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Will to Death, Erasure, and Survival: A Critical Evolution of the Nietzschean Übermensch in The Blind Owl, Prince Ehtejab, and Gavkhuni

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Extended ABSTRACT

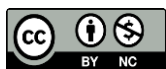
In the nineteenth century, Nietzsche introduced the concept of the “Übermensch” in response to the crisis of modernity, proposing a path to overcome nihilism and reconstruct meaning and human selfhood. In Iran, encounters with modernity, mediated through Western epistemic frameworks, acquired distinct historical and cultural characteristics. This study employs a philosophical, critical, and interdisciplinary approach combined with thematic-interpretive analysis to investigate how the Nietzschean Übermensch was localized within three canonical Iranian novels: *The Blind Owl* (Pahlavi I), *Prince Ehtejab* (Pahlavi II), and *Gavkhuni* (post-revolution). The research examines how the “will to power” is transformed into localized forms of subjectivity shaped by the unique socio-historical contexts of each period. The central question addresses how these diverse contexts generate differing configurations of the Übermensch and how these transformations intersect with the evolution of nihilism in Iranian modernity.

In *The Blind Owl*, set within early Pahlavi modernity and Romantic nationalism, the subject experiences rupture and introspective isolation. Passive nihilism dominates, and the will-to-power manifests as a self-directed “will to death.” The emergent Übermensch appears as a semi-divine, interiorized figure whose creative agency remains largely confined to imaginative and mental realms. In *Prince Ehtejab*, produced during late Pahlavi modernity, characterized by urban expansion and formal leftist aesthetics, active nihilism predominates. The narrative situates the subject in constant confrontation with collective memory and historical violence, replacing the will-to-death with a “will to erasure” and generating a critically interventionist, “flaming” Übermensch aligned with Nietzsche’s trajectory from active nihilism toward self-overcoming.

In *Gavkhuni*, representing post-revolutionary modernity marked by incomplete modernization and identity crises, the subject occupies an interstitial condition, neither fully passive nor fully active. The resulting “ruptural” or farreh-gosal Übermensch exhibits a hybrid individual-national identity, characterized by fluidity, fragmentation, and a suspended temporality. Here, the “will to survival” replaces the logic of death or erasure, enabling continuous meaning-making and creative becoming amid existential discontinuities.

The study’s theoretical contribution lies in conceptualizing this “interstitial condition” as a localized framework for understanding the formation of the Übermensch in Persian literature. It provides an analytical model for exploring the dynamic interplay between narrative form, historical context, and subjectivity, and offers a tool for examining the localization of philosophical concepts in literature. This framework can be applied in future research on narrative studies, the formation of subjectivity, and the role of historical and ideological horizons in shaping literary representations of human agency.

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