CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

An existential crisis is a profound psychological condition in which individuals confront essential questions regarding the purpose, meaning, and value of life. This phenomenon often emerges in response to intense personal experiences, such as loss, trauma, guilt, or exposure to death, and typically leads to feelings of despair, confusion, and isolation. According to Irvin D. Yalom (1980), such crises arise from confronting four ultimate concerns: death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness. These concerns are inherent to the human condition and often trigger deep internal reflection and emotional unrest. As individuals grapple with these existential realities, they may experience a sense of emptiness and a diminished sense of personal significance.

The urgency to understand and respond to these crises has been central to existential psychology, particularly in the work of Viktor E. Frankl. Frankl, a Holocaust survivor and psychiatrist, introduced logotherapy—a form of psychotherapy grounded in the belief that the primary motivational force in human beings is the pursuit of meaning. He argued that even in the most unbearable situations, life retains its meaning, and it is the individual's responsibility to discover it. In his seminal work, *Man's Search for Meaning* (2006), Frankl asserts, *"Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose."* (p.104) From this standpoint, Frankl identified what he termed the "Tragic Triad"—suffering, guilt, and death—as the primary existential triggers that challenge individuals' capacity to find meaning.

One particularly useful framework for understanding the existential dimensions of *Othello* is Viktor Frankl's Tragic Triad. Frankl developed logotherapy to respond to the growing existential crisis in modern society, which he termed the "*existential vacuum*" (Frankl, 2006). He believed that human beings are not primarily driven by pleasure or power but by an intrinsic need for purpose. At the heart of his philosophy is the Tragic Triad, which identifies three unavoidable elements of human existence: guilt, the acknowledgment of one's moral failings and the burden of responsibility that follows; suffering, an inevitable part of life that, when confronted meaningfully, can lead to personal growth; and death, the ultimate limitation of human existence, which paradoxically gives life meaning by reminding us of its brevity (Frankl, 2006;). Frankl argued that individuals embracing these realities with pose can transcend their suffering and cultivate meaning, even circumstances. (Frankl, 2006)

works are written works that contain the author's emotions, nowledge. Literary works function as a source of information curring in the author's social context as well as amusement.

According to Wellek and Warren (1963: 22), they said that *"Literature is the product of an author's ability to make up a universe of unlimited imagination through references to real-life events."* Literature, particularly tragic literature, has long served as a profound medium for exploring such existential questions. Tragedy often portrays characters caught in situations where their values, identity, and sense of purpose are intensely challenged. As Terry Eagleton (2008) notes, literature provides a space to investigate the human condition, portraying how individuals respond to the absurdities and sufferings of life. Through characters' journeys, readers gain insight into the psychological and philosophical dilemmas that define human existence.

In this study, Viktor Frankl's theory of the Tragic Triad is employed as the primary analytical framework to examine the existential conditions experienced by the main characters in *Othello*. Although Frankl's ideas originated in a clinical and historical context, their conceptual relevance transcends disciplines and eras, allowing for interdisciplinary application within literary analysis. The play's depiction of psychological and moral breakdowns presents an opportunity to explore how existential crises manifest in complex, multidimensional characters. While Othello's narrative arc is often viewed as the central focus, this research provides a broader interpretation by identifying distinct existential themes embodied by other characters as well. Subtly hinted throughout the play is a distribution of existential burdens, suggesting a division of the Tragic Triad across three major characters.

This research aims to explore the existential crises presented in *Othello* through the lens of Viktor Frankl's Tragic Triad. The study does not merely seek to categorize characters according to psychological conditions but to engage deeply with how these conditions reflect broader existential dilemmas that continue to resonate with readers and audiences today. By integrating Frankl's existential theory with literary analysis, the study highlights the enduring relevance of Shakespeare's tragedy and affirms literature's capacity to illuminate the human struggle for meaning amidst suffering.

