

Trancendence of Woman Existence through the Character of Shirayuki in the Anime Akagami No Shirayukihime

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ABSTRACT

Akagami no Shirayukihime (2015) features a female character named Shirayuki who actively shapes her identity through her actions. This research aims to analyze transcendence as a manifestation of women's efforts to demonstrate their existence and ability to shape their own identity. The research applies a qualitative descriptive method by examining dialogues, character interactions, and selected scenes from the anime as the primary data source. The analysis is based on Simone de Beauvoir's Existentialist Feminism theory, particularly the concept of transcendence, which explains women's efforts to move beyond passive and socially imposed roles. The findings indicate that Shirayuki portrays transcendence through her independence and determination in making life choices. The findings indicate that Shirayuki portrays transcendence through her independence and determination in making life choices. She refuses forced marriage and rejects being treated as an object of male authority. In addition, she shows courage by leaving her hometown to pursue a better future. Shirayuki also develops her intellectual abilities through her dedication to studying herbal medicine and working as an apothecary. Her competence in solving medical problems and helping others demonstrates that women are capable of contributing meaningfully to society through knowledge and skill. Conclusion, Shirayuki's character represents a woman who transcends patriarchal limitations through freedom, work, knowledge, and responsibility. This study highlights that Akagami no Shirayukihime offers a positive representation of female existence in anime, where women are portrayed as active subjects capable of defining themselves and contributing meaningfully to society.

Keywords: *Transcendence, Existentialism, Simone de Beauvoir*

INTRODUCTION

Literary works have evolved into a medium for conveying or expressing a particular meaning. Every piece of literature in the world more or less describes the state of the society around it (Sridevi, 2024). Literary works that are part of literature itself convey meaning through scenes, dialogue, narration, and visual characterization, depending on the author's own intentions. The author and their work are two inseparable things, the factors of the author's life can influence the characteristics of the author in creating their story (Lestari et al., 2018). However, the depiction does not fully describe the state of society, but is reworked by the author based on the aesthetics they desire.

One of the issues that has developed in Japanese literature is the issue of feminism. The concept of feminism was once very limited, only in the form of character depiction and also a work written by women (Purohit & Mewada, 2017). Portrayal of women in Japanese literature often places women in the lowest and most oppressed position. This is related to the position of women in Japanese society, which still shows inequality compared to men (Affriliana, 2022). This condition often unconsciously leads to female characters always being portrayed as victims, with stereotypes of women as someone who needs to be saved, as a mother, and a femme fatale (Saikia, 2024). Therefore,

the feminist movement emerged as a form of thinking that seeks to criticize and fight against gender inequality experienced by women.

As time progresses, the portrayal of feminist values is no longer limited to actions or literary texts, but in modern times also includes visual literary works such as anime. This opinion is in line with (Andriani, 2025), who states that in the modern era, one way to convey feminist messages is through anime. In anime, feminist issues are often depicted in the Shoujo genre, as this genre focuses on the portrayal of women. According to Saito (2011) in (Wang, 2024), this genre was born amid various gender struggles, emerging in the context of the second wave of feminism, the sexual revolution, and the golden age of Japanese comics. Thus, this genre makes the portrayal of women more challenging and goes beyond the roles of women as understood by society.

Previous researchers have conducted studies on feminism in anime. Athiyah Fina Anggraini (2018) conducted research on the "Eksistensi Perempuan di Masa Perang Dunia II yang Tergambar Pada Tokoh Urano Suzu Dalam Anime Kono Sekai No Katasumi Ni Karya Sutradara Sunao Katabuchi." In addition, this research has also been conducted by Yulia Afifah Andriani (2025) in the journal "Ketidakadilan Gender terhadap Tokoh Utama Arte dalam Anime Arte karya Kei Ohkuba." Both studies discuss gender injustice in general from the perspective of existentialist feminism theory and do not focus solely on the discussion of transcendence. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by examining how transcendence depicts female characters in anime differently from previous studies.

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method. According to Moelong in (Fiantika, Wasil M, 2022), qualitative research involves collecting facts, data, and information from various sources, which are then described and explained to provide an overview of the phenomenon being studied. The theory used for this study is Simone de Beauvoir's Extensional Feminism theory. According to Beauvoir, as cited in (Martinus & Marsih, 2022b) this theory is a reflection of the rules or guidelines regarding how women should behave.

This study aims to analyze the depiction of female transcendence in female characters in the anime Akagami no Shirayukihime (2015), which is the object of this study, using an existentialist feminist perspective. In addition, this study also aims to identify the forms of action and development of female characters in their efforts to transcend social boundaries that place women in an oppressed position. This study is expected to provide an understanding of how women's struggles in building their existence are depicted in anime.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existential Feminism Theory is a theory developed based on Simone de Beauvoir's ideas. This theory emphasizes how women struggle to become free subjects through awareness, work, and liberation from patriarchal constructs (Artanti et al., 2025). This theory is based on Beauvoir's thoughts in her book entitled *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir's thinking was greatly influenced by Jean Paul Sartre, who was known to be Beauvoir's long-time partner (Anggraini, 2018). Beauvoir has four main concepts in her feminist theory, namely the Other, Immanence, Transcendence, and Freedom (Al Barka & Basid, 2024). One of the concepts used in this study is Transcendence, a strategy used by women to escape from patriarchy, which has taken away their freedom (Geleuk et al., 2017). Through this, women can declare that they are capable of being independent and free in their life choices.

