

Questions of Human Mortality in the Novel *the Pillow of Death* by Abdelhafid Amriou

Lynda Messali

Abderrahmane Mira University of Béjaïa
lynda.messali@univ-bejaia.dz

Lounis Ben Ali

Abderrahmane Mira University of Béjaïa
lounis.benali@univ-bejaia.dz

Received date: 02.01.2025; Accepted date: 11.03.2025;
Publication date: 03.05.2025, doi: 10.56334/sei/8.3.44

Abstract

The novel "Death Pillow" by the Algerian writer Abdelhafid Amriou. Expressing human pain, in a very detailed and profound way, conveys to us man's obsession and his struggle with his destiny. As you read the novel, you feel a kind of existential anxiety that has haunted a person from the moment of his birth. We have subjected the novel to an objective question, as well as an examination of its philosophical dimensions and an approach to the connection that connects the novel to the rest of the fields. Other knowledge, especially philosophy, and the characteristics that have come to characterize the philosophical novel at the textual and artistic levels

Keywords: The novel, death, contemporary philosophy, narrative, self, existence

* **CC BY 4.0.** © The Author(s). Publisher: IMCRA. Authors expressly acknowledge the authorship rights of their works and grant the journal the first publication right under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License International CC-BY, which allows the published work to be freely distributed to others, provided that the original authors are cited and the work is published in this journal.

Citation. Lynda M., Lounis Ben A. (2025). Questions of Human Mortality in the Novel the Pillow of Death by Abdelhafid Amriou. *Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems*, 8(3), 718-733. doi: 10.56352/sei/8.3.44. <https://imcra-az.org/archive/358-science-education-and-innovations-in-the-context-of-modern-problems-issue-3-volviii-2025.html>

Introduction

Literature, both poetry and prose, has become the civilizational framework that exposes the contemporary human suffering from economic, social, psychological and cultural issues, and is philosophically preoccupied with showing the fate of man in this existence, his issues, his goals and his functional role in the society in which he is located. Literature is the best expression of life, and it is one of the artistic means that tends to bring about change and transcend the accumulations of reality. It is known that it is the collective self that forms a vision of life and awareness of it, and draws the terrain of reality with clear lines and bright coolers, thus dictating the role and responsibility of the writer in the matter of this reality, criticizing it, trying to change and develop it, and directing this collective self towards throwing mercy and outlets of salvation from the coma of anesthesia and the cruelty of life.

Such a philosophical argument has become a preoccupation of philosophical studies in recent centuries, because the concept of man was absent in ancient philosophical studies and was not a major issue in Plato's philosophy or a preoccupation of Aristotle, and philosophy as a whole did not occupy a wide area of Arab culture as it did in Greek culture and did not attract segments of thinkers who were preoccupied with religious sciences such as Kalam, Hadith, Tafsir and Shari'ah.

It is true that the starting point of every philosophy is the theory of existence and the creation of concepts from cosmic facts and mental axioms to find the basic principles that search for the knowledge of a person's ability to formulate an intellectual theory corresponding to perceptual reality and present metaphysical perceptions capable of creating mental convictions for the facts you are looking for. but the concern with the human self started with existential philosophy and developed further afterwards.

In general, the questions of death and mortality have always haunted philosophy and put man in front of his realization of the truth of the end of his existence, as the human being exists as a mortal being and is the only being who knows that he is mortal, and this is the limit that cannot be penetrated, the infinite mortality and death, in addition to the fact that he knows this limit in the sense that he is the only being in the world who knows it, and this fact does not require being a reader of the occult to be discovered by existentialism, and knowing the end makes man accept fate and reality, which is the source of wisdom according to Heidegger, which is the acceptance of reality..



Figure 1. Novel The Pillow of Death

The novel *The Pillow of Death* is almost the last work of fiction by Abdelhafid Amrio, a creative and humble writer, as well as a wide horizon and imagination, and such phrases I wrote after reading his work and through knowing him as a person. Reading the novel was purely by chance, but it managed to penetrate my thinking space, first because I read it almost during the holiday period and coincided with the passing of my grandmother, and I lived the sad atmosphere with her, and second, it is a novel that goes beyond the narrative logic because it tries to evoke Gilgamesh's logic in the search for the mystery of existence and eternal immortality, about man's struggle with his fate and his inevitable end crowned by annihilation.

