentless, suffocating pain. Estranged from all connections, he finds solace only in death, viewing it as the ultimate escape from suffering and disillusionment.

### Research Questions

1. How does Hedayat depict existential despair, as conceptualized by Kierkegaard, through the protagonist's experiences of anger, suffering, and confrontation with death?
2. In what ways do Kierkegaard's concepts of 'the sickness unto death' and 'the leap of faith' inform a deeper understanding of the protagonist's existential crisis in *The Blind Owl*?

### Research Objectives:

1. To explore the manifestation of existential despair, anger, and suffering in *The Blind Owl*, aligning these themes with Kierkegaard's existentialist philosophy to understand the protagonist's psychological and philosophical journey.
2. To analyze the themes of death and spiritual crisis in *The Blind Owl* through the lens of Kierkegaardian thought, examining how these themes illuminate the existential conflicts central to Hedayat's narrative.

### Review of Literature

The term "existentialism" has long posed challenges in terms of definition, largely because it encompasses a wide array of thinkers with varied philosophical goals and works. Nonetheless, it is widely acknowledged that many philosophers commonly linked to the existentialist tradition, despite their differing doctrines, were significantly influenced by Kierkegaard's writings. His ideas served as a foundational influence, shaping existentialism's focus on individual experience, choice, and the search for meaning (Stewart, 2011). Existentialism centers on the individual's experience of existence, perceiving the world as inherently chaotic, with human beings as fundamentally isolated entities rather than social participants. This philosophy grants individuals the freedom to make choices while simultaneously imposing the responsibility to confront their consequences. Existentialism directs human consciousness toward an understanding of the condition and existence of man. Existentialists demonstrate a profound engagement with the major issues of human life. They

assert that individuals must choose, and make decisions independently in their life circumstances. By embracing this agency, one can contribute to alleviating the pervasive distress, distrust, and discord present in various aspects of life.”Existentialism lays stress on...anguish, anxiety, alienation, boredom, choice, despair, dread, death, freedom, frustration, finitude, guilt, nausea, responsibility etc.” (Singh & Somvanshi, 2017, p. 2).

Ramamurthy (2017) points out that Anita Desai and Anita Nair, as novelists, engage deeply with existentialist themes to explore the human condition, particularly emphasizing the muted suffering and helplessness of married women facing existential dilemmas. As female authors, both have established a distinctive narrative space, examining women’s emotions, feminine sensibility and psychology. Their female protagonists confront the absurdities of their circumstances, often grappling with the darker facets of life. By situating their heroines in precarious situations, they project a somber outlook, analyzing these protagonists as complex individuals who must endure hostile environments. “Existential anxiety is a symptom of this terrible conflict between the individual and their adverse surroundings” (Ramamurthy, 2017, p. 131).

Naem and Janoory (2019) assert that *The Beggar* is a novel set in Cairo during the early 1950s, where Naguib Mahfouz deals with the psychological anguish of Omar Al-Hamzawi. Once a fervent revolutionary in his youth, Omar finds himself disillusioned in middle age, having been abandoned by the aspirations of Nasser’s 1952 Revolution. Now a member of the bourgeoisie, he leads a comfortable life in Cairo but sacrifices his job, friends, and family in pursuit of a series of illicit love affairs, hoping to achieve psychological renewal. However, his moral compass has eroded. As he seeks this renewal, his relationships only heighten his alienation from both himself and the world around him. “*The Beggar* presents a general view of the predicaments in Egyptian society...Mahfouz shows that the Egyptian identity is on the verge of collapse” (Naem & Janoory, 2019, p. 1213)

Sapkale and Patil (2021) claim that Markandaya portrays the tragedy of a traditional Indian village and its tenant peasant family amidst industrialization, the zamindari system, and natural calamities. The tannery’s establishment devastates the village, leading to inflation, social vices, and diseases that disrupt the community’s peace. Rukmani, the protagonist, faces numerous tragedies: the death of a son at the tannery, failed crops, starvation of another son, and her daughter Ira’s descent into prostitution. Ultimately, after seeking help from their son in town, Rukmani and Nathan return home only to confront Nathan’s death. She later returns to her village with Puli to live with her remaining children. “The significance of the novel lies in the existential struggle of Rukmani against such formidable enemies to her family. Individual must live a life despite of whatever difficulties may be and develop the endurance cum struggling power” (Sapkale & Patil, 2021, p. 112).

