

EXSISTENTIALISM OF THE CHARACTERS IN THE NOVEL: FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY

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ABSTRACT

This research employs the novel *Real Face* by Chinen Mikito as the object of study in the journal, as it features a depiction of existentialist concepts in the character Kagura Seiichiro, who leads a life as a plastic surgeon. The objective of this study is to elucidate how the novel *Real Face* reflects the concept of existentialism, including freedom, responsibility and individual existence, as exemplified by the character Kagura Seiichiro. The research method employed is descriptive qualitative research, encompassing the following steps: data provision through reading and recording techniques, data analysis through the grouping of data into relevant categories, and presentation of the results of data analysis. The findings of this study demonstrate that the novel '*Real Face*' offers a manifestation of Sartre's existentialist concepts. The novel *Real Face* by Chinen Mikito is found to be a successful illustration of these concepts through the character Kagura Seiichiro, who is depicted as reflecting freedom and responsibility in all decisions taken.

Keywords: Existentialism, Freedom, Responsibility, Individual Existence.

INTRODUCTION

Literary works represent the culmination of creativity and imagination, products of human ingenuity that are also a source of enjoyment for society. The inseparable nature of literary works from human life is exemplified by the process through which authors articulate their ideas using literary language. This concept is further elaborated by Wicaksono (2017), who asserts that literature emerges as a result of the fundamental human desire to articulate the experiences of life through the medium of language.

Literary works manifest in diverse forms, including drama, poetry and prose. According to Nurgiyanto (2019), novels are classified as part of the fictional prose genre. Novels represent a particular type of literary work, born from the author's cognitive processes, often depicting human life in interaction with the environment. This assertion is further corroborated by the observation of Febrianty (2016) that literary works represent the culmination of an author's creative process. These works not only embody aesthetic beauty but also serve as a reflection of the author's personal experiences and observations of the world around them.

According to Kosasih (2012), a novel is defined as an imaginative literary work that portrays the problematic aspects of the life of an individual or multiple characters. Nurgiyantoro (2019) asserts that the components of a novel can be categorised into two distinct types: intrinsic elements and extrinsic elements. Intrinsic elements are those that contribute to the development of a literary work from within, whereas extrinsic elements are those that are external to the literary work. The focus of literary works, particularly novels, is often on the challenges faced by the characters, thereby creating a space for readers to delve more profoundly into the characters' lives.

Chammah (in Jabrohim, 2003) asserts that literary research is an essential activity for the development, revitalisation and refinement of a scientific discipline, with the analysis of literary works being a particularly effective method of achieving this. The analysis of literary works enables researchers to delve into the latent meanings and comprehend the social, cultural, and psychological context that underlies the text. This, in turn, enriches the insights in the field of science.

One of the extrinsic elements that is interesting to study in this research is literary sociology. According to Damono (in Wiyatmi, 2013), literary sociology is one of the approaches in literary science that explores or understands and assesses literary works by considering their social and societal aspects.

In the domain of literary sociology, an investigation into existentialism as a philosophical school is imperative. A seminal figure in this field is Jean-Paul Sartre, a renowned existentialist philosopher. Bertens (1987) contends that Sartre's theoretical framework underscores individual existence, autonomy, and self-determination. This theory places significant emphasis on the significance of individuals living according to their own values and choices, acknowledging their responsibility for the consequences of these decisions. This viewpoint is further elaborated by Tambunan (2016), who concurs with Sartre's assertion that freedom is inextricably linked to responsibility.

Within the context of the novel *Real Face*, an analysis of Kagura Seiichiro's character can be conducted to comprehend how individual freedom emerges from intricate social and moral circumstances. This research endeavour will elucidate the manner in which Kagura Seiichiro articulates his freedom and responsibility in choosing his life's trajectory.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the philosophy of existentialism, freedom is not merely the capacity for choice, but rather, it is intrinsic to human existence. As Nugroho (in Simbolon, 2020) asserts, Sartre's philosophy posits that humans are 'condemned to be free'. This assertion signifies that freedom is not a choice, but rather, it is a necessity that is inextricably embedded in existence. Humans initially exist, and it is through the choices they make that they determine the meaning of their lives. To summarise, human beings are the architects of their own existence through their actions and choices.

Existentialism, a philosophy that emphasizes the significance of the individual and the search for purpose in life, reached its zenith in the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, a renowned philosopher. Other notable figures contributing to the development of existentialism include Friedrich Nietzsche, Simone de Beauvoir, Søren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus. Nietzsche's existentialism encourages individuals to maximize their potential and to accept their existence in this world without seeking the deeper meaning of life. In contrast, Sartre's perspective is that human existence is a mere accident devoid of purpose. Finally, Camus's philosophy is characterized by a sense of absurdity, asserting that human existence is devoid of reason (Onwuatuogwu, 2020).