It is a novel that tries to approach the meaning of existence and death, to raise philosophical issues, the most important of which is the human suffering in his life from illness, fear and pain. It puts us in front of fate to ask deep questions in the form of inquiries sought by a child who has suffered since birth from the difficulties of life and the obstacles to happiness, and the pursuit of bad luck, and asks about circumstances and their ability to break the strength of man who breaks before fate and his inevitable fate, and also expresses his struggle to change this fate or limit its power.

The protagonist is an existentialist according to Heidegger, because he is in this public world that is determined by death and experienced in anxiety, and he is a human being who is aware of himself as a creature who already lives in anxiety, crushed under the weight of his loneliness within the horizon of his existential time (Al-Fayoumi, 1983, pp. 113-114). Here, he resembles the mythological hero who defies the gods in an attempt to counter the predictions of his future fate, but his stubbornness in reaching his goal makes him defy fate itself and finally comes to declare his defeat and resignation to life.

1- The Undermining of Subjectivity

The writer confirms the continuity of human questions about existence, so he takes us towards the question of the creation of man and the purpose of his existence, which philosophers and researchers have been preoccupied with and are now forgotten. This is what Heidegger confirmed in his book "Being and Time", where he explains the modern world's disregard for the last moments of human life, as he put it, a life that is considered transcended by death. All modern

thinkers, without exception, from Descartes to Nietzsche and even the thinkers of the technological age, have prioritized existence as a manifestation of subjectivity and formulated subjective conceptions of truth and the nature of man, thus all these philosophers, regardless of their various projects and purposes, continue the same question posed by Descartes.

What has been transcended in modern philosophies is the question of existence itself and the limitation of man in time and has become concerned only with man and his aspirations and achievements, which confirms the same question that has not left the thought of philosophers, especially Edmund Husserl, focusing on that effort that liberates man and enables him to regain his dignity and his true nature. Heidegger endeavored to undermine the self and liberate existence from all impurities and deposits of subjectivity. He also linked and replaced humanism with the truth of existence to form a new conceptualization of the human being.

Scholars have long emphasized that Heidegger's modern philosophy is the triumph of the self, as it has revolved around him since Descartes and returns to him. Even the rest of existence is viewed from the angle of its relation to the human being. Man is the being that not only exists, but has to exist and has to take on the responsibility and trust of existence, which is why he deserves a special word (*dasein*) (Jaafar, 2000, p. 105). In the seventeenth century, this word meant nothing more than presence. In the eighteenth century, its first philosophical meaning emerged when Christian Wolff translated the Latin word, which, in Scholastic philosophy, meant present, actual existence as opposed to abstract, speculative existence. The term was later transferred to a term specific to human life by Kierkegaard and Dilthey.

At the level of the novel, the hero's existential questions arise every time he conveys to us the environment in which he lives or moves to for some reason, and since existence is not an abstract idea without being related to a real existence or existences that we abstract from it, God exists, and his creatures exist by creating them, i.e. bringing them from nothingness to existence (Abbas, 2015, p. 105). In the novel, he describes things and brings them out of the state of non-existence in the text to the narrative existence, but he describes them from the standpoint of rejecting the difference in the manifestations of things and places, and we see this in his desire to show continuity since his birth as if he shows the inability of the sad human being to see the differences as long as life wears the same coolers. So we see him saying after he went out at night to check things out: Wandering around the streets of the city of Oran at night at this time enables you to imbibe the beauty of the city. It is as if the buildings are twins... similar in everything, the color of the paint, the statues, the windows, the sips, everything suggests that they are from one mold (Abdelhafid, 2019, p. 10), he only sees similarity in things and always tries to generalize in his vision towards the other/reality.

This does not prevent him from having a contemplative mind, but the hero is fully aware of all phenomena, but he presents them from his own logic, as the researcher states: "The fact that man enjoys the contemplative mind means that his thought is directed in a direction that would achieve the truth. By nature, he never stops looking for unity in the many, for similarity in difference, for survival in what is transient, and to think naturally as if he recognises some priorities such as the object (Essen, 2009, p. 16). We understand here that Omri means that our ideas or meanings do not exist in our minds if they do not have a basis in reality. The novelist tends towards generalisation again and rejects the difference in human nature, saying: Man despises and despises his fellow man, and even tramples on him as a mosquito tramples under the leg of an ox, and if any man could despise all human beings for the sake of the king of power, he would do so indifferently, and would exaggerate and exaggerate his contempt and disdain for his fellow man" (Orwell, 1984, p. 12)