*The Blind Owl* is a deeply introspective work by Sadegh Hedayat who is a leading Persian writer of 20<sup>th</sup> century. His life unfolded during a period marked by persistent political instability and the far-reaching effects of World War II. Confronted with the political repression of freedoms in his homeland, Hedayat, like many intellectuals of his era, experienced profound disillusionment with life, which he poignantly expressed in his writings (Ardalan, (1975). Najafibabanazar (2020) argues that the female figures in *Ulysses* and *The Blind Owl* inhabit a boundary space between the semiotic and symbolic domains. Both novels depict themes of marginalization, social isolation, and female disempowerment, conveyed through the characters’ silence and a language grounded in the semiotic, linked to écriture féminine. Female characters are often linguistically marginalized within the narratives of the stories. (Najafibabanazar, 2020).

In Hedayat's novel, there are traces of Western modernist movements (Mansouri-Zeyni, 2013). *The Blind Owl* presents an autobiographical nightmare (Hillmann, 1989). It is the first modernist novel in Persian literature, establishing a benchmark for subsequent works in the genre. Symbolism, surrealism, and expressionism are its predominant stylistic techniques (Yavari, 2008). The existing literature on the selected work does not capture existential despair, anger, suffering and death. This research gap highlights the need for an in-depth a Kierkegaardian study of anger, suffering and death in Hedayat's *The Blind Owl*.

### Research Methodology

The research methodology employed for the study involves a qualitative analysis of the novel with a view to investigating existential despair, anger, suffering and death in Hedayat's *The Blind Owl*. Analyzing *The Blind Owl* from an existential perspective reveals Hedayat's distinctive style, characterized by a deeply personal expression of inner confusion and distress.

### Theoretical Framework

Existentialism, a prominent philosophical movement of the 20th century, emphasizes the individual's role as a self-determining agent responsible for their choices and actions. Central to existentialist thought is the affirmation of individual autonomy and the unique subjective experience. The foundational concept, often referred to as "the existential attitude," encapsulates a profound sense of disorientation or uncertainty when confronted with the complexities and ambiguities of the broader world. Heidari, & Sharifi Abnavi (2022) argue that existentialism stands as a pivotal branch of modern philosophy, incorporating a wide range of ideas and works typical of twentieth-century intellectual movements. A unifying theme among existentialist thinkers is their rejection of transcendental philosophies. In contrast to transcendentalists, existentialists assert that cognition arises only after an object's existence and argue that an object's existence is not inherently necessary. This understanding of existence as non-essential grants humans' freedom, yet existentialists maintain that individuals are responsible for crafting meaning within their otherwise absurd and purposeless existence through the exercise of that freedom. Sartre (1948) argues that existentialism, as a prominent ideology of the mid-20th century, is grounded in the concept of individual agency. He asserts, "in a lifetime, each person must make countless choices" (p. 4). While these choices may reflect one's past experiences, they ultimately represent the individual's exclusive responsibility. Sartre (1948), further, emphasizes that even when faced with two options, one of which might be imposed by dire consequences, "it remains his choice and his choice alone" (p. 4). Webber (2018) explains that, according to the initial definitions offered by Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, existentialism is essentially an ethical framework. This framework posits that the freedom central to human existence must be valued in itself and considered the basis for all other values (Webber, 2018). Søren Kierkegaard is widely recognized as the founding figure of modern existentialism and is the earliest European philosopher to be associated with the existentialist tradition. He was the first to introduce and utilize the concepts of "existence" and "existentialism" in a philosophical context. Rejecting the dominant political, social, and religious ideologies of his time—which aligned individuals with the state, society, and church—Kierkegaard revolutionized the core tenets of existentialist thought, emphasizing the individual's autonomy and subjective experience.