Research related to existentialism has been conducted by several authors, including Budisantoso, K. (2019) with the title *Existence of the Main Character Keiko in the Novel Konbini Ningen* by Sayaka Murata. Badra, L. M. (2024) with the title *Existentialism Elements in Light Novel Durarara!!!* by Ryohgo Narita. Emilia, D. (2023) with the research title *Existentialism and the Meaning of Life: A Philosophical Analysis of Individual Choice*.

Emilia's (2023) argument posits that, in existentialism, existence takes precedence over essence. This premise suggests that individuals possess the capacity for autonomous determination of the meaning of their own lives through their choices and actions. Consequently, individuals are held responsible for creating meaning in their lives. The core concept of existentialism is comprised of three main elements (Emilia, 2023).

1. Freedom

According to Suseno (in Taqbir, 2024), freedom is the evidence and manifestation of human values. It is this freedom that allows an individual to be independent, make choices, and direct their life according to their will. Humans have awareness and the capacity for freedom of choice, and they have desires and reasons that underlie each of their actions. However, Sartre rejects the view that every action must always have a reason, because he believes in absolute freedom that transcends rationality.

2. Responsibility

Sartre (in Yunus, 2011) asserts that human reality is free and completely free; however, this freedom is not absolute, but is always accompanied by responsibility. Freedom gives the right to choose an option, organise life, and act according to the will of each individual. As Sartre's concept of existence precedes essence, humans must be held accountable for their actions and choices.

3. Individual existence

Emilia's (2023) argument asserts that existentialism repudiates the notion that humans are merely components of a homogeneous collectivity. Instead, it accentuates the uniqueness of each individual, perceiving them as a distinct and irreplaceable reality. This perspective emphasises the notion that individuals must discover and create their own interpretation of life. This concept resonates with the notion of 'dasein' as articulated by Heidegger, which characterises humans as perpetually situated within the world, yet possessing a distinct and unique existence.

METHODOLOGY

Prawoto (2021) asserts that a qualitative approach constitutes a research procedure that engenders descriptive data in the form of words, quotations, and character ideology reflected in the text. The data in this study are in the form of sentences, dialogues, and paragraphs, and this research also employs descriptive methods. Sugiyono (2019) further elaborates that the descriptive method is a technique employed to analyse and depict the state of the object under scrutiny, encompassing various social and natural phenomena present in human existence. This approach is congruent with the objective of the present study, which aims to identify and describe the manifestation of existentialism in the character Kagura Seichiro within the literary work *Real Face* by Chinen Mikito.

The present study utilises data sourced from the novel *Real Face*, published by Haru Publisher in March 2021. The central focus of this research is the existentialism embodied by the character Kagura Seichiro.

The data collection technique, as outlined by Sugiyono (2023), constitutes the most pivotal phase in the study's methodology. The approach adopted in this study involves the thorough reading and comprehension of the novel *Real Face*, with the objective of identifying the overarching themes. Subsequent to this, the identified data is then examined for its alignment with the theoretical framework, and data that corresponds to the formulated problem is meticulously selected. Thereafter, the data extracted from the novel is subjected to a process of restructuring to enhance its clarity and coherence.

The data analysis technique employed in this research is descriptive qualitative, as the data necessitates such an approach. The technique of description is utilised to ascertain the purpose of the research, with the initial step involving the comparison of one data set with another. Subsequent to this, the data is grouped according to existing categories, thereby facilitating further data analysis.

Utilising a particular descriptive qualitative research method enables the provision of a meticulous interpretation of the existentialist concepts reflected in the character Kagura Seiichiro in the novel *Real Face* by Chinen Mikito.

DISCUSSION

As elucidated in the theoretical foundation concerning the concept of existentialism, an analysis will be conducted to determine how the concept is manifested in the character Kagura Seiichiro in Chinen Mikito's novel *Real Face*. This analysis will emphasize the character's dilemma, decision, and struggle to maintain his freedom. The concepts of existentialism identified in Chinen Mikito's novel *Real Face* are categorized according to the concept of existentialism in continuity with the quotation. This systematic approach facilitates a comprehensive description of how these existential themes are reflected in Kagura Seiichiro's characterization and the trajectory of his journey throughout the novel. The subsequent section aims to elucidate the concept of existentialism as it is manifested in the novel.