Since Sartre emphasised that man exists, but it is his actions that give him the opportunity to appear, while the rest of the things are not subject to laws, they have absolute freedom in manifestation, and if this is true, the hero here becomes constrained to show himself, unlike his opinion to others who are far from them and are not obliged to submit to his sense, or even his gaze, he portrayed the people in the village envying each other without any reason, you find their faces grim and sullen as if they are from the banshee lineage. You find the elders sitting in the corner of a narrow street as if they were tombstones... The young and the young have inherited this sacred custom from their parents and grandparents who call themselves the mujahid, the son of the mujahid, the son of a martyr, the son of a martyr. It is clear that there is an alienation that the protagonist has experienced in the city and has shown signs of cruelty, so you see him denying the existence of others, perhaps even seeing their existence as marginal.

Thus, he gave existence a social symbol with all that is in it, considering that the universe always and in any concept always serves the meaning of presence, and not being absent from sight or vision. What increased his alienation was the death of the mother and the departure of the father, then his distance from the village, which caused him a suffocating and spiteful psychology of life, to the extent that he became a person who did not care about jobs or classes, as the village elder was like the other people he met later, during his visits to the brewery, who were limited to human figures that represented the face of life in the city.

The protagonist's consciousness evolves as his issues increase, and he also changes with the years, pointing to an important issue, which is that every time man finds himself forced to redescribe himself and define what he is, so we see the protagonist trying to provide an overall schematic picture of that existence that escapes all definition, by playing on the technique of the omniscient narrator, that god who knows everything about the psychology of the characters, and

their tendencies, saying for example about that old man he met for the first time: His features were suggestive of many interpretations that anyone should enquire about them and dig into their depths, but it seems that no one nowadays cares about that. He is Not only is he curious about the conditions of others, but he is also very comfortable with what happens with them, interfering in their affairs, and wanting their lives to go according to his own logic that he sees as a way to make them happy, even if it is related to ending their pain himself, which can be seen as a humanitarian tendency of the hero, which is intended to hide his illusions, which are the illusions of man that he weaves about him.

We see in the hero the fragmentation of what Nietzsche called the will to power or the self's claims to absolute dominance over existence. The text leads us to evoke Nietzsche's real opinion about humanism, which he sees as a mere metaphysics, it means a morality that fabricates false and transcendent values, i.e. idealistic values that aim to conceal and obscure reality. Of course, the text leads us to recall Nietzsche's real opinion about humanism, which he sees as a mere metaphysics. a morality that manufactures false and transcendent values of reality, the idealistic values that aim to conceal and obliterate the harsh manifestations of reality that startle and frighten people and shatter their dreams and illusions (Al-Ashmawi, 2007). She even lures others to reveal all the secrets in her psyche, no matter how big the secret is, and in the first meeting too, as happened with the sheikh who shared his story.

The story of the novel begins on a seat in a tramway station, similar to the mythological stories that play on the issue of predicting the fate of the hero or predicting his life and his entire future and the effects of his birth, which reminds us of the birth of Oedipus and the moment of predicting his life: 'Very soon, yes, you will become a father, your wife will give birth to a boy, he is the firstborn son, I have seen this in your palm...but this child will not be good, he will be born with misfortune and calamities will befall you, so do not let him be born...prevent his existence, otherwise his curse will fall on you...abort him. In her words, there is evidence that man is strictly subjected to blind fate and destiny, which does not care about the truth of his actions or the nature of his intentions, it distributes destinies and draws destinies.

What is striking in the novel is the father's complete refusal to acknowledge her words, as he is, according to the narrator, a believer in prophecy and divination, which confirms that since ancient times, man has not been content to submit to the phenomena of nature, but has tried to take control of his life and has exerted a lot of effort in order to. However, as the narrative develops, he and his wife make a blessing in order to obtain a child and pregnancy. She did not take the path of prayer, approaching God through prayer and almsgiving, and visiting all shrines to be blessed, although he never believed in these customs, but his longing for fatherhood made him believe in them.

2-The Quest for the Experience of Being

The narrator began to tell us about the moment of his birth and the happiness that accompanied that event, about accompanying his father to the orchard where he worked when he reached the age of four. Of course, his existential questions at that time were not like those questions that children often ask, as we see him growing up on other things such as his father's ability to plant all the trees in that land and take care of them, and about that house that, according to him, is located at the edge of the orchard, and here we see him emphasize the difference, which means that the child's vision has changed, and after seeing the difference in the surrounding objects,

he now sees them all as the same type and even the same value .He says about the house, for example: It was big, much bigger than our house, but it did for example, about the house: It was big, much bigger than our house, but it did not resemble any of the houses in the village, it was like a palace with a high triangular roof of brick colour with a chimney at the back end and windows like a rectangle .He narrated to us his entry into a mosque to learn the Quran from Sheikh Mokran.

The difference in his features and personality is one of the things that the writer always insists on showing in the hero or in himself, declaring his uniqueness and thus preparing for a stage that will change the fate of that character, but the narrator here did not show his positive behaviours as much as he tried to show the child's aversion to mixing with the rest of his peers until he became, as everyone said, alienated from him. One of the questions the child used to ask his teacher at the mosque about the usefulness of existence as long as the end of man is clear and why he has to struggle with death. The author shows the return of man to his primitiveness, due to his helplessness in the face of death, and this issue is raised after the birth of the child, who is ill: A few months after she was born, she began to show physical defects and her skin became speckled with black pimples and her face shrank, her features were the features of an old woman, and as time went on, black pimples invaded her body, her nostrils widened and her crying intensified for hours so that she did not sleep all night.

The boy's existential questions began when he learnt of his sister's impending death and saw her daily screaming in pain, as knowledge and its discovery is logical given the human tendency towards understanding and awareness, indeed, man is born with a natural impulse to question, ... about the origin of the world, the existence of God, the soul and the second life .He describes it as a professional hunter who does not miss his prey, regardless of their sizes and ages, and does not comply with the law of ages because he himself determines his own goal, he is an authoritarian tyrant who exercises his sadism on everyone.

The disease sucks life and movement from the human being, and manipulates the body consciously and consciously, and in this way it seems to limit its expansion through time, as the

body is the prison in which it is recovered, the human being can only be aware of life within the scope of this meaning and within its limits. So the hero wanted to triumph over the pain and end the farce of the ache, saying: I stepped quietly and approached my sister, I looked at her very attentively and pondered and meditated, then I took my mother's pillow and quietly placed it on the little girl's face and put my hand Little by little, the sound of her crying became weaker and weaker, and the movements of her little legs and arms became heavier, then she finally calmed down and silence prevailed in the place – after the As if he had realized that death is a mystery that is almost inseparable from the core of our existence as long as our existence is a temporal existence that inevitably moves towards mortality and that the universe wiytt5thxll involve many mysteries that the ordinary man may not try to clarify because he feels that it is not within him at the core of his existence.

The writer here turns to an issue that has been raised in Western society recently, namely euthanasia, which allows the doctor to end the patient's life out of compassion and alleviate his pain, and this is evident in what he says later: 'I realised that my sister will share me warmly, she will even hug and kiss me and ask God to let me enter heaven with her because I relieved her of the pain and that God will not reject her request because she suffered greatly and God knows it (Abdelhafid, 2019, p. 41) . In Kierkegaard's philosophy, life shows the suffering of the self to exist in an attempt to determine its own destiny .The boy did not stop at eliminating his sister, but narrated a dialogue with a lot of blasphemy, and yet we cannot disbelieve his speech because the questions and inquiries were coming from a six-year-old boy who said after he was isolated away from the house while he was betraying the Creator: 'I have triumphed over you and I laughed in triumph at that moment, I went to God, yes, I meant that I had triumphed over God... It seemed to me that this is the justice that should prevail in the world, I decided not to submit to the authority of pain and norms.(Abdelhafid, 2019, p. 45)

The character is shown fighting against his destiny, as if he is a mockery of the human being who knows his fate in advance. The issue of triumph over nothingness is observed first with the birth of the child and then moving on to the issue of triumph over disease and pain, and here he emphasises that man is the being who not only exists but has to exist and bear the responsibility and trust of existence (Safaa Abdel Salam, p. 105). Nihilistic thought seeped into the hero, emphasising man's isolation from everything, leading him to a total denial of his surroundings and then to a denial of belief in any value of faith in humanity or faith in God. Life as such is evil because pain is its primary motive and reality, and pleasure is nothing more than a passive abstinence from pain. Although Herbert Sencer sees in evil a spirit of good, and in error a spirit of truth, and that every theory about the origin of the universe leads us to things that the mind does not realise and stands helplessly in front of it and cannot understand anything about it (Mahmoud, 2003, p. 30),

evil often comes from weakness in those moments when you find that man is driven by his emotions and instincts.

The experience of death remains present in the Arabic poetic experience since ancient times, attempting to monitor the fate of human beings. When life withers and the atmosphere of death prevails, the death of life in its components and characteristics .In front of it, man stands amazed, as he watches his self represented in the other going towards nothingness and remains only a memory or even a trace that time soon takes care of eliminating, if not for the evidence of death, man would forget his fate, so he enters his confusion and anxiety when he stands at the graves, talking to himself the words of the hero: Shame on existence and humanity, and arbitrariness against souls that have the right to live as other souls live. There is some link in this existence that we still do not know or perhaps we acknowledge our ignorance of it, yet life is only waiting for death, and no matter how long a person lives, waiting for death becomes very boring (Abdelhafid, 2019, p. 48) . The cemetery and the prison are symbols of human helplessness in the face of fate.

The restlessness caused by death lurks in the unconscious and human thinking, affecting behavioural motives and the formation of basic ideas such as the idea of a redeeming hero or rebirth, and even ideas shared by people, which Jung called the collective unconscious. The individual has become a mere piece of dust in this great machine that can be replaced at any moment. Thus, death has become an objective reality and we talk about the cause of mortality and the possibilities of survival in a normal way, and every human being has become afraid of the truth, as the hero emphasises, so that human beings reproduce and ignore their inevitable fate, but they do not succeed in that because death is practicing its hobby every moment, and there is no doubt that every human being is consciously aware of that moment when his breath fades away little by little.(Abdelhafid, 2019, p. 67)

Thus, according to him, existence is an unconscious existence of things and the world, so that life emerges from the womb of death and then soon returns from it, no matter how much he tries not to return. Life is nothing but the breath that death breathes and then recovers it by its will and force whenever it decides to do so, and this is precisely the meaning of existence as Sartre describes it. This is exactly the meaning of existence as Sartre describes it, that is, that feeling or consciousness perceived in itself as if in a state of loneliness or isolation, which is non-existence in itself and a feeling of lack of existence and longing for existence, so that human existence is in fact a common existence as long as it does not dispense with others.

2- Religious existential enquiries

Philosophy looks at religion from different angles, as it is not a single entity like mathematical or natural science, but varies according to the diversity of philosophers. Therefore,

religion in general is a relationship of self-consciousness to God, as Hegel says: 'God is God only insofar as He is aware of Himself in Himself. Moreover, His knowledge of Himself is an awareness of Himself through man, and man's knowledge of God is realised in his knowledge of himself in God'. (Zakhili, p. 20) Religion has been central to human societies since ancient times, and nations are still preoccupied with it until this moment in their languages, cultures, and social, political, and economic situations.

Because the novel is life, it has been concerned with religion and its manifestations in its themes and narratives. It is strongly evident in texts that are concerned with the civilisational and political dimensions of nations, and even intellectual visions and human reality, or those that call for cultural and religious coexistence between the ego and the other. In fact, most of the texts do not present religion as a format that can be discussed, studied, or read, but rather representations are made according to a traditional vision or perspective related to interpretations of the psychology of the Algerian individual and society, as well as its presence. The anthropological presence is constrained by certain socio-cultural norms, so you see it as an element that keeps pace with what is happening in the country, even if it is a supporting element to the narrative in the 90th novel due to its intervention in the bloody events, it was inherent to the character of the Algerian person during colonialism and a component of the Islamic and Arab national identity of which Algeria is a part.

The texts of novelists were filled with these judgements by Boudjedra, Wassini al-Araj and Amin al-Zawi, until it became impossible to see a religious figure with a positive role, and if there is one, the authority continues to follow them and make them suspect individuals. We noticed this in the novel *Down the Love* by Amina Cheikh with the imam who taught in the mosque and they were subjected to the harshest punishments and exile.

Many novels in the third millennium have shown an interest in the religious discourse from the point of view of the need to include it in the processes of openness, cultural and civilisational communication, and even the nature of the relationships between the novel's characters. With the growing calls for coexistence between the Algerian and the Christian or Jewish other, even as we observed in Ismail Yabriri, some novels were more like terminological texts that call on society to adhere to it and reject openness to the other, disregarding any seed of civilisation that could result from this.

What distinguishes Omariwo's novel *The Death Pillow* is that he did not deal with the religious discourse in a stereotypical repetitive manner, but rather accompanied it with a set of philosophical questions that man collides with at some stages of his life, and he presented them with a lot of controversy and inquiry, the hero tended towards ridiculing religious hypocrisy and finding the opposite in an attempt to draw the failure of the religious system to establish the

answer to many existential questions that bother man, and the novel can support our opinion, as he said to the teacher 'When God created us of course the answer was to die (Abdelhafid, 2019, p. 80) .meaning what is the use of living life if we will eventually die. The fact that Omariu's protagonist is preoccupied with religion, or rather the idea of God, means that he cannot live except in the orbit of that unseen force to which he always resorts when his abilities are exhausted in the face of life's obstacles.

The hero obliges others to answer his childish questions, looking at religion from the point of view that it is first and foremost a morality. The fact that he is the keeper of the Book of Allah makes him argumentative. The Qur'an provokes and pushes one to ask questions that people think are blasphemous, but in reality they stem from a human being who is looking for a truth to quench his thirst for faith. He believes that 'the Qur'an does not need books to complete its meaning, it was revealed in its entirety, otherwise how would people have understood religion after the death of the Prophet, as there were neither books of hadiths nor books of interpretation (Abdelhafid, 2019, p. 87).

He also argued with Sheikh Amgran, who taught him at the mosque, about the issue of marriage and the choice of religion, trying to introduce philosophy into religion to understand it and collide with the multiplicity of interpretations. He tended to consider some interpretations as pure nonsense because they came up with things that are unacceptable to a sane person, and he was inclined to consider some interpretations as mere superstition. The death pillow establishes a stage in which the Algerian novel experienced a new awareness of religion and tried to hear the religious voice in its characters, after the aim of the discourse was to understand religiosity as a continuation of the conservative current, or as mere worship that lacks depth in terms of doctrines and mechanisms, so that the conflict of religious presence in the Algerian novel extends between scientificism and secularism.

The conservative religious discourse did not completely disappear in the novel because the sheikh or the imam of the mosque was the one who evoked it the most. However, the hero broke this pattern of receiving religious discourse without understanding or interpretation, as you find in the novel many attitudes issued by the child towards life, man, the tendency of malice that inhabits him and the conflict of the universe based on good and evil, such as the case of Cain killing his brother Abel out of jealousy and the issue of Iblis disobeying his Lord, as he sees that Satan is a victim of human existence because God wrote for him to disobey as well as man disobeying. Although Satan is a helpless victim, even when he whispers to man, it is out of pride for his status, which was taken away from him by God's decree (Abdelhafid, 2019, p. 99) .

He also has a different opinion about worship and the issue of asceticism, in which he has a different opinion because he rejects the idea of staying away from people and retreating to

worship, but it is necessary to be patient with temptation if one wants to reach the highest degrees of faith and demonstrate the strength of his faith, and the hero's patience appeared during his discovery of the truth about his mother's impending death: When I felt a great hatred of pain and a frenzied rage that I had never felt before, I imagined that the pain was cunningly repeating its action and entertaining my mother's body as it had entertained my sister's body in excess (Abdelhafid, 2019, p. 105). This death-induced restlessness is known to 'lurk in the unconscious and in human thinking, influencing behavioural motives, the formation of basic ideas such as the idea of a redeeming hero or rebirth, and even ideas shared by people, which Jung called the collective unconscious (Mahmoud, 2003, pp. 11-12).

As if the hero shows here the extent of man's preoccupation in this life to collect its meaning and value and to know his role in it, his responsibilities and his destiny, and after he monitored the issue of victory over nothingness in the beginning with the birth of the child, he allowed himself to move to the issue of victory over illness and pain, and this is the nature of humans, as man since ancient times has not been content to submit to the phenomena of nature and content to submit to them, but tried to take control of his life and made many efforts to change the course of cosmic phenomena (Esen, 2009, p. 69) . Death remains the absolute truth that is written on countless pages, for history is death. It invites, as Socrates invites man to know for himself the elements of human and human existence, saying: 'I worship God not for his paradise, as everyone else does, but only because he has commanded it: I worship God not for his paradise, as everyone else does, but only because he has commanded me to do so, and I do not need paradise and bliss in order to pray to God and give alms, while people require a reward for their prayers and alms that they give to the weak (Abdelhafid, 2019, p. 140) .

