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## REBUILDING SELF: LOSS AND TRANSFORMATION IN ALAN SILLITOE'S "THE FISHING BOAT PICTURE"

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the ideas presented by British writer Alan Sillitoe concerning existentialism, focusing on his unique perspective on the theme of loss through the lens of the British object relations theory. Sillitoe's literary portrayal of the protagonist and his coping mechanisms for grief and loss offer a distinctive perspective to analyze shifts in individual identity. Our focus centres on Sillitoe's story titled "The Fishing Boat Picture," which allows us to explore the connection between loss, grief, and personal transformation. Through the protagonist—an elderly man who comes to terms with his wife's passing and discovers a sense of self—this paper presents a framework for comprehending how loss impacts the disruption and rebuilding of one's identity. Moreover, it sheds light on how psychological experiences of loss can shape individuals' perception of themselves by emphasizing how moments of loss and grief can lead to profound growth by serving as experiences. Ultimately, this research contributes to a comprehension of the psyche and how we navigate through losses and grief while constructing our identities.

**Keywords:** Alan Sillitoe, Grief, Identity, Loss, Transformation

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## KENDİNİ YENİLEME: ALAN SİLLİTOE'NUN "BALIKÇI TEKNESİ RESMİ" HİKÂYESİNDE KAYIP VE DÖNÜŞÜM

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### ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Britanyalı yazar Alan Sillitoe'nin varoluşçuluk hakkındaki fikirlerini araştırmaktadır ve İngiliz nesne ilişkileri kuramı çerçevesinde Sillitoe'nin kayıp kavramına yaklaşımına odaklanmaktadır. Sillitoe'nin ana karakteri resmedişini, bu karakterin kayıp ve yas ile başa çıkma mekanizmalarını ve bireysel kimliğinde yaşadığı değişimleri analiz etmektedir. Bu çalışma, Sillitoe'nin "Balıkçı Teknesi Resmi" adlı hikayesine odaklanarak, kayıp, yas ve kişisel dönüşüm arasındaki bağlantıyı keşfetme fırsatı sunmaktadır. Bu makale, eşinin ölümüyle yüzleşmesi sonrasında kendini keşfeden yaşlı bir kahraman ile, kaybın kişinin kimliğinin bozulması ve yeniden inşası üzerindeki etkisini anlamak için bir çerçeve sunmaktadır. Ayrıca, kayıp ve yas kavramlarının bireyin kendini algılamasını nasıl şekillendirebileceğini vurgulayarak, bu tür deneyimlerin derin bir dönüşüme yol açabileceğini ortaya koymaktadır. Sonuç olarak, bu araştırma, kayıplarla ve yasla nasıl başa çıktığımızı ve kimliklerimizi nasıl dönüştürdüğümüzü anlama konusuna katkıda bulunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Alan Sillitoe, Dönüşüm, Kimlik, Hüzün, Yas

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## Introduction

The experience of loss and grief is a human condition that is shared universally. It begins with the natural process of separating from parents, after a period of attachment to them as caregivers. As people grow, they form additional relationships beyond the primary bond with their parents. However, throughout life, individuals experience various forms of loss such as the loss of loved ones, living beings, places, institutions, and relationships whether by choice or circumstances beyond their control. The process of mourning becomes a mechanism for dealing with any type of loss that disrupts these connections. Freud was the first offer to a systematic psychoanalytic approach to understanding the psychological processes involved in mourning. He defines the process of mourning as "regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (1917, p. 243). Freud's perspective demonstrates the operation of human mind by highlighting that connections with individuals, locations or beliefs are aspects of our lives and loss in its manifestations is a part of the human journey and impacts people from diverse cultures and contexts. This universality emphasizes that it is an experience that resonates with everyone regardless of who or what they have lost. Grief and mourning following losses are a result of the prior attachment and possession of the lost entity. The loss of a loved one is particularly devastating, as the connections and attachments made with living things, objects, and places contribute to the formation of one's identity. Losing a loved one means losing a part of oneself, leading to profound pain and mourning. As social beings, people struggle to cope with the isolation and disconnection that come with the loss of a loved one. They grieve not only for the loss itself, but also for the part of themselves that is gone. This raises the question of who they are without the connection that has been lost. Losing the connections that make up one's identity leads to uncertainty and confusion about their place in the world.

Loss and its transformative effects have not received sufficient attention in the literature. However, it is clear that anyone who experiences a loss and grieving process must undergo a transformation. The loss of a loved one, in particular, can be a powerful catalyst for this transformation. Initially, the overwhelming grief may lead us to believe that we will eventually return to our former self, but the loss reveals the integral nature of our connections with others to our identity. These connections are the bonds that shape us and losing them leads to a profound change in the self. This transformative process does not occur quickly or easily, as it involves a psychological process known as mourning. The mourning process serves as a means to help us come to terms with the loss and ultimately leads to a new perception of oneself. As such, the loss of a loved one can be a significant trigger for a deep and enduring transformation of the self.

Alan Sillitoe's oeuvre is characterized by his skilful exploration of the theme of loss and its transformative effects on how these characters see and make sense of their environment and experiences. For Sillitoe, whose works frequently explore themes of loss and identity, this would involve examining how profound personal loss impacts the characters' perception of the world and themselves. His works delve into the question of identity and how it is shaped by profound personal loss, leading to a heightened sense of self-awareness. In this study, we closely examine Sillitoe's (1995) celebrated short story, "The Fishing Boat Picture," in which

the protagonist's wife's death acts as a catalyst for a profound existential shift. By conducting a nuanced analysis of this work, we gain valuable insights into Sillitoe's broader artistic vision and the ways in which literature can offer a unique means of exploring complex psychological terrain with deftness and sensitivity. This study highlights the exceptional strengths of Sillitoe's literary artistry and illuminates the transformative power of loss in literature.

### **Alan Sillitoe's New Existentialism**

The literary oeuvre of Alan Sillitoe has garnered considerable scholarly attention due to its evocative portrayal of the existential struggles of working-class individuals in post-war England. While this thematic strand constitutes a prominent and recurrent feature of Sillitoe's writings, there exists an understudied facet of his works that demands scrutiny. Specifically, Sillitoe's use of the motif of existential escape holds intriguing psychoanalytic implications, given its linkage to the theoretical tenets of loss in the object relations theory of Sigmund Freud and Melanie Klein. A close examination of this overlooked yet compelling dimension of Sillitoe's fiction can offer valuable insights into the interplay of literature and psychology and illuminate the complex ways in which narratives can serve as vehicles for exploring existential quandaries.

As a modern writer, Alan Sillitoe deals with the sense of detachment and overall despair of modern individuals by creating an escape into inner world by his characters. However, the physical or spiritual escape is always temporary since the loss of a partner, often by death, brings about a new sense of identity for the one withdrawn into himself. As Jean-Paul Sartre, a pivotal figure in existentialism, claims that the central idea or basis of existentialism is that "existence is prior to essence"; that is, humans form their essence in the course of the life they choose for themselves (2007, p. 26). Sartre means that human beings have a strong subjective aspect and choose their passions, emotions, as much as any other features of life. This idea promotes a really personal and introspective way of living, emphasizing that each person is responsible for creating their own set of values. It supports the notion that true freedom comes from breaking from norms and choosing values that resonate with one's individuality while letting go of those that do not. This philosophy places a great deal of responsibility on individuals to actively shape their identities through decisions, personal commitments and an intentional detachment from societal pressures. To fully embrace the freedom to choose one must first navigate through challenges that pose a threat to this freedom. This approach to existence is vividly portrayed in Alan Sillitoe's works, where characters embody themes in a manner offering a fresh and captivating perspective on the human experience.

While existentialism's roots can be traced back to Kierkegaard in Denmark and Husserl and Heidegger in Germany, it was in France, through the works of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus that existentialism gained significant international prominence. Their works grappled with the themes of absurdity, freedom, alienation, and the human condition in a seemingly irrational world. Colin Wilson distinguishes between "critical existentialism" of writers such as Camus and Sartre and "positive existentialism of the new existentialists" (1967, p.18). Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, two of the most important pioneers in the existentialist tradition, present unique perspectives on the human condition, each marked by their distinct philosophical and literary approaches. French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre focused on the

question of human existence and the meaning of life. Sartre's philosophical perspective on existentialism stands out for its emphasis on freedom and the notion of "bad faith" in which he posits that individuals have the ability to make their choices and define their values (1992, p.64). However Sartre observes that many people often choose to reject this freedom and instead live in a state he refers to as bad faith. This notion highlights how individuals tend to avoid the responsibility that comes with their freedom by conforming to societal norms or external expectations thereby denying their selves and the essence of their free will. This means that they deny their responsibility for their actions and blame their circumstances or other people for the choices they make. This may suggest that individuals must confront their freedom and accept the responsibility that comes with it in order to create meaning in their lives. In Sartre's works, such as his novel *Nausea* (1964) we witness his somber and pessimistic outlook. Unlike poets who might perceive the world with a sense of wonder and joy, Sartre finds it unsettling and perceives the existence outside of the human mind as a source of existential discomfort. This perspective heavily influences his narrative in *Nausea*, where the protagonist experiences moments of realization that cause him to feel a sense of unease. Sartre explores these themes by illustrating his fascination with the feeling trapped in mundane existence under constant scrutiny of others. Sartre's philosophy of existentialism thus offers a thought-provoking perspective of human life, one characterized by the battle between embracing complete freedom and the inclination to flee from it.

Albert Camus was another French philosopher and author who is best known for his philosophy of the absurd. In contrast to Sartre, Albert Camus presents a different viewpoint associated with existentialism. While he explores the same themes with Sartre, such as the absurdity of life and the human condition, Camus provides a different approach. According to Camus (1955), the universe is fundamentally meaningless and absurd and human beings must confront this fact and find meaning in their lives. Camus believed that the only response to the absurdity of existence was "rebellion" (1955, p. 113). Here rebellion refers to the rejection of the meaninglessness of the universe and a commitment to creating one's own meaning in life. For Camus, the rebellion against the "absurdity of existence was an act of courage that required the individual to confront their mortality and embrace the present moment" (1955, p. 56). His prose literary work (1989) delves into the concept of the absurd which refers to the clash between desire for meaning and the meaningless universe. Camus' characters frequently confront the lack of meaning in life; however he proposes a rebellion against this absurdity. This rebellion does not involve denying the nature of existence but rather embracing it while refusing to surrender to despair. His philosophy encapsulates this perspective by arguing that simply engaging in the struggle against the absurd is enough to fulfil a person's heart, implying a form of defiance. Unlike Sartre, Camus does not completely dismiss the possibility of discovering joy or meaning through experiences despite acknowledging life's absurdity. Occasionally, his works hint at moments that surpass reality as they are moments of profound connections or realizations.

In many ways, Camus and Sartre's philosophies are similar, as both emphasize the need to create one's own meaning in life and confront the reality of human existence. However, they differ in their emphasis on rebellion and freedom, respectively. Their theories indicate different perspectives: Camus believed that rebellion against the absurdity of existence was necessary

to create meaning, while Sartre emphasized the importance of embracing one's freedom and accepting responsibility for one's actions. Despite these differences, both Camus and Sartre contributed significantly to the development of existentialism and their ideas continue to be influential in philosophy and literature today.