1. Freedom

この腕の怪我では、『柊孝之』ではいられない。主治医の解任が完了するまで、雰囲気が落ち着くまで、そして腕が良くなるまで、私とポジションを入れ替えてくれないか？柊孝之の名誉を守ってくれるか

"With such an injured arm, I can't be 'Hiiragi Takayuki', will you switch positions with me until your doctor's release is complete, until the atmosphere calms down, and also until my arm gets better? Will you keep the honor of Hiiragi Takayuki's name?" (*Real Face*: 349)

The quote reflects the concept of freedom in existentialism, as illustrated by the case of Kagura, who, due to the revocation of her doctor's licence, is faced with the choice to accept or reject the offer. Sartre emphasises that humans are always faced with choices and that every choice made will form the essence of themselves. It is precisely due to Kagura's constraints that she opts to accept Hiiragi Takayuki's offer. From Sartre's standpoint, autonomy constitutes the quintessence of human existence, yet it is inextricably linked to a profound sense of accountability for the decisions made. By accepting the offer, she assumes the responsibility for upholding the honour of the Hiiragi name, ensuring the continued success of the plastic surgery clinic, and shouldering any consequences that may arise from her disguise.

The dialogue is a compelling illustration of Sartre's existentialist concept of freedom and responsibility, emphasising that this freedom is not a straightforward or enjoyable undertaking, but rather a substantial burden to be shouldered with full awareness and a sense of responsibility to meet expectations concerning Hiiragi.

「神楽誠一郎は悪魔の殺人鬼として死んだ。そして私は、偉大な美容外科医である「柊孝之」という名前を手に入れた。このブランドが今の私の名前です」

"Kagura Seiichiro is dead now, as a serial killer demon. And I got the name 'Hiiragi Takayuki', a great cosmetic surgeon. This mark is my name now." (*Real Face*: 377)

In the context of Sartre's existentialism, the quote reflects his concept of existentialism as the freedom to create oneself. Sartre's argument is that humans do not have a predetermined essence, but rather that existence precedes essence. This means that humans initially exist in the world, and then create themselves through the choices they make.

In the quote under consideration, the character Kagura consciously elects to 'kill' her original identity and substitute it with that of Hiiragi Takayuki. This can be interpreted as a form of existential freedom to create oneself. However, this freedom also brings great responsibility, as Kagura must face the absurdity of the world and create meaning for herself through her actions and choices. The absurdity of life can be seen as a reflection of the uncertainty and unpredictability that fills our existence. This is evidenced by the recognition that, despite our

aspiration for clarity and purpose, life frequently presents circumstances that defy logic and rationality (Shakeel et al., 2023).

This assertion of individuality is achieved not through mere imitation or adoption of the roles of others, but through the infusion of personal experiences, values, and goals, thereby endowing Hiiragi Takayuki with a unique and personalized identity. In this context, the world may appear absurd and devoid of inherent meaning. The absence of objective guidelines or external values that can provide a framework for guiding the character is further compounded by the assertion that the individual must create their own meaning through their choices and actions.

2. Responsibility

この入院以来、この花は毎週送られてきている。しかし、送り主の名前はない。

"Since this hospitalization, these flowers have been sent every week. However, there is no name of the sender."
(Real Face, 324)

The quote reflects the concept of existentialism, which is characterised by a sense of responsibility. The flowers sent on a weekly basis can be interpreted as a symbol of Kagura Seiichiro's responsibility towards her adoptive father, who is currently receiving treatment in a medical facility. Kagura perceives a sense of responsibility for the decisions she has made, which have resulted in her being unable to visit her adoptive father, due to her undergoing a facial operation to resemble Hiiragi Takayuki. This notion is further reinforced by the following dialogue:

誠一郎に違いない。彼がここに送ってきたんだ。それだけでなく、妻が亡くなった。6年前の命日には、毎年墓に花が供えられた。墓石もピカピカに磨かれた。誠一郎がいなくなっても。

"It must be Seichiro. He sent it here. Not only that, my wife died; six years ago, on the anniversary of her death, flowers were offered at her tomb every year. Her gravestone was also polished to a shine. Even after Seichiro disappeared." (Real Face: 324)

It is evident that Kagura's decision to adopt Hiiragi's identity was not a simple act of renunciation, but rather a calculated choice that entailed assuming a new role with a concomitant assumption of responsibility. The adoption of Hiiragi's identity, as previously observed, placed Kagura's existence in jeopardy, necessitating the concealment of her true self and the adoption of a new persona. This process of disguising her identity and adopting an alternative persona was accompanied by significant sacrifices, as highlighted by Batta (2017). The assertion that an individual who opts for personal autonomy over societal norms risks losing societal support is a salient point in this context. Conversely, if an individual prioritises society, they may sacrifice their individuality. Nevertheless, Kagura's actions demonstrate a commitment to her responsibilities, reminiscent of a child's devotion to their parents, as illustrated in the aforementioned dialogue.

Conventionally, research on Sartre's existentialism has centred on the notion of freedom and responsibility in general, with other studies exploring the assertion that humans are born with nothing, yet freedom is the sole element of significance. The present analysis of the novel *Real Face*, however, focuses on the character who chooses his own path, seeks his existence, and accepts the consequences of everything he chooses.

3. Individual Existence

神楽は「柊孝之」になることを望み、そのために手術を受けることに同意した。

"Kagura wanted to become "Hiiragi Takayuki" and he agreed to undergo an operation so that the plan could be carried out." (Real Face: 350)

The quote reflects a concept central to existentialism, namely that of individual existence. When Kagura elects to adopt Hiiragi's identity, her own existence as an individual is imperilled. She is compelled to conceal her true identity

and assume the guise of another person. This scenario exemplifies how an individual's existence can be exposed when confronted with the decision to evade responsibility for past actions in the face of external pressures.

The decision to adopt another's identity, in this case that of Hiiragi Takayuki, serves as a metaphor for the human capacity to shape one's own essence through the choices made, while also being prepared for the consequences and responsibilities that accompany these decisions.

「柊です。柊孝之です」

"I am Hiiragi. Hiiragi Takayuki." (Real Face: 383)

The quote reflects one of existentialism's concepts, namely individual existence, which is defined as the notion that each person possesses a unique and irreplaceable existence. This concept is in contrast to the view that humans are merely part of a homogeneous collectivity. In the quote, the character asserts his individuality by stating his name, Hiiragi Takayuki.

In accordance with Sartre's existentialist perspective, humans do not possess a predetermined essence, but rather, existence precedes essence. Individuals shape their own essence through their actions and choices. Through this dialogue, Kagura deliberately crafts and reinforces her new identity, opting to identify with the name and role, despite relinquishing her previous identity.

This conflict exemplifies a prevalent existential predicament, wherein individuals endeavor to comprehend and embrace their identity, which is frequently repressed by the prevailing social milieu due to a history they seek to evade. This scenario underscores the notion that existentialism encompasses not only the quest for life's meaning but also the acceptance of one's identity, encompassing the perceptions of others. Notably, Kagura, Hiiragi's student, exhibits a remarkable boldness by portraying her teacher in a surgical context, a risk that underscores the existential depth of her engagement with the subject matter. This act resonates with Dayanty (2020) assertion that human development is fostered through extensive and comprehensive experiences, alongside the acquisition of profound knowledge about life and one's own choices.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Real Face employs the character of Kagura Seiichiro as a medium to explore numerous existentialist concepts proposed by Sartre, including freedom, responsibility and individual existence. The narrative illustrates the notion of human freedom as manifested through Kagura's decision to transform into Hiiragi Takayuki, a choice that signifies the creation of his own essence through the agency of his actions. However, this choice also brings with it the consequence of great responsibility, where Kagura must face existential anxiety, and the potential loss of identity due to her decision to turn into Hiiragi. This novel demonstrates that freedom is not a straightforward concept; it is not something that can be taken lightly, but rather a burden that must be carried with full awareness and great responsibility. The novel evokes profound reflections on the limits of freedom, the cost of avoiding the past, and the intricacies of identity.

The present study explores the concepts of existentialism in the Real Face novels, utilising a methodical examination of in-depth characterisation elements and quotations of notable strength. Through this analytical approach, readers are prompted to engage in profound reflection on the essence of existence, the obligations and liberties that individuals must assume, and the intricacies of navigating life's challenges. The analysis of selected quotations provides a comprehensive exploration of the characters' journeys in determining their own existence and assuming responsibility for the consequences of their decisions.

The potential for further research in this area is significant, as it offers a rich source of material for exploration. This novel provides a compelling case study of the concept of existentialism, utilising a psychological approach to analyse Sartre's existentialist concepts as presented in the novel. The arrangement of these concepts in a compelling narrative offers a valuable opportunity to explore the interplay between philosophy and literature. Further analyses

could reveal how the novel criticises or supports Sartre's ideas, and how Sartre's concept of existentialism can reflect social and cultural issues related to identity and appearance.

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