Religion is a feeling and belief that existence consists of two worlds, the mundane or the world of material phenomena that we see and live in, and the second is the hidden divine realm that lies beyond the world of visible phenomena. In the novel, we hardly know to which side the author belongs, did he make his character live all those pains because of what he was thinking about, about the penalty for those who disagree with the statements of scholars and interpreters and say what contradicts what is stated in their books. However, he repeatedly emphasised that he is a person who firmly believes in God and that he is, after all, a human being and they, according to him, are nothing more than corpses.

The sheikh and the imam offer interpretations based on convictions that refuse to argue in matters of religion, while the intolerant religious other, who does not have the qualifications to stop at such deep philosophical theses, judges the other as a devil and a bad omen. The novelist brought back to the forefront the issue that religion was facing in the midst of its adhesion to philosophy, which brought it into many disputes between them, because it was taking it for

religious purposes, until it became, in its eyes, every persecution that religion inflicted on people, as the philosophers thought, was really based on the clergy and every persecution that religion suffered was also based on the clergy and even the persecution of thought (Al-Fayoumi, 1983, p. 35) This caused the men of thought and philosophy a crisis that the clergy is an impediment to progress.

The hero here sees in it a kind of truth and a search for the nature of creation and existence, as if he declares that the real authority is for the human mind and how it understands the sacred text, which by its nature is a problematic text. This is because what characterises religion is that it contains a superstructure consisting of myths, beliefs, rituals and institutions, in addition to that, God Almighty commanded us to reflect on the matters of the universe, creation and the meaning of existence, in accordance with His words: In the creation of the heavens and the earth and the difference of night and day are signs for those who remember Allah, standing and sitting and on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, O Lord, you have not created this in vain, Glory be to you, save us from the torment of the Fire (Surah Al Imran, verse 189/190/191) .The relationship with God must be based on reflection and contemplation.

In the novel, we notice the high status of clerics in society, and the author explained the reason for this, according to his opinion, because the status has been prevalent since ancient times, because all work is utilitarian, whether it is agriculture, hunting or livestock care, while he was devoted to religious affairs, and religious affairs by nature is a non-utilitarian activity that transcends the rhythm of daily life (Al-Sawah, p. 52). From the novel, you can also find him as a vegetarian who refuses to eat meat and fish since he saw a sheep looking for her baby and found it dead, so the shepherd came forward and beat her severely and threw the little lamb to the dogs, while she remained silent. You may say; that the human body needs proteins and that he should eat meat to provide what his body needs, but I know that I refuse to live healthy at the expense of helpless creatures. It is a shame that man takes the life of a weak creature in order to derive his energy from it I do not deny that God has allowed us to eat meat and impose the sacrifice of sacrifice for those who can afford it. But I can't even slaughter a chicken (Abdelhafid, 2019, p. 165)

The religious bet that the novel can adopt through its imaginative and aesthetic nature remains the attempt to dig aesthetically into the question of existence and values, to try to reveal aesthetic and imaginative interpretations that contribute to the promotion of awareness of the self, the homeland and the world and attempts to understand the other from the perspectives of the self, which can also save the novel from superficial religious employment that may lead to a preachy understanding of the novel. The protagonist even enters the world of taboos to show that

deeds are with intentions, and that a person may reach some acts that are forbidden by God, but his intention remains to forgive, and love and tolerance fill his heart. The protagonist embraces some religious prohibitions that drag the Muslim into the labyrinth, such as his drinking in the bar, the company of Wafi and his acquaintance with the waitress later, Al-Hawari and the story of his mother and his paralysed sister. Here, he brings up the issue of drunkenness and love of God at the same time, saying in the words of the bartender : Do you remember God in a pub, with a glass of wine in your hands, and above your table is wine that is almost gone, do you see that you are drunk? You see the pub as a mosque... What does this have to do with that God is never imprisoned in mosques... I love God and believe in him even though I am here in a miserable pub...Wherever I am, he is present with me (Abdelhafid, 2019, p. 171).

In fact, the novelist presents the fact that worship may not reveal a person's intention towards God, and therefore his wearing of religion is not religion, but a metaphor for a religious mask in order to achieve a political, social or economic purpose, and that religion or rather religiosity is not associated with rigidity and conservatism, but rather there are those who carry a revolutionary tendency in favour of central and grand values .We can affirm that the text leads us to evoke Nietzsche's real opinion about humanism, which he sees as a mere metaphysics, i.e. a morality that manufactures false and transcendent values of reality, i.e. idealistic values that aim to conceal and obliterate the harsh manifestations of reality that amaze and frighten man and shatter his dreams and illusions (Al-Ashmawi, 2007, p. 34) .They ignore the real world, but in the same hero we recognise the fragmentation of what Nietzsche called the power par ahumanism and self claims of absolute hegemony over existence.