In Kierkegaard's writings one can find a rich array of concepts that became central to the existentialists' palette. His analyses of concepts such as anxiety, despair, freedom, sin, the crowd, and sickness all came to be standard motifs in existentialist literature. (Stewart, 2011, p. x)



Sartre endeavors to integrate Kierkegaard's philosophy into the broader existentialist tradition, recognizing the latter's emphasis on individual choice and subjective experience as central to existentialist thought. "Sartre was in large measure responsible for canonizing Kierkegaard as one of the forerunners of existentialism" (Stewart, 2011, p. x). Kierkegaard argues that individuals are continually faced with contemporaneous possibilities, compelling a choice rather than leaving an escape into neutrality. This view opposes efforts to present Christianity as the ultimate outcome of a linear, global progression or a "progressive revelation" that would make it a universal culmination of human history. In challenging systems that attempt to anchor Christian ethics—whether based on personal conviction or broader philosophical systems like intuitionism, Kantianism, or utilitarianism—Kierkegaard critiques any attempt to establish ethical principles outside of individual faith and commitment. He insists that Christian ethics demand a personal and immediate engagement, one that cannot be systematized or rationalized by external ethical frameworks. Thus, his approach requires a direct, existential choice rather than reliance on any philosophical abstraction or moral system.

"Kierkegaard claims that almost all men try to escape from themselves. And our station and its duties, science and philosophy, social activities and the churches, too, help us to run away from ourselves" (Kaufmann, 1980, p. 205). For Kierkegaard, existence is fundamentally a state of becoming. Each individual's primary task is to realize their true self, a process that can only be fulfilled through a relationship with God. Failure to engage in this relationship results in despair, whether one is consciously aware of it or not (Hall, 1980). Gardiner (2002) asserts that Kierkegaard highlights the necessity for individuals to freely choose their own paths and to recognize that their freedom is inherently unique. Each person confronts their own specific and distinctive challenges, which are rooted in the concrete realities of daily life. The primary existential question he poses is, 'How can I exist'? Kierkegaard argues that selecting one option inherently entails the exclusion of all other possibilities. This process requires a concentrated focus on one's goals and the pursuit of consistency, while simultaneously dismissing any distractions that could disrupt that focus. "Kierkegaard takes no pride in the progress of freedom or science. Modern man's achievements, far from solving our basic problems, are distractions" (Kaufmann, 1980, p. 205).

In conclusion, the theoretical framework presented above draws on Kierkegaard's existential philosophy to explore the central themes of despair, freedom, and the search for meaning in the face of suffering and death in *The Blind Owl*. Hedayat's novel reveals existential anguish, where the protagonist's failure to confront his own existential reality leads him into a spiral of despair.

### Textual Analysis

Sedegh Hedayat, a renowned Persian author, is widely celebrated for his notable work *The Blind Owl*. *The Blind Owl* is a powerful meditation on the nature of human existence, making it a quintessential work of 20th-century Iranian literature that resonates with universal themes of isolation and the search for meaning. Hedayat (1937) skillfully conveys the bleak and futile state of human existence, illustrating pervasive themes of purposelessness, isolation, loneliness, abandonment, alienation, hatred, despair, frustration, and disillusionment with fate. The story of the novel is in form of an internal monologue articulated in the first person, with the narrator serving as the main character. The narrator renounces belief in God, asserting that only he can fully grasp his own pain and identity. In his last days, he etches fragments of his memories onto the walls of his room, entrusting these reflections solely to his shadow. Haunted

by traumatic experiences and pervaded by death motifs, he recounts his life—moments of happiness, marriage, and faith—feeling forsaken by God amidst personal turmoil and societal conflicts. Overwhelmed by profound isolation, he withdraws to the city’s periphery, severing ties with society. He dedicates himself to solitary pursuits, engaging with his shadow as his only confidant, and feels a growing detachment from people, God, and the natural world. His suffering is relentless and described as incurable, only exacerbated by fleeting relief from medication. He suffers deeply, agonizing over the loss of an enigmatic woman and enduring a lack of genuine connection. The narrator explains the plight of his life after losing his beloved, “I felt that my existence had become pointless, that I had lost my way for all time to come” (Hedayat, 1937, p. 16).

*The Blind Owl* unfolds as a “confession,” with the narrator frantically recording his thoughts, addressing them to an imagined presence—a shadow resembling an owl that appears on his wall. In Western contexts, owls often symbolize wisdom, yet in Iranian and Indian cultures, the owl is regarded as a “bad omen,” a dual symbolism Hedayat was likely ‘aware of’ in constructing the dark, foreboding atmosphere of the narrative. The protagonist is torn between the desire to “understand or exorcise the demons” plaguing him, haunted by macabre visions and unclear memories of a possible crime. This “delusional narrator,” overtaken by despair, remains a deeply unreliable figure, blurring the lines between reality and hallucination (Schreiber, 2020, para. 3). Embracing solitude, he withdraws from social engagements, feeling no need for external validation. Determined to distance himself even from his own shadow, he records memories on his bedroom wall. In a symbolic gesture of self-reliance, he shares his grievances only with his shadow, embracing solitude as a form of liberation. Adopting the occupation of a pen-case painter, he turns to opium and alcohol as fleeting reprieves from his torment. This self-imposed isolation and his belief in self-mastery lead him to view his suffering as a private domain beyond the intervention of any divine force. Within the confines of the four walls of his room, the narrator’s existence has been gradually deteriorating, much like a candle. His existence is akin to ‘a green log’ that has been cast to the side of the fireplace, scorched and charred by the flames of the surrounding logs. It neither burns away completely nor retains its original vitality; instead, it has been “choked by the smoke and steam” of the others (Hedayat, 1937, p. 43). The narrator describes the feeling of loneliness, “Ever since I have been confined to my bed people have paid little attention to me” (Hedayat, 1937, p. 43).

The narrator expresses a profound disconnection from the temporal flow of existence. The phrase “all the bonds which held me to the world of living people have been broken” (Hedayat, 1937, p. 43) reveals a deep existential rupture, suggesting that the narrator feels detached from the world of the living. This detachment aligns with Kierkegaard’s notion of despair, where an individual loses a sense of connection with others and with life’s purpose. The narrator’s perception of time—“Past, future, hour, day, month, year—these things are all the same to me” (Hedayat, 1937, p. 43)—mirrors the existential crisis of living without direction or meaning. From an existential perspective, the narrator’s inability to differentiate between past and future illustrates a state of ‘existential time’—a conception of time that is disconnected from the usual human experience of change and growth. This stagnation leads to a perception of life stages as “nothing but futile words” (Hedayat, 1937, p. 43), highlighting the sense of existential futility, where the concepts of childhood, maturity, and progress lose significance. This aligns with Sartre’s view of existence as absurd and without inherent meaning, where the individual must create their own meaning in a world that does not offer it. Thus, the narrator’s reflections embody the Kierkegaardian despair of an individual trapped in an existential void, where past

experiences and future possibilities are rendered meaningless. The narrator articulates a deep sense of existential stagnation, conveying a life devoid of change or variety. He claims that his life has been monotonous, characterized by a lack of transformation or growth, “My life has always known only one season and one state of being” (Hedayat, 1937, p. 43). The narrator’s philosophy of life indicates his sense of dissatisfaction with life.

Existentialism posits that every individual inevitably confronts an existential crisis, a moment of realization regarding the absurdity of life and the absence of intrinsic meaning in the universe. This crisis arises from the tension between the recognition of life’s inherent meaninglessness and humanity’s profound desire for purpose. However, existentialists argue that true freedom can only emerge from this very conflict. By acknowledging the absurdity of existence, individuals can liberate themselves from the constraints of societal norms and expectations, allowing them to assert their agency and construct meaning within an ostensibly meaningless world. While the existential crisis may initially evoke feelings of fear, despair, or nihilism, it simultaneously offers individuals the opportunity to embrace their inherent freedom and forge their own paths, despite life’s absurdities. In this sense, existentialism provides a transformative framework for understanding human existence, where the existential crisis becomes a catalyst for introspection, personal growth, and the pursuit of an authentic way of life. The narrator feels wholly cut off from the outer world and lives a secluded life. The narrator says, “I live is situated beyond the edge of the city in a quiet district far from the noise and bustle of life” (Hedayat, 1937, p. 10).

The narrator experiences a profound sense of isolation from both his environment and the external world. Confined within the four walls of his home, he feels disconnected from the vibrancy of life beyond his immediate surroundings. He describes himself as detached from the dynamics of the outside world. Instead, he perceives himself as having distanced himself from the collective of people around him. This sense of alienation leads to a profound disbelief in God. The narrator experiences a profound feeling of abandonment in a world where he must endure suffering, which exacerbates his estrangement from the divine. As a result, he perceives himself as increasingly disconnected from God. In addition to his detachment from the divine, the narrator feels isolated from the external world and society at large, ultimately viewing himself as existing outside of the planet itself. He wants at least his shadow to know him. “The shadow that I cast upon the wall was much denser and more distinct than my real body. My shadow had become more real than myself” (Hedayat, 1937, p. 95). This situation illustrates that when an individual feels isolated from friends, nature, and society at large, he may turn to his shadow as a means of self-disclosure. The shadow serves as a reflection of his identity, aimed at understanding and recognizing him. The narrator finds a peculiar solace in his isolation and loneliness, which are compounded by the limited relationships he has. His universe revolves primarily around a small circle: his wife, mother-in-law, brother-in-law, and father-in-law, with only his uncle as a distant relative. “Only his [shadow] was capable of understanding” (Hedayat, 1937, p. 95).

This longing for validation from his shadow reflects his sense of alienation from himself. As a result of this estrangement—from God, his own identity, other individuals, the external world, and society—he finds himself becoming increasingly weak, helpless, and devoid of a distinct identity. Consequently, the narrator struggles to maintain trust in any aspect of his life. His faith in everything erodes, particularly because he perceives God as failing to offer solace or atonement to alleviate his suffering. This perception deepens his affinity for death, which he

views as the only solution to his pain. He believes that death, being an unyielding truth, can provide the comfort he seeks.

A fundamental aspect of existentialism is anguish. This experience arises from the recognition of life's inherent lack of meaning, leading individuals to feel fatigued, anxious, and uncertain, even in the face of their own freedom. As noted by Ellis and Bochner (1999), anguish is the manifestation of freedom. This highlights how the weight of freedom can evoke deep emotional turmoil, as individuals confront the existential reality of their choices and the absence of prescribed meaning. The narrator wrestles with profound existential anxiety, confronting the unrelenting and absurd nature of existence. The concept of "utter nothingness" emerges as a paradoxical source of hope, implying that true liberation or transcendence might be found in complete annihilation, a departure from the burdens of life itself. This idea contributes to a wider existential inquiry into the futility of life, as the narrator perceives himself ensnared in a dichotomy of bitter tragicality and tragic bitterness. The line "Idle thoughts! Perhaps. Yet they torment me more savagely than any reality could do" (Hedayat, 1937, p. 7) reflects the deep internal torment and despair of the narrator, showing how even fleeting or seemingly inconsequential thoughts can cause greater anguish than actual external circumstances.