1.2 Identification of Problem

After reading *The Tragedy of Othello, The Moor of Venice by* William Shakespeare, the researcher found several problems which can be analyzed:

a) While Othello has been extensively studied from literary and dramatic perspectives, there is limited research that integrates psychological and _____ ameworks, such as Frankl's Tragic Triad, to analyze the

_____ ies often focus on Othello's jealousy and Iago's villainy but fail _____ ine how guilt, suffering, and death shape the characters' actions _____ e stages of the protagonist's journey toward self-actualization _____ surrounding female characters in *Othello*, particularly _____ often focus on gender roles and inequality. However, few

studies delve into the emotional depth of her character through an existential lens, especially concerning sacrifice and the human confrontation with mortality.

d) The emotional tension and inner turmoil experienced by the protagonist are frequently interpreted through sociocultural or historical frameworks. Yet, interpretations that explore these struggles as reflections of existential suffering and a crisis of meaning remain limited.

e) Iago's pursuit of revenge is frequently studied as a symbol of villainy or unchecked ambition. Still, it is seldom considered as an expression of existential emptiness or as a distorted attempt to reclaim meaning following personal betrayal and resentment.

1.3 Scope of Problem

This study focuses on analyzing how the three main characters in Shakespeare's *Othello*—Othello, Iago, and Desdemona—represent Viktor Frankl's Tragic Triad: guilt, suffering, and death. The research is limited to examining the existential issues experienced by these characters using Frankl's theory, especially how their emotional struggles shape their actions and lead to their downfall. The study also focuses on two main concerns: first, the lack of research that applies existential psychology, particularly Frankl's ideas, to the play; and second, the need to look deeper into how themes like guilt, suffering, and death—not just jealousy or revenge—play a key role in the story. This analysis is limited to *The Tragedy of Othello, The Moor of Venice,* and does not include other plays or psychological theories outside Frankl's work.

1.4 Research Question

According to the scope of the problem, the author decided the research question below:

a) How do the main characters of *Othello* represent the three elements of Viktor Frankl's Tragic Triad—guilt, suffering, and death—in Shakespeare's *Othello*?

b) How do the characters reflect the existential crises described in Frankl's existential theory?

1.5 Objective of the research

The objective of the research can be stated as follows:

a) To analyze the main characters in Shakespeare's *Othello*—Othello, Iago, and Desdemona—embody the three existential elements outlined in Viktor Frankl's Tragic Triad: guilt, suffering, and death

b) To analyze the existential crises experienced by the main characters of ʌello, Iago, and Desdemona—through Viktor Frankl's Tragic ical framework.

he study

study offers theoretical and practical significance. Theoretical ificance will be explained as follows:

this research is expected to be used as reference material for science, especially for English literature students, who will

understand the psychological study of existential crisis of the characters in literary works.

b) Practically, for students, more specifically English literature students, this study provides students with a deeper understanding of *Othello* and the application of psychological theories in literature. It encourages critical thinking and interdisciplinary learning, enhancing their analytical skills in both literary and psychological contexts. And for readers, the research offers contemporary readers insights into the timeless themes of suffering, guilt, and the search for meaning in *Othello*. It encourages personal reflection on these themes, fostering a greater appreciation for the complexities of human experience and the importance of finding meaning in adversity.

1.7 Sequence of the chapters

This study has been systematically divided into five chapters. Every chapter covers a distinct topic, which is as follows: Chapter one provides an introduction that consists of background of the study, identification of problems, scope of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, significance of the study, and sequence of writing. Chapter Two elaborates on previous related studies and the theoretical background of the study. Chapter three provides a research method that consists of the source of the data, the technique of data collection, and the technique of data analysis. In addition, chapter four consists of analyses and discussion, and finally, chapter five describes the conclusion and suggestions.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Previous study

The author needs references to previous study that is relevant to this research. There are three previous studies that the author has identified which applied similar theory, issue, and or object. The three previous studies are Fainuddin (2015), Assia Guidoum, Mohamed Lamine Debaghine, and Carolyn Calloway (2021), and Syafina Muzaqqi and Jumino (2022).

Fainuddin (2015), in *Jealous Murderers as Reflected in Shakespeare's Othello: A Psychoanalytic Study*, analyzes the characters Othello and Iago using Freudian psychoanalysis, focusing on themes of jealousy and unconscious drives. The study aims to explore how jealousy operates as a destructive psychological force, rooted in the id, ego, and superego. Using a qualitative textual analysis method, the research applies Freud's structural model of the psyche to examine character motivations. The result reveals that Othello's and Iago's actions stem from repressed desires and unresolved inner conflicts— Othello's downfall is driven by unconscious insecurity, and Iago's manipulation arises from suppressed envy and inferiority.