Before concluding our research, we took note of the novelist's opinion on women in the novel, which in Arab societies and in the Islamic religion is considered one of the most important issues subject to debate and religious evaluation. This woman was looking for security and tranquillity in a feeling that pushes the character to leave the mother's nest. The woman is effective in the life of the man from whom she derives presence, transcendence, spaciousness, beauty and tranquility, capable of containing the man and the source of his feeling of happiness and then fate, but in the novel she appeared suffering from the bullying of the man who caused her death after beating her and did not show any sadness, but she appeared to suffer from the bullying of the man who caused her death after beating her It took him only a few months to remarry, and his attempt to marry his daughter, then his desire to marry her, her escape to Oran, and the story of how the fiancé followed her and went to prison for her death, says the narrator: 'No matter how idealistic a man may be... no matter whether he is a believer or a non-believer, somewhere in his soul, in his feelings, he has the instinct of possessiveness and power at the expense of his brother (Abdelhafid, 2019, p. 194) In court, all his little behaviours are recounted.

And his eventual death after delivering a letter to the master and killing himself with the same pillow.

Conclusion

The analysis of Abdelhafid Amriou's novel *The Pillow of Death* highlights a profound philosophical exploration of the human condition in the face of death and finitude. The novel depicts the existential anxiety that arises from the awareness of mortality—a central theme in existentialist philosophy, particularly in the thought of Heidegger, for whom the acceptance of death is the path to truth and wisdom. The protagonist, confronted with his inescapable fate, embodies the tension between the desire to resist destiny and ultimate resignation, in a manner reminiscent of ancient myths such as that of Gilgamesh. This inner conflict reveals the fragility of the human being, torn between the search for meaning and the recognition of inherent limitations.

Beyond its narrative dimension, the novel emerges as an existential inquiry into the very nature of existence and the individual's place in a world marked by social alienation and the loss of subjectivity. The homogenization of individuals, the erasure of difference, and the protagonist's isolation underscore a contemporary identity crisis. Through this work, Amriou offers a lucid meditation on human suffering—pain, fear, and loneliness—while also calling for an existential awareness that alone can restore human dignity and authenticity.

Thus, *The Pillow of Death* stands as a major philosophical novel that questions human destiny, the meaning of life, and the confrontation with death. It invites readers to reflect deeply on their own existence and on how to face the inevitable end with clarity and courage.

References

- Abbas, K. (2015). *Existence and Nothingness in Existentialist Philosophy*. Haddous and Ashraquat for Publishing and Distribution.
- Abdelhafid, A. (2019). *The Masters of Death*. Meem Publications.
- Al-Ashmawi, M. S. (2007). *History of Existentialism in Human Thought, Doctrines and Personalities*.
- Al-Fayoumi, M. I. (1983). *Existentialism, the philosophy of human illusion*. Anglo-Egyptian Library.
- Al-Sawah, F. *God, the Universe and Man*.
- Esen, A. A. (2009). *The Philosophy of Life 'The Study of Thought and Existence'*.
- Essen, A. (2009). *Philosophy of Life 'The Study of Thought and Existence'*. Dar Al-Shorouk for Publishing and Distribution.
- Jaafar, S. A. S. (2000). *The Real Existence of Martin Heidegger*. Egypt.

- Mahmoud, A. R. A. S. (2003). The Philosophy of Death and Birth: A Study in Al-Siyab's Poetry, Culture Society.
- Orwell, G. (1984). 1949. Nineteen Eighty-Four. London: Seeker and Warburg.
- Safaa Abdel Salam, J. The Real Existence of Martin Heidegger.
- Zakhili, M. The Function of Religion and the Human Need for it. Special Edition, International Islamic Dawa Publications.

IMCRA - International Meetings and Conferences Research Association

www.imcra-az.org; E-mail (Submission & Contact): editor@imcra-az.org
"Science, Education and Innovations in the context of modern problems" Journal
ISSN (pe): 2790-0169 / 2790-0177

DOI- 10.56334/sei/8.3.44



© 2025 The Author(s). This open access article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 license
Share— copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format. Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot
revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms.

Under the following terms:

Attribution — you must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that
suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. No additional restrictions

You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.