Existential alienation primarily revolves around the notion of the individual's experience of objectification. According to Sayers (2003), the concept is used primarily to refer to a psychological, perhaps even spiritual, kind of malaise, which is pervasive in modern society but not specific to it. Rather, it is symptomatic of the human condition as such. This highlights how feelings of disconnection and estrangement are inherent to the human experience, transcending specific societal contexts. The narrator captures the profound existential pain and disorientation that define the human experience, exposing the complexities and burdens inherent in awareness. He points out that certain wounds, akin to a canker, gnaw at the soul in isolation, weakening it over time. Discussing these profound hardships with others proves futile, as society tends to categorize them as exceptional or singular occurrences. When individuals dare to speak or write about such pain, they are often met with cynical remarks and dubious smiles, revealing a collective adherence to prevailing attitudes and personal beliefs regarding suffering. This societal response contributes to the absence of genuine remedies for these pains. The narrator reflects that the only escape lies in artificial sleep induced by opium or wine, yet acknowledges the ephemeral relief provided by these substances. Ultimately, their effects are transient, often exacerbating the underlying anguish rather than alleviating it. Through these reflections, the narrator grapples with his consciousness and circumstances, captivating the reader with his intense psychological suffering and longing for solace.

Bitterness emerges as a prominent motif and a recurrent sensation throughout the novel, often highlighting the existential struggles faced by the narrator. The term "bitterness" appears nine times in this relatively brief narrative, emphasizing its significance in shaping the emotional landscape of the text. By highlighting this existential bitterness, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the narrator's internal conflicts and the relentless dissatisfaction that accompanies his desires. "It seems that there is an existential impact on the narrator himself as he identifies his "entire being" with this grotesque desire, which is in turn closely connected to bitterness" (Ardalan, 1975, p. 278).

This "ethereal girl" manifests in a series of visions that evoke the intricate scenes often found in Persian miniature paintings. Captivated by her beauty, the narrator resolves to venture outside his home in search of her, embarking on a quest that lasts for several days. Ultimately,



after one of his nighttime excursions in pursuit of his beloved, he returns to find her waiting at his doorstep. Without exchanging any words, she enters his room and lies down on his bed. Overwhelmed by a mixture of joy and disbelief at his fortune, he attempts to be a gracious host; tragically, he unintentionally poisons her with wine. Confronted with the dire consequences of his actions, he dismembers her body, places the remains in a suitcase, and buries her in a remote area on the outskirts of the city. The narrator's profound attachment to an elusive, transcendent figure—a beautiful damsel—serves to highlight his torment. Without a remedy for this affliction, he resigns himself to a lifetime of enduring his pain. He recognizes that no cure exists for his suffering, and though he resorts to pills in an attempt to forget, their fleeting effects ultimately deepen his despair. He compares his existence to “a fresh stump of wood lying at the side of a tripod” (Hedayat, 1937, p. 95). The stump, “scorched and charred by the fire of the other burning wood” (Hedayat, 1937) embodies a state of existential liminality—caught between vitality and decay. It “neither burns thoroughly nor stays fresh and green” (Hedayat, 1937, p. 95), symbolizing a life suffocated by the smoke and fumes of external forces.

In the midst of a world marked by suffering and despair, the narrator briefly experiences a flicker of hope, which he perceives as a transformative force. He reflects, “In this mean world of wretchedness and misery I thought that for once a ray of sunlight had broken upon my life” (Hedayat, 1937, p. 9). However, this fleeting sense of salvation proves illusory, as he soon realizes that it was not a true beacon of light, but merely “a passing gleam, a falling star” (Hedayat, 1937, p. 9) which manifested in the form of a woman—or perhaps an angel. This momentary illumination allows him to glimpse both the depth of his existential suffering and the ephemeral nature of the fleeting beauty he encounters: “In its light, in the course of a second, of a single moment, I beheld all the wretchedness of my existence and apprehended the glory and splendor of the star” (Hedayat, 1937, p. 9). The narrator confronts the tension between the despair of his existence and the transcendent, yet unreachable, ideal that momentarily shines through. The juxtaposition of fleeting beauty and enduring suffering aligns with Kierkegaard's understanding of existential despair, where moments of potential redemption are often overwhelmed by the crushing weight of one's existential reality. The narrator grapples with the profound connection he feels toward the woman, questioning how it is possible to forget someone so deeply intertwined with his sense of self: “How can I forget her, who is so intimately bound up with my own existence” (Hedayat, 1937, p. 9)? This reflection stresses the existential struggle between individual identity and the other, highlighting the impossibility of severing ties to a person who has become integral to one's own sense of being. The question speaks to the existential tension between the self and the other, a central theme in existential thought, where the intertwining of personal identity with another's existence creates an indelible mark, further intensifying the individual's sense of entrapment within their own emotional and existential state.