Guidoum et al. (2021), in *Existential Escapism and the Tragic Triad: Sula Vs Fred Daniels*, explore the interplay between existential themes and Viktor Frankl's Tragic Triad—guilt, suffering, and death—in literary characters. The study examines how the protagonists in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and Wright's *Fred Daniels* confront existential crises. Using a qualitative approach rooted in Frankl's existential philosophy, the researchers analyze the characters' psychological and emotional responses to adversity. They highlighted how these characters' experiences reflect the complexities of human psychology and the search for meaning in the face of adversity.

Syafina and Jumino (2022), in their study *The Will to Meaning in Tiger's Life Journey in Kathleen Glasgow's "How to Make Friends with the Dark"*, aim to examine the existential crisis experienced by the protagonist, Tiger Tolliver, using Viktor Frankl's concept of the Tragic Triad—death, pain, and guilt. The researchers apply a qualitative method through Frankl's logotherapy framework to analyze Tiger's psychological development following the loss of her mother, financial hardship, and emotional isolation. The findings show that Tiger ultimately discovers meaning in life by engaging with creative, experiential, and attitudinal values, helping her emerge from existential emptiness and begin

studies that apply Viktor Frankl's Tragic Triad have primarily dual characters and how they overcome existential crises by ning through guilt, suffering, or death. These studies tend to s who ultimately achieve self-realization, personal growth, or covery. However, there is a lack of research that explores how

each element of the Tragic Triad, guilt, suffering, and death, can be distributed across multiple characters within a single literary work.

In contrast, this study examines how the three main characters in Shakespeare's *Othello*—Othello, Iago, and Desdemona not only embody the elements of the Tragic Triad respectively, but also fail to find existential meaning through them. This failure leads to tragic consequences: self-destruction, moral corruption, and untimely death. By applying Frankl's philosophy to a classical tragedy in which no character reaches resolution or redemption, this research offers a new perspective on existential failure, thereby expanding the application of Frankl's theory beyond narratives of survival and healing.

2.2 Theoretical Background

In this sub-chapter, the researcher explains the theory used as the theoretical basis for this study. The primary theoretical approach employed is Viktor Frankl's Tragic Triad. Derived from his philosophy of logotherapy, Frankl's Tragic Triad identifies three unavoidable aspects of human existence: guilt, suffering, and death. According to Frankl, while these elements are inherently linked to human experience and often associated with pain and loss, they also provide profound opportunities for growth and the discovery of meaning. In applying this framework to literature, the study examines how the existential dimensions of guilt, suffering, and death are reflected within the narrative and its characters.

The following are the theories on which this study is focused:

2.2.1 The Historical Development Of Viktor Frankl's Psychoanalytic Theory

Viktor Frankl's psychoanalytic theory, known as logotherapy and existential analysis, developed throughout his life and career, influenced by his experiences and the historical context of the 20th century (Frankl, 1985; Batthyány & Russo-Netzer, 2014). Viktor Emil Frankl was born on March 26, 1905, in Vienna, Austria. He grew up during a time when Vienna was a hub of intellectual and psychological thought, with figures like Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler making significant contributions to the field of psychoanalysis.

In the 1930s, Frankl started developing his ideas that would later form the basis of logotherapy. He was influenced by existential philosophy and sought to introduce a spiritual-mental dimension into psychology. Frankl aimed to combat what he called *"psychologism,"* a reductionist view of human motivation that ignored the role of meaning and values. The most pivotal period in the development of Frankl's theory came during World War II. In 1942, Frankl and his family were arrested to Nazi concentration camps. Over the course of three years, is moved between four camps, including Auschwitz. During his e camps, Frankl observed and experienced extreme suffering, ofoundly shaped his understanding of human psychology 2006). He noticed that even in the most dehumanizing s, some individuals were able to maintain a sense of purpose

and dignity. This led him to conclude that the search for meaning is a fundamental human motivation, even in the face of extreme adversity (Frankl, 2006).

After his liberation in 1945, Frankl returned to Vienna and began to formalize his theories. In 1946, he wrote his seminal work, *Man's Search for Meaning,* which detailed his experiences in the concentration camps and outlined the basic principles of logotherapy. Frankl positioned logotherapy as the "Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy," following Freud's psychoanalysis and Adler's psychology. The key concepts of logotherapy include:

1. The will to meaning
    Frankl proposed that the primary motivational force in humans is the search for meaning.
2. Meaning in life
    He argued that meaning can be found in any situation, even in suffering.
3. Freedom of will
    Frankl emphasized that humans have the freedom to choose their attitude in any given set of circumstances.