New existentialism emerged during the mid-20th century as a movement that sought to challenge the unfavorable elements commonly associated with traditional existentialism. New existentialists aimed to expand on the insights of existentialism while highlighting the potential for personal growth and progress in individuals (Bakewell, 2016). The shift from existentialism to new existentialism marks a significant change in philosophical thinking evolving through the ideas and contributions of various thinkers. Traditional existentialism, pioneered by figures like Sartre, Camus and Heidegger emphasizes the idea that life's inherently devoid of meaning in a universe without purpose. This perspective highlights freedom and the responsibility to shape one's essence through choices and actions. According to Sartre (2007), existence comes before essence suggesting that individuals must define their significance in a universe. On the other hand, Heidegger explores the concept of "Being" and the notion of "Dasein" (being there) focusing on an individual's authentic existence and their encounter with their own mortality (1962, p.26). His philosophy addresses the tendency for humans to forget about being and often live inauthentically by becoming absorbed in distractions, losing sight of their nature and potential. However, new existentialism represents progress from these ideas. It does not discard existentialist views. New existentialism builds upon the ideas of traditional philosophy by integrating insights from phenomenology as well as other philosophical and psychological disciplines. This new wave of existentialism recognizes the limitations of consciousness and seeks to explore beyond traditional boundaries set by existential thought.

One important figure in the development of new existentialism is Maurice Merleau-Ponty. His exploration of the phenomenology of perception challenges the separation between mind and body proposed by Descartes. According to Merleau-Ponty (1962), perception is a process that involves interpretation and is deeply rooted in our interactions with the world. This perspective expands inquiry into the realm of embodied experiences. In the same way, the work of phenomenologists like Husserl lays a foundation for existentialism. Husserl's concept of "intentionality" suggests that consciousness is always directed towards something and not merely a reception of information (2019, p. 26). This dynamic understanding of experience implies that our perceptions and consciousness actively shape our reality challenging the existential notion of a chaotic and indifferent universe. New existentialism places emphasis on comprehending the lived experience as well as exploring the structures of consciousness. This approach aims to uncover meanings and values that are implicitly embedded in our experiences. It does not perceive existence as devoid of meaning but rather suggests that meaning and values often remain hidden due to limitations within our ordinary consciousness. Furthermore, new existentialism draws heavily from psychology insights derived from existential branches. Thinkers, like Viktor Frankl and R.D. Laing contribute to this perspective by emphasizing the ability to rise above challenges and the significance of discovering purpose in times of suffering and hopelessness. While traditional existentialism focuses on the absurdity and lack of meaning in life within an universe, the modern form of existentialism delves into deeper layers of human perception and consciousness. It suggests that our everyday perceptions



and understanding are limited and that a profound and meaningful reality can be accessed through an exploration of consciousness and personal experiences. This contemporary version of existentialism thus bridges the gap between feelings of despair and the potential for discovering meaning in our existence.

In contrast to existentialism's emphasis on the limitations and constraints of existence, new existentialists were intrigued by exploring opportunities for personal transformation and advancement. This often entailed exploring the aspects of existence such as creativity, empathy and meaningful connections with others. New existentialists emphasized the significance of self-discovery and personal growth in their works. They believed that individuals are not limited by their circumstances, they rather have tremendous potential for transforming themselves and progressing. This optimistic approach involves a renewed focus on the aspects of being human such as creativity, empathy and forming meaningful connections with others. By exploring these aspects new existentialists aimed to demonstrate that humans can surpass their limitations leading to a satisfying and purposeful existence. In this context, new existentialism presents a dynamic outlook on human potential compared to traditional existentialism's emphasis on the absurdity and meaninglessness of life. It suggests that while existential challenges are a part of being human, they do not define our existence. Instead, individuals have the capacity to shape their destinies through engaging empathetically with the world and those around them.

In England, the rise of positive existentialism presented new literary possibilities for contemporary British writers, including Alan Sillitoe, who based their approaches on these ideas. This movement rejected determinism and instead emphasized the power of human agency and the potential for individuals to shape their own destinies and create meaning in their lives. While traditional existentialism focused on negative aspects of experiences like anxiety and despair, new existentialists viewed them as opportunities for personal growth and development. For instance, the experience of anxiety was seen as a natural and healthy response to the challenges of existence and the key was to confront it and use it as a catalyst for personal growth. In this way, new existentialists sought to create a more positive and empowering vision of human existence by emphasizing the importance of personal responsibility and individual choice. In this sense, Sillitoe's works often explore the transformative effects of personal loss on his characters leading to a heightened sense of self-awareness and the recognition of the power of individual agency. By rejecting determinism and embracing the potential for personal growth and development, Sillitoe's writing embodies the spirit of positive existentialism and its focus on the power of the individual to shape their own destiny.

### **Mourning and Psychological Transformation**

Grief is a lifelong process that involves connecting with, internalizing, and eventually letting go of loved ones who have passed away, while incorporating their memory and significance into one's own internal world. However, mourning is a unique process that occurs when an individual accepts that they will be permanently changed as a result of a loss they have experienced. It involves coming to terms with the fact that a transformation will take place and accepting it as a part of the grieving process. In other words, mourning is a way of acknowledging and agreeing to go through a change brought about by loss. In the context of

mourning, as part of the grieving process, Michael Cholbi (2021) explains that it is an acknowledgment and acceptance of the transformative impact of loss. Mourning is not just about letting go or holding on to the relationship with the deceased. It goes beyond releasing and clinging onto the connection we had with the departed. Instead, it involves utilizing our relationships as building blocks and reshaping our identities in light of this loss. This perspective of mourning, as Cholbi (2021) puts it, is a journey towards personal freedom. This clearly shows that mourning is a form of psychological liberation, allowing us to transcend the limitations of our previous identity that was defined in relation to the deceased.

The foundation of psychoanalytic thought on loss, mourning, and psychic transformation can be traced back to the works of prominent figures in the field such as Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein, and those who have continued their legacy. Sigmund Freud's paper "Mourning and Melancholia" published in 1917, marked a significant milestone in the understanding of the role of mourning in human psychology. Freud (1917) highlighted the importance of the process of mourning and its impact on an individual's psychological well-being. Object relations theorists further expanded upon Freud's insights, recognizing that mourning is a crucial developmental process. They were the first to recognize the critical nature of the mourning process and its impact on the growth and transformation of an individual's psychic state. Thus, their work built upon and added to Freud's ground-breaking insights into the human experience of loss and mourning.

According to Sigmund Freud (1953) in psychoanalytic psychology, the concept of mourning refers to an individual's response to the loss of a loved one or the disappointment that is associated with a beloved person. This loss can be either tangible such as the passing away of a relative, or intangible such as the disillusionment of an ideal. In order to understand the effects of mourning on the psyche of an individual, Freud categorizes it into two distinct categories: "normal mourning" and "pathological mourning" (1917, p. 153). Normal mourning is a conscious process in which the individual acknowledges the loss and gradually withdraws their emotional attachment and energy from the lost object. This process allows the person to reorient the focus and libido towards a new object. According to Freud (1917), a crucial aspect of healing and moving on from grief involves redirecting the libidinal energy towards a new object. Interestingly, Freud (1917) proposes that this new object primarily refers to the ego itself. This perspective represents a departure from the notion of channeling emotional energy towards external factors like new relationships or passions. In Freudian psychoanalysis, the ego symbolizes the self or conscious mind, incorporating self-awareness, identity and personal experiences. In the context of mourning and loss when one's libido (psychic energy) focuses on the ego as the object, it signifies an introspective journey into self-awareness and self-nurturing. This internal shift entails investing energy in understanding oneself while fostering personal growth. This inward orientation fosters self-healing and development. The individual engages in self reflection reevaluating life goals, values and beliefs in light of their loss. It is a process of redefining oneself and discovering meaning and purpose in life from what was lost. This realignment helps alleviate feelings of emptiness and disconnection that often accompany grief. Furthermore, when individuals prioritize their sense of self they are more likely to cultivate a sense of kindness and acceptance towards themselves. This approach helps them



recognize and integrate their experiences of loss into their life stories accepting it as a part of their past and shaping their identity.

On the other hand, pathological mourning is an unconscious experience that occurs when the individual is unable to perceive or accept the loss. The phenomenon of pathological mourning is characterized by an individual's inability to properly grieve the loss of a loved one. Unlike normal grieving where the individual gradually withdraws their emotional energy from the lost object and focuses on himself or herself for healing, in pathological mourning the individual becomes overly attached to the lost object in their fantasies. This attachment is due to the individual's desire to maintain a sense of connection to the lost loved one leading them to introject the lost object into themselves and identify with it. As a result, the loss of the loved one transforms into an ego-loss and the attachment to the lost object shifts to become an attachment to the self. This shift in attachment leads to a narcissistic withdrawal where the individual becomes increasingly preoccupied with themselves and experiences a decline in interest in those around them. The pathological mourner becomes absorbed in a whirlwind of self-reproaches, losing sight of their loved one and the outside world. In conclusion, pathological mourning is a complex process that diverges from the normal grieving process. The individual's attachment to the lost object becomes distorted leading to a narcissistic withdrawal and an increased focus on the self.

Melanie Klein was a pioneer in understanding the significance of the grieving process on human development and social bonds. Building upon the work of Sigmund Freud, she was the first to explore how mourning shapes our identity through our relationships with others. Her insights led to the development of object relations theory, which provides a deeper understanding of human motivation and the importance of relationships in shaping our lives. Klein's theory bridges the gap between Freud's instinct-based view of human nature and a more relational view, which emphasizes the need for connection and relationship in our lives. The contributions of Klein have been instrumental in shaping our understanding of human development and relationships. Melanie Klein (1968) believed that a new born baby is in a state of fragmentation and undergoes a painful journey towards integration through experiences with external objects such as others. At first, the baby sees these objects as a part of itself, but over time, it learns to differentiate and separate them from its own identity. This process is a critical aspect of the development of a coherent sense of self. Klein's developmental processes of "paranoid-schizoid" and "depressive processes" and their influences on human psyche are really crucial to understand the mechanism of pathological mourning (1968, p. 34). According to the theory of Melanie Klein (1968), a dynamic and non-linear development of the mind is marked by psychic positions or modes of experience. Even individuals who are generally well-adjusted can temporarily revert to earlier stages under stress.

The first stage, known as "the paranoid-schizoid position", occurs when the infant needs to cope with frustration in its relationship with the primary attachment object (usually its mother) (Klein, 1968, p. 163). In this earliest phase, the infant relates the world through external part objects, the breast being the first love object. The infant perceives everything as parts rather than whole beings. Through these external part images, the infant tries to ease the anxiety in its unconscious phantasy life. The infant tries to ease anxiety and hostile and envious

impulses by organizing a split between the good and bad objects which refers to loved and hated aspects of the same object. The good ones are those that nurture and comfort it whereas the bad objects are persecutory objects that increase its inner anxiety. Although Klein does not give a clear explanation about whether behaviours of mother or unconscious of the infant are responsible for creating an organization of the objects, the favourable development in the paranoid-schizoid position is that good experiences should predominate over bad ones. The positive aspect of the paranoid-schizoid position is that good experiences should outweigh negative ones. Effective handling of the anxieties faced in the early stages of an infant's development leads to a structured perception of the world. As a result, the infant perceives its ideal object and positive impulses as stronger than its negative object and impulses leading to greater identification with its ideal object. Klein claims that "with the ego, inner harmony, security and integration ensue" (1968, p. 313). She highlights that along with the growth and development of the ego, an inner peace is achieved. More specifically, the identification with the ideal good object makes the infant feel more secure and capable of defending itself and its ideal object. With a strengthened ego and a secure ideal object, the infant experiences less paranoid fears and a greater tolerance of its own death instinct.

Klein (1968) asserts that the depressive position is really important for learning to mourn and is normally achieved in the first year of life. It consists in setting up the mother as a whole object. The infant starts to relate itself more and more not only to mother's breast, face, eyes as separate objects but to herself as a whole person. The whole mother, the first love object, can be at times good, at times bad, present or absent, who can be both loved and hated. Klein asserts that "the synthesis between the loved and hated aspects of the complete object give rise to feeling of mourning which imply vital advances in the infant's emotional and intellectual life" (1997, p. 17). Based on the recognition that mother is separate, the infant recognizes that the mother is an individual who leads her own life and has relationships with other people. Klein addresses the relationship between the recognition of mother as a separate object and mourning by claiming that;

The poignancy of the actual loss of a loved person is, in my view, greatly increased by the mourner's unconscious fantasies of having lost his internal 'good' objects as well. He then feels that his internal 'bad' objects predominate and his inner world is in danger of disruption. We know that that loss of a loved person leads to an impulse in the mourner to reinstate the lost loved objects in the ego. In my view, however, he not only takes into himself the person whom he has just lost, but also reinstates his internalized good object (ultimately his loved parents), who became part of his inner world from the earliest stages of his development onwards. These too are felt to have gone under, to be destroyed, whenever the loss of a loved person is experienced. (1997, p. 321)

As the mother becomes a whole object, the infant's ego becomes a whole ego and this constitutes the beginning of subjectivity. In Klein's conception (1968), subjectivity involves mourning and object loss. Separation from the internalized mother provides a meeting with the sense of self. This period is a kind of separation-individuation process in which the favourable experience is an urge to emotionally merge with the mother as a separate and whole being rather than an internalized part object. During this time, the pain of grieving is initially felt and

can lead to feelings of guilt towards the loss and a desire to recreate or rebuild it. The infant feels a strong sense of despair due to the feeling of helplessness and loneliness.

What stems from Klein's theory is that this stage of healthy separation from mother is crucial to deal with future mourning as it creates a foundational behaviour pattern. The infant's reaction to the loss of the mother, and its passing through the process of separation from mother through a healthy mourning which leads into individuation and construction of identity is a precursor of normal mourning of later years. Every painful piece of mourning related to life losses and separations follow the pattern of separation from the mother.

The mourning process is an ongoing experience that begins from the moment an infant is separated from its mother. Those individuals who are able to successfully navigate and grow through the mourning experience in their early years are better equipped to handle loss and bereavement in the future. On the other hand, infants who are unable to properly process their mourning may become stuck in their grief and may never learn to effectively deal with loss. This first experience of mourning sets the stage for how individuals will handle bereavement and loss throughout their lifetime and is crucial in preventing pathological forms of mourning in later years. In essence, the ability to mourn is a key factor in an individual's ability to navigate the ups and downs of life, and to find resolution and healing after loss.

As such, Klein's theory (1968) appropriately shows that when individuals successfully navigate the challenging process of grieving in their infancy, it leads to a typical pattern of mourning. Children are better equipped to handle this process, which involves integrating their sense of self and their relationship with a lost loved one, if they had a strong, loving bond with their caregiver. This creates a psychological environment where love can overpower hate. However, if this balance is not achieved, it can negatively impact the couple's relationship, leading to a lack of passion, feelings of persecution, or even fear. Thus, it is common for couples who struggle with unresolved grief to experience difficulties in their relationship or even a complete cessation of emotional and sexual intimacy following a loss.

It is notable that when the bond with a positive caregiver is weak, individuals may resort to using narcissistic control instead of working through the grieving process. They may try to keep the good and bad aspects of the lost loved one separate. However, resolving depressive anxieties through the mourning process leads to a surrender of narcissism and enables the individual to separate and develop their sense of self. This has significant consequences for managing loss, as it allows individuals to experience the loss of a loved one without feeling like they have lost a part of themselves. When depressive anxieties are resolved, it leads to a reduction of narcissism and allows for greater individuality and separation. This is significant in terms of coping with loss as the loss of the other is traumatic because it results in the loss of a part of oneself. It is important to understand the manic behaviours that may accompany loss, as they are key indicators in the assessment of couples who are struggling with unresolved grief.

Klein's research (1968) provides a valuable contribution to the field of psychology by shedding light on the complex mechanisms that underlie the experience of normal grieving and melancholic reactions within couples and families. Her work highlights how the inability of

couples to effectively manage their depressive anxieties may result in a shift towards a paranoid-schizoid mode, ultimately leading to disinterest and withdrawal from their social support network, and further into an inner world of fantasy. Moreover, Klein's approach emphasizes the importance of examining the inter-subjective nature of couple relationships, revealing the potential for significant changes in one's sense of identity. Overall, Klein's findings offer a critical framework for understanding the intricate and dynamic ways in which individuals navigate their experiences of grief and loss within the context of close relationships.

### **The Loss and the Discovery of a New Self: Alan Sillitoe's "The Fishing Boat Picture"**

Alan Sillitoe's philosophical stance is marked by a distinctive brand of existentialism, which is characterized by the incorporation of object relations theory into his work, offering new insights into the complex emotions of grief and loss within human relationships. Through his writing, Sillitoe (1975) delves deeply into the psyche of his characters, examining the intricate and often tumultuous nature of human relationships, and exploring the profound impact that losing a connection with another person can have on one's mental state. One example of Sillitoe's unique approach to existentialism can be seen in his short story "The Fishing Boat Picture," in which the death of the wife becomes a transformative event for the husband, propelling him on a journey of self-discovery. Here, the notion of transformative event becomes a concept that extends beyond mere happenings. It is regarded as a source of transformation—a juncture where new ways of thinking, being and comprehending our world come into being. Deleuze's philosophy (1990) is important in drawing attention to the meaning of such a transformative event. It encompasses more than the happening by holding the power of transformation. Deleuze perceives reality as a flow of change, where everything is in a state of perpetual transformation. In this context, an event signifies an incident that triggers a shift or transition into something new. It marks a moment when the usual course of existence is disrupted paving the way for new possibilities and forms of being. Sillitoe's narrative (1995) underscores such transformative power of an event of loss, and how it can profoundly affect one's worldview and sense of self. Through his work, Sillitoe (1995) emphasizes that loss is an inherent and fundamental aspect of the human experience and stresses the importance of processing it properly. It can be observed that Sillitoe posits that failing to do so can have significant detrimental effects on one's mental health. Sillitoe's unique approach to existentialism offers readers a profound understanding of the complexities of human relationships and the ways in which they shape our lives. Through his incorporation of object relations theory and his profound insights into the nature of grief and loss, Sillitoe offers a nuanced and multifaceted perspective on the human condition, encouraging readers to explore and examine the complexities of the human experience.

The primary character depicted in "The Fishing-Boat Picture" is Harry, a postman in his fifties, whose narrative revolves around the dissolution of his marriage and the subsequent self-discovery he experiences. The story is set between two global wars, where Harry and his wife Kathy initially wed following the conclusion of the first war, maintaining a matrimonial bond for a duration of twenty-eight years, which is coincidentally equivalent to Harry's occupational tenure. A decade of separation ensues until Kathy returns at the onset of the second world war. The story begins with Harry expressing a sense of fatalism as he explains how he fell into the two-fold trap of marriage and job, stating that he married Kathy as soon as he obtained a

permanent job, not out of love, but rather a sense of obligation due to a promise he had made (Sillitoe, 1995, p. 92). This union was constructed on a foundation of deceit and results in significant anguish for Harry, who is forced to confront the consequences of living a life of denial, as Sillitoe suggests, "Sooner or later you have to pay for living in a state of oblivion" (Sillitoe, 1959, p. 18). In British post-war period, there was a prevailing sense of resignation and a tendency to accept one's fate often expressed through ironic humour. This feeling was the result of a long period of economic hardship, social upheaval, and the trauma of war. Many people felt that they had little control over their lives and that their future was predetermined. This sense of resignation often manifested itself in the form of melancholy, a feeling of sadness or gloominess that could be pervasive. The protagonist Harry's marriage is based on a sense of resignation and fatalism. He feels that he had to marry his wife because "he had promised her he would and because she wouldn't let him forget it" (Sillitoe, 1995, p. 92). This decision ultimately leads to a sense of melancholia as the marriage is unhappy and causes him much pain. Harry's story is an example of the ways in which the post-war feeling of resignation could lead to a sense of hopelessness and despair.

Melanie Klein's depressive position (1968) is relevant in understanding the pervasive sense of melancholia that affected many people in the post-war period. The trauma of war and resulting economic and social upheaval made it difficult for individuals like Harry to process their grief and come to terms with their losses. Klein's theory (1968) emphasizes the importance of mourning in order to move through the depressive position. The failure to mourn over loss including the loss of loved ones, homes, and ways of life can lead to various manifestations of the depressive position such as a sense of detachment or numbness, feelings of guilt or shame, and difficulty forming meaningful relationships. In extreme cases, individuals may turn to substance abuse or other self-destructive behaviours as a way of coping with their pain. In the story, Harry's despondent state is attributed to grief stemming from his life before getting married. This sense of indifference towards life that Harry displays can be seen as a reflection of the prevailing war mindset in society at that time. This particular mindset is characterized by a state shaped by the aftermath of war encompassing various experiences and emotions. People were grappling with disillusionment as they witnessed their war ideals and beliefs being shattered. It wasn't only about mourning and loss of lives but about losing a way of life including the destruction of homes, communities and the erosion of national and personal identities. Thus, Harry's personal grief and his apparent detachment reflect these issues showing how his individual struggles are intertwined with the larger existential and societal challenges during his time. This overall background significantly influences how individuals experience grief and loss as we observe in Harry's life. Through the protagonist Harry, the story demonstrates how unresolved grief can manifest not in signs of depression but also in a more subtle and all encompassing sense of existential despair. This aligns with Klein's perspective that working through feelings of depression is crucial for healing and personal growth. For Harry and many others in the war era, the challenge lies in finding a way to come to terms with the past and reconnect with the present—a journey that is deeply personal while reflecting broader societal circumstances.

Kathy, the wife of the protagonist, resents Harry's apathy, as the narrator describes, "she was never happy about our life together, right from the start" (Sillitoe, 1995, p. 93). This



emotional distance between them leads to bitterness, as Harry is both unable and unwilling to give his wife the reassurance she desperately needs. The resulting sense of melancholy is further compounded by Kathy's own feelings of entrapment in a marriage that Harry sees as nothing special. As he bluntly puts it, "the bare fact of getting married meant only that I changed one house and one mother for another house and a different mother" (Sillitoe, 1995, p. 94). The contrast between Kathy's desire for emotional connection and Harry's detachment creates a palpable sense of sadness and melancholy in their relationship, as they struggle to find fulfilment and meaning in their union. Harry's reasons and general feelings about his marriage show that Harry has an attachment problem when it comes to his marriage with Kathy. Harry's statement that getting married only meant changing one house and one mother for another suggests that he sees their relationship as lacking in meaning and depth. Furthermore, Sillitoe portrays Harry's emotional repression by describing how he channels his feelings and fantasies into adventure and travel books, using them to escape from his everyday reality. When Harry's wife Kathy intrudes on this escape, she is met with resentment, as evidenced by Harry's reaction to her comment that his reading is "bad for [his] eyes," which draws him away from his "hot possessive world of India" (Sillitoe, 1995, p. 95). Kathy's frustration with Harry's emotional detachment reaches a breaking point when she throws his travel books into the fire. While she intends to draw his attention to their relationship, Harry shows more concern for the books than his wife's feelings, stating that "it was a good reading-book, and what's more it belonged to the library, I'd have to pay for a new one" (Sillitoe, 1995, p. 96). Kathy recognizes that forcing Harry to engage with their marriage is meaningless and leaves home, leaving a message that "I am going away and not coming back" (Sillitoe, 1995, p. 97). Kathy's departure from their home signifies her despair about Harry's melancholia and inability to connect with her emotionally. Although Kathy had been having an affair with someone for a certain period of time, she does not leave Harry until she recognizes that his passive ignorance is beyond her tolerance.

In the story, following Kathy's departure, Harry enters a prolonged period of emotional numbness, lasting for ten years. During this time, he is depicted as being unresponsive to anything beyond his most basic needs. Harry's internal escape deepens as he works his monotonous job at the post office, allowing his mind to wander into the fictional worlds of characters such as Arthur Seaton in "Saturday Night and Sunday Morning" and Colin Smith in "The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner" (Sillitoe, 1995, p. 98). Harry's prolonged emotional deadness and withdrawal from the world can be seen as a manifestation of a catatonic state. This term refers to a type of mental disturbance characterized by a lack of responsiveness and an absence of voluntary movement or speech, often accompanied by a withdrawal into oneself. Catatonia, when discussed in the context of disorders often involves a decrease in responsiveness to the surrounding environment (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). In Harry's situation, his catatonic-like state appears to be a result of his trauma and unresolved grief. His disconnection from the world and lack of involvement in his life can be interpreted as a way to protect himself from the pain of his loss and the monotony of his existence.

Kathy returns to assess any changes in Harry's attitude towards their marriage following a decade-long absence, hoping for his warmth and interest. However, Harry's initial response



to her return is ambivalent, as he explains that "I was neither glad nor happy to see her, but maybe that's what shock does because I was surprised" (Sillitoe, 1995, p. 100). Kathy's mental and physical state has changed since her departure, and she no longer carries herself with the same confidence and self-assuredness. Her demeanour suggests feelings of abandonment and confusion regarding the status of their marriage as she buttons up her coat before entering the house. Despite Kathy being the one who initially left Harry, she experiences a sense of abandonment from him, as she had hoped for the attention and care that she felt was missing from their relationship.

The symbol of the fishing-boat picture is of significance, as it represents Kathy's attempt to recover the source of love in their marriage. The fishing boat picture is a present given to Harry and Kathy as a wedding present. As she gazes at the picture, she identifies it as "the last of the fleet" (Sillitoe, 1995, p. 102), linking it to both her marriage and herself. Harry's response to this symbol is to hand it over to Kathy, stating, "Take it. I've got no use for it" (Sillitoe, 1995, p. 106), which symbolizes his final rejection of her and their marriage. Kathy leaves the house, taking with her a picture and unbuttoning her coat. Harry comments, "So she went. But it didn't take me long to get back to my book" (Sillitoe, 1995, p. 107). While he initially seems disinterested in their relationship, Harry later gives thought to his past actions when he sees the fishing boat picture in the window of a pawn shop. This image triggers a memory of their wedding day, and for the first time, Harry takes action to improve their marriage by purchasing the picture for four shillings. When Kathy visits Harry the following week, she notices the picture on the wall, but makes no mention of it. Nevertheless, she becomes noticeably happier, feeling hopeful regarding their relationship. Over the war years, Kathy continues to visit Harry, who gives her a few shillings, which becomes a substitute for the love in their relationship and creates a kind of dependency. After the first visit, Kathy comments on the fishing boat picture each time she is at the house, stating that it is beautiful, and that Harry should never part with it. She describes the picture as having the perfect combination of elements as the symbol of marriage, including "the sunrise and the ship and the woman and the sea were just right" (Sillitoe, 1995, p. 114). Kathy's comments show that Harry is the unfitting part of the marriage due to his lack of interest in their relationship. The more Harry loses interest in their marriage, the more Kathy craves a close relationship between them. However, despite Kathy's efforts to wake him out of his catatonic state of numbness, Harry remains emotionally detached until her death. Sillitoe explores the complexities of a marriage where one partner is emotionally absent. Through the symbolism of the fishing boat picture, the story suggests that even small actions can make a difference in a relationship. However, the unresolved grief of Harry makes building an attachment impossible.

In the story, the fishing boat picture serves as a symbolic representation of Kathy, and her attachment to it underscores her yearning to be valued by her husband, Harry. In an attempt to get Harry to recognize her value, Kathy asks for the picture again and puts the picture in the pawn shop, hoping that Harry will purchase 'her' back. Unfortunately, Harry does not buy the picture, and shortly thereafter, Kathy dies after being hit by a truck outside the pawn shop. The tragic incident prompts Harry to reflect on the impact of his inaction and he confesses, "This time I did not go in and try to get it back. In a way, I wished I had because then Kathy might not have had the accident that came a few days later..." (Sillitoe, 1995, p. 114). The loss of

Kathy compels Harry to re-evaluate his actions and his relationship with her. He recognizes that he was unable to appreciate her worth while she was alive and that her death has left a profound void in his life. His grief challenges his notion of autonomy and control, prompting him to question his own identity. As a result, Harry becomes the narrator of the story, as he tries to make sense of his emotions and thoughts. However, his narration is interrupted, and the “I” of the story is called into question by its relationship to the Other (Kathy). As Judith Butler notes, “grief contains the possibility of apprehending a mode of dispossession that is fundamental to who I am” (2004, p. 28). Here, Butler clarifies the relationship between the self and the other. In other words, Harry is compelled to confront the fact that his actions have led to the loss of Kathy, and he must come to terms with what he has lost. Upon losing Kathy, Harry experiences a sense of dispossession and grief, which prompts him to reflect on his current state and the nature of his ties to her. This introspection leads him to realize that his identity is inextricably linked to his relationship with Kathy, as the bonds that connect them form an integral part of who he is. This underscores the notion that one’s existence is shaped by their interactions with others and that independence is a fallacy. Despite Harry’s apparent detachment from his marriage, it is nevertheless a form of attachment to Kathy that contributes to his self-conception. In the aftermath of her death, he not only mourns her passing but also engages in a process of self-discovery to determine his identity in the absence of Kathy.

The final stage of the story is told in the present tense to emphasize the transformation of Harry’s consciousness. He seems regretful about the way he has treated Kathy by stating that “I began to realize that I should never have let (pictures of them together) them go, and that I shouldn’t have let Kathy go either. Something told me I’d been daft dead to do it...” (Sillitoe, 1995, p. 116). Through Kathy’s death, Harry is able to start the search and reach some understanding of his life. He searches for truth, asking himself a series of questions about the point of his life: “Why had I lived? I wondered. I can’t see anything for it. What was the point of it all?” (Sillitoe, 1995, p. 116) This questioning refers to Alan Sillitoe’s positive existentialism and emphasizes the importance of embracing personal responsibility, freedom, and choice in creating a meaningful existence. This philosophy is closely related to mourning and psychic change in several ways. Sillitoe’s positive existentialism highlights the importance of taking responsibility for one’s own life and creating meaning out of difficult experiences. This perspective can be applied to mourning, as individuals who embrace their grief and take responsibility for their own healing can find a deeper sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. This can include choices about how to remember and honor their loved one, how to manage their emotions, and how to make meaning out of their loss. This is what Harry does when he says:

And yet at the worst minutes of my midnight emptiness I’d think less of myself and more of Kathy, see her as suffering in a far rottener way than ever I’d done, and it would come to me – though working only as long as an aspirin pitted against an incurable headache – that the object of my having been alive was that in some small way I’d helped Kathy through her life. (Sillitoe, 1995, p. 116-117)

As the passage claims, Harry is reflecting on his life and questions its purpose. During his process of mourning, he has reached a point of despair where he believes that there is no point to his life and that he is too far gone to turn to religion or alcohol to alleviate his pain. Harry is

struggling to find meaning and purpose in his life, and he wonders why he has lived at all. However, in the midst of his despair, Harry begins to think of Kathy and her suffering. This causes him to see his own suffering in a different light and to consider that the object of his having been alive may have been to help Kathy through her life in some small way. This realization brings some comfort to Harry, even if it only works as a temporary relief like an aspirin for an incurable headache. This passage reflects Harry's existential crisis, where he is questioning the meaning and purpose of his life. His realization that he may have helped Kathy in some small way highlights the importance of human connection and the positive impact that one can have on another's life. It also shows that even in the depths of despair, there may be a glimmer of hope and meaning to be found through caring for others.

In terms of psychic change, Sillitoe's positive existentialism emphasizes the importance of personal growth and transformation as a means of creating a meaningful existence. This perspective stems from Harry's mourning as Harry takes an active role in his own healing process which brings an experience of a shift in his identity or sense of self. He reevaluates his values, beliefs, and priorities in life, which lead to a deeper sense of meaning and purpose. It is the final observation of Harry that shows how he heals himself and changes: "Then optimism rides out of the darkness like a knight in armour. If you loved her... (of course I bloody-well did) ... then you both did the only thing possible if it was to be remembered as love" (Sillitoe, 1995, p. 117). As these sentences highlight, Harry is experiencing a shift in his perspective and emotions, which can be related to psychic change after mourning. Harry reflects on his love for Kathy and acknowledges that they did everything they could to make their love memorable. This realization brings a sense of optimism, represented as "a knight in armour", which emerges from the darkness of his despair (Sillitoe, 1995, p. 117). The knight in armour can be seen as a symbol of hope and optimism, representing a new outlook that is emerging from Harry's mourning process. This new perspective enables Harry to view his love for Kathy in a more positive light, as something that was memorable and meaningful, despite the pain of losing her. However, he then states that "Now didn't you? Knight in armour goes back into blackness" (Sillitoe, 1995, p. 117). He means that the knight in armour soon disappears back into the darkness, suggesting that this optimism is fragile and fleeting. Harry then reflects on the fact that neither he nor Kathy took action to preserve their love, which causes him to cry and feel a sense of regret: "Yes, I cry, but neither of us did anything about it, and that's the trouble" (Sillitoe, 1995, p. 117). These moments of reflection and remorse correspond to the stage of depression in the Kübler-Ross model, where a grieving person recognizes the extent of their loss and feels sadness. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1969) developed a five-stage framework to understand the process of grieving more generally. These five stages of grief begin with denial, where people try to numb their feelings and struggle to come to terms with their loss. After denial, anger sets in, where the pain resurfaces, and individuals often direct it towards others or themselves. The next stage is bargaining, where they try to negotiate or find a way out of their grief. Following bargaining comes depression, characterized by an acknowledgement of the loss accompanied by feelings of sadness and regret. Finally, there is acceptance, where individuals gradually accept the loss as a permanent reality. Harry's tears and acknowledgement of his inaction indicate that he is processing his grief, moving beyond denial and anger to gain an understanding of the reality and consequences resulting from the

end of his relationship. The fleeting appearance of the knight in armor represents a flicker of hope. This image also mirrors the non-linear nature of grief, where moments of acceptance or optimism can come and go, sometimes followed by a return to earlier stages like depression or anger. Harry's journey through the Kübler-Ross stages reflects the often unpredictable path one takes when mourning as he gradually works towards reconciling with his past and coming to terms with losing Kathy. Overall, his last observation of himself reflects the complex emotional journey of mourning and psychic change where the individual experiences a range of emotions and perspectives as they come to terms with the loss of a loved one. Harry's initial despair and sense of hopelessness are transformed by a newfound optimism, which is tempered by the realization of missed opportunities and regret. This process highlights the transformative potential of mourning as the individual is forced to confront difficult emotions and reflect on the nature of their relationships.

### **Conclusion**

Alan Sillitoe's "The Fishing Boat Picture" delves into the themes of sorrow, grief and personal transformation. The story revolves around the protagonist Harry and captures the process of mourning and its impact on his sense of self. Initially overwhelmed by grief, Harry embarks on a journey that exemplifies the power inherent in grappling with loss. His changing perspectives and gradual shift from despair to a glimmer of hope highlight the interplay of emotions during the mourning process. The narrative delves into the multifaceted stages of grief encompassing moments of despair and regret alongside glimpses of hope leading to acceptance. Ultimately, the narrative masterfully illustrates one's complex and non-linear journey through grief, weaving through despair, regret and flickers of hope, culminating in profound acceptance.

The story's strength lies in its depiction of Harry's struggle and his eventual psychological transformation. This metamorphosis serves not as a testament to Harry's character but as a broader reflection on our shared human experiences. It underscores that while grief is intensely personal it has the potential to spark growth and understanding. Through Harry's journey Sillitoe effectively showcases how confronting and processing emotions is crucial for attaining closure and moving forward.

"The Fishing Boat Picture" makes a contribution to our comprehension of the processes involved in mourning. This story cogently illuminates how the human spirit can endure and find strength in the transformative events of life. It serves as an exploration of how grief can lead to transformation and the challenging journey towards healing and embracing acceptance.

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