After losing his girlfriend, the narrator intensifies his reliance on substances such as wine and opium, yet, “those remedies of despair failed to numb and paralyse my mind” (Hedayat, 1937, p. 17). Rather than providing the desired escape, these indulgences exacerbate his mental anguish. The narrator's obsession deepens as he becomes increasingly unable to forget. “On the contrary, day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, the memory of her, of her body, of her face, took shape in my mind more clearly than before” (Hedayat, 1937, p. 17). The narrator experiences insomnia. He finds the shadow of his girlfriend everywhere, “Whether my eyes were open or closed, whether I slept or woke, she was always before me” (Hedayat, 1937, p. 17). He had grown dependent on these walks just as he had on opium. “It was as though I was compelled by some outside force to undertake them (Hedayat, 1937, p. 17)” During each walk, he found

himself consumed by thoughts of her, fixated on the memory of his first glimpse of her, unable to escape the overwhelming presence of that image in his mind.

Death is a fundamental component of existentialism, as it compels individuals to confront their own non-being—the denial of existence. Existentialism asserts that one must accept death; it serves as a mnemonic for life, illustrating that existence is a process rather than a conclusion. This perspective reveals the mechanisms through which we navigate our lives. Death dominates the text as a theme:

The shadow of death permeates the novel and its characters. Through the interaction of these characters, of these selves, and through the transmutation of dream images, some from Persian lore, the protagonist achieves transcendence. Despair and transcendence are mixed together in the rare experience of *The Blind Owl*. (Ardalan, 1975, p. ii)

The narrator points out that the fear of impending death holds significant weight. He portrays death as a source of calm, suggesting that it can alleviate life's anxieties. In this view, death offers relief and tranquility, allowing individuals to escape the burdens of existence. He articulates, "My one fear is that I may die without having come to know myself" (Hedayat, 1937, p. 7). The narrator seeks acknowledgment from both his own shadow and his self-identity. Prior to his death, he yearns for a profound understanding and recognition of his own being. Additionally, he says: "Death, death ..... where are you? The thought of death soothed me" (Hedayat, 1937, p. 64).

## Conclusion

Human life is replete with sorrow, suffering, and affliction. Pain and anguish are foundation of existence, with the potential to either strengthen an individual or lead them into desolation and despair. Existentialism addresses human existence by considering material conditions and relationships, where happiness and pleasure are seen as essential to a fulfilling life. When life is marked by suffering and sorrow, however, individuals may experience such intense anguish that they come to view death as a welcome escape from their pain. Hedayat (1936) captures the protagonist's deep suffering and existential dread, portraying humanity as a lost hound in an endless, barren wasteland. He depicts the bleakness and isolation of human existence, filled with aimlessness, despair, gloominess, and pervasive darkness. The protagonist due to his profound suffering, experiences profound alienation from people, God, and nature, turning to solitary activities and only confiding in his shadow. He suffers from relentless pain, exacerbated by temporary relief from medication, and grapples with the deep anguish of losing a mysterious girl and lacking genuine connections. He likens his existence to a scorched wood stump, illustrating his suffocating torment. Ultimately, he sees death as the only solace, viewing it as an escape from his suffering and disillusionment. For him, death becomes a sought-after release from enduring misery.

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