In the later part of his career, Frankl's theories continued to evolve. The practice of logotherapy gave rise to a need for additional methods and a broader understanding of psychopathology. This led to the development of Existential Analysis (EA), which expanded on Frankl's original ideas (Batthyány & Russo-Netzer, 2014). Existential Analysis introduced a more complex, four-dimensional motivational system and developed specific therapeutic methods. This evolution brought Frankl's approach closer to other humanistic psychologies, such as Carl Rogers' person-centered therapy (Wong, 2014). Viktor Frankl passed away on September 2, 1997, but his ideas continue to influence psychology and psychotherapy. Logotherapy and Existential Analysis are still practiced and studied worldwide, and Frankl's emphasis on meaning and purpose in life remains relevant in contemporary psychological thought.

Frankl's psychoanalytic theory developed over nearly a century, beginning with his early contributions in 1920s Vienna. His experiences during World War II deeply shaped his ideas, leading to the formulation of logotherapy and the concept of the Tragic Triad. Through the integration of existential philosophy and psychological insight, Frankl left impact on the field of psychotherapy that continues to evolve is lifetime.

Frankl's Tragic Triad Theory

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of logotherapy and the concept of the Tragic Triad. Through the integration of existential philosophy and psychological insight, Frankl left a lasting impact on the field of psychotherapy that continues to evolve beyond his lifetime.

From these experiences, Frankl developed Logotherapy, a form of existential psychotherapy centered on the belief that the search for meaning is the primary motivation in human life. Within this framework, Frankl introduced the Tragic Triad, which consists of three unavoidable human experiences: suffering, guilt, and death. He argued that these realities often trigger existential crises, situations in which individuals question their life's purpose, value, and direction.

a) Guilt

Guilt is the first element of Frankl's Tragic Triad. It arises when individuals recognize that they have failed to live up to their own moral standards or ethical responsibilities. Guilt is often seen as a negative emotional experience, one that many people try to avoid. However, Frankl viewed guilt as an essential part of the human condition. He argued that guilt is an opportunity for growth, as it forces individuals to confront their mistakes, accept responsibility, and take corrective action.

Frankl (2006) believed that guilt stems from a sense of responsibility, and in this sense, it can be a positive force. He wrote, *"Guilt is an awareness of having failed in one's duties"* (Frankl, 2006). This awareness can lead to a crisis, where the person must grapple with the consequences of their actions and confront their failures. However, Frankl emphasized that rather than being paralyzed by guilt, individuals should use it as a motivation to take responsibility and make reparations. For example, someone who feels guilty about not being there for a loved one during a time of need may use that guilt to mend the relationship or offer support in the future. In this way, guilt is not a permanent state but a call to action. By confronting our guilt, we can learn, grow, and correct our course, which ultimately helps us become more authentic and self-aware.

Guilt, in Frankl's framework, also leads to the search for meaning through responsibility. "*By turning toward guilt in this way, we can find our way back to responsibility, and responsibility brings ack to meaning*" (Wong, 2014:158). Thus, guilt serves as an ential signpost, urging us to reflect on our choices and, if ssary, make amends. In facing our guilt, we are challenged to me better versions of ourselves.

b) Suffering

According to Frankl (2006), suffering is one of humans' most universal experiences. It can take many forms: physical pain, emotional turmoil, psychological distress, or existential anguish. Suffering is an inherent part of human life that cannot be avoided, and it is in the face of suffering that the individual's ability to find meaning becomes crucial.

Frankl's own experiences in Nazi concentration camps shaped his understanding of suffering. He observed that individuals who were able to find meaning in their suffering, whether through love, faith, or a sense of purpose, were more likely to survive and endure the hardships of the camps. In Frankl's view, suffering itself is not necessarily the problem; the way we choose to respond to suffering is what matters most. He explained, *"If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering"* (Frankl, 2006). For example, Frankl himself found profound meaning in his suffering during the Holocaust. Despite the horrific conditions, he believed that the pain he endured could be transcended by focusing on the larger meaning it could offer. This belief became a cornerstone of his therapeutic approach, which asserts that people can find meaning in their suffering by reframing it in a way that aligns with their values and goals. Frankl said, "*When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves*" (Frankl, 2006:115). This highlights how suffering, while inevitable, can lead to personal transformation if we choose to face it with courage, resilience, and a search for meaning.

In modern life, suffering often appears as loss, illness, or personal failure. According to Frankl's theory, these difficult experiences can be transformed into opportunities for personal growth, contribution to others, and the development of life's meaning. By responding to suffering thoughtfully and purposefully, individuals can begin to find meaning even in painful situations.

However, Frankl also warned that not everyone responds to suffering with transformation. When suffering is not met with the will to find meaning, individuals may fall into what he terms the existential vacuum—a state of inner emptiness, boredom, and apathy. In such a condition, people feel that life has lost direction, they begin to drift psychologically and spiritually. This vacuum n leads individuals to destructive substitutes for meaning, such ddiction, aggression, or extreme conformity.

A particularly dangerous consequence of the existential um is nihilism, the belief that life is inherently meaningless. kl viewed nihilism not only as a philosophical stance but as a chological collapse—a loss of the belief that anything matters.

Individuals caught in nihilism may no longer see any value in love, truth, or morality. Instead of using suffering as a bridge to growth, they fall into despair and meaninglessness. Frankl believed that this condition reflects a deep refusal or inability to confront pain with purpose.

Closely related to nihilism is cynicism, which Frankl identified as a psychological defense mechanism. Rather than confront disappointment, loss, or suffering, some individuals mock or devalue the very ideals they once cherished. Cynicism, in this view, is not a sign of strength but a symptom of despair. People become cynical not because they see clearly, but because they no longer believe that meaning can be found. In literature and in life, this cynical attitude often manifests as sarcasm, manipulation, or moral detachment—a mask worn to hide existential vulnerability.

In sum, while suffering can serve as a gateway to meaning, it can also—if unmet with reflection and responsibility—lead to profound existential disintegration. The existential vacuum, nihilism, and cynicism are not inherent consequences of suffering, but of suffering that is unprocessed, ununderstood, and unredeemed. Frankl's theory urges us to see suffering as a call to meaning, not as a sentence to despair.

c) **Death**

Death is the final and perhaps most universal aspect of the Tragic Triad. While suffering and guilt can be mitigated or redefined, death is the ultimate certainty that everyone must confront. Frankl's insights about death are particularly poignant because, rather than focusing on death as something to fear or avoid, he saw it as a powerful motivator for living more meaningfully.

For Frankl, the awareness of death should not create despair but rather awaken a deeper appreciation of life. "*The awareness of our own mortality is the catalyst for living a life full of meaning*" (Wong, 2014:161). The certainty of death forces individuals to reflect on what truly matters to them — their values, relationships, and goals. Frankl argued that by accepting the inevitability of death, we gain the freedom to live with purpose and intention. This awareness gives life its urgency and sharpens our
s on what is truly significant

Frankl believed that individuals who accept their mortality
more likely to live authentically and meaningfully, making the
st of their time on Earth. "*We can discover this meaning in life by
epting its finiteness*" (Frankl, 2006:121). For example, someone
ng a terminal illness may find a renewed sense of purpose,
ding to reconcile with estranged family members, complete

unfinished goals, or live in a way that reflects their deepest values. In this sense, death becomes not something that diminishes life but something that gives life its value. It reminds us of our limited time, urging us to embrace every moment. The recognition of death can lead individuals to live more fully, appreciating the preciousness of each experience and connection. In this way, death acts as a guide, motivating us to prioritize what is truly meaningful and to live a life of purpose.

2.4. Pertinent Ideas

2.4.1 Existential Crisis by Viktor Frankl

Viktor Frankl's concept of existential crisis is central to his theories of logotherapy and existential psychology. An existential crisis occurs when an individual faces a profound sense of meaninglessness in their life, often triggered by challenging circumstances such as suffering, guilt, or awareness of death. Frankl argues that human beings are driven by a fundamental need to find meaning in their lives, and when this need is unmet, it can lead to deep psychological distress and confusion (Frankl, 2006).

In his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl discusses how the awareness of suffering and the inevitability of death can trigger an existential crisis. He suggests that, while suffering is an unavoidable part of the human experience, it is possible to find meaning in even the most painful or tragic circumstances. For Frankl, the key to overcoming an existential crisis is the ability to find purpose and meaning in life, even in the face of adversity (Frankl, 2006).

Frankl identifies that individuals can experience an existential crisis in various ways, often manifested through guilt, suffering, and death—three central elements that define his Tragic Triad. These elements play a significant role in how individuals interpret their lives and face the challenges that threaten their sense of purpose. Frankl's view asserts that individuals have the freedom to choose their attitude toward these challenges, and that this freedom enables them to create meaning even in the most dire circumstances (Frankl, 2006).