Previous research has been conducted by Athiyah Fina Anggraini (2018) in her thesis entitled *The Existence of Women During World War II as Portrayed by the Character Urano Suzu in the Anime Kono Sekai No Katasumi Ni* by Director Sunao Katabuchi. This research uses three main concepts from Beauvoir, namely the Other, Immanence, and Transcendence, in the character of Urano Suzu, whose anime is set during World War II in Japan. The results of the study show that Urano Suzu is portrayed as a woman who continues to try to live her life despite being in a war situation. She faces various difficulties such as economic limitations, social pressure, and the impact of war on family life. However, through her persistence and resilience in difficult situations, Suzu shows a form of female existence that continues to play an important role in social life.

In addition, this research has also been conducted by Yulia Afifah Andriani (2025) in the journal *Gender Injustice against the Main Character Arte in Kei Ohkuba's Anime Arte*. The analysis was conducted using Mansour Fakhir's theory of gender injustice and Simone de Beauvoir's theory of existential feminism. The results of the study show that Arte is persistent and hardworking, rejecting the view that women are weak, and striving to become an intellectual

figure capable of working in the male-dominated field of painting. Through this attitude, Arte successfully defies gender stereotypes and shows that women can have abilities and social roles equal to those of men.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze transcendence in the character Shirayuki in the anime *Akagami no Shirayukihime* (2015). According to Moelong from (Fiantika, Wasil M, 2022) qualitative research involves collecting facts, data, and information from various sources, which are then described and explained systematically to provide a scientific description of the phenomenon being studied. This approach is considered appropriate for use in literary and visual media studies because the research does not focus on testing the validity of a theory. Instead, the research is more directed at uncovering and understanding the forms of representation and meaning structures contained in the work.

Data analysis was conducted using the Existential Feminism theoretical framework proposed by Simone de Beauvoir. Beauvoir, in (Salsabila et al., 2023), argues that women have always been positioned at the bottom throughout history, making their existence in this world "other" to men. This theory base on her book 'The Second Sex' that contains about an existential phenomenological analysis of women's lack of freedom and oppression as a universal problem (Durmus, 2022). Therefore, there is a drive for women to break free from these limitations. The effort to transcend these limitations is known as transcendence, which is the act of individuals freeing themselves from restrictive conditions and building their own independent existence. According to Beauvoir in Anggraini (2018), there are four strategies that can be categorized as transcendence, namely: 1) Women can work, 2) Women can become intellectuals, 3) Women can work to achieve social transformation, 4) Women can reject their otherness by identifying themselves through the views of the dominant group in society.

This research uses the anime *Akagami no Shirayukihime* (2015), which is an adaptation of the manga by Akizuki Sorata. This anime was produced by Studio Bones with the genres of shoujo, fantasy, and romance, set in a kingdom. The story focuses on the development of a red-haired female character named Shirayuki, who in her life journey tries to build her future through learning and the abilities she possesses. This anime consists of two *seasons*, each with 12 episodes. In this study, the researcher only uses the first *season* of *Akagami no Shirayukihime* as the research object. The first *season* was chosen because it shows the early stages of character development and various important events that reveal the main character's actions and decisions relevant to the focus of the study.

DISCUSSION

Data 1

This scene tells the story of what happened after Shirayuki was forced to marry Prince Tanbarun. The allure of her red hair attracted many people, which is why Shirayuki decided to leave Tanbarun and find her own way in life. Before leaving, Shirayuki cut her hair because it was a symbol of her attractiveness that caused her to be treated as an object by male authority figures. Shirayuki's decision to cut her hair shows her rejection of this objectification.



Figure 1. Shirayuki decides to leave Tanbarun

Minutes (05:07 – 05:29) Episode 1 Season 1

Dialogue		
Kanji	Romaji	English
シラユキ：さよならタンバルン。	<i>Shirayuki: Sayonara Tanbarun.</i>	Shirayuki: Goodbye, Tanbarun

This trait reflects Existential Feminism, where women can reject their otherness, as Shirayuki prefers to leave the city and start a new life rather than live under the compulsion of becoming the concubine of Prince Tanbarun. It can be concluded that Shirayuki strives to assert herself as a free subject, not as "the Other" determined by men.

Data 2

This scene shows that Shirayuki, who has arrived in a foreign land called Clarines, decides to look for a job as an apothecary. However, it is very difficult to find such a job, so a shopkeeper suggests that she take the selection test to become a palace apothecary. Therefore, she decides to study hard in various places where medicinal plants grow abundantly.



Figure 2. Shirayuki decides to explore in order to learn more.

Minutes (06:20 – 06:47) Episode 2 Season 1

Dialogue		
Kanji	Romaji	English
ゼン: あんなところに何しに行くんだ? シラユキ: いろんな薬草が生えてるんだって。 シラユキ: 自分で調達して薬学の勉強をしたくて、町の薬屋さんに薬草が採取できる場所をいくつか教えてもらったんだ。 ゼン: ほう。勉強って、お前もともと薬剤師だろ。 シラユキ: うん。でも、今の私の未熟な技術じゃ全然。もっともっと学ばなきゃ。	Zen : Anna tokoro ni nani shi ni iku n da? Shirayuki : Ironna yakusou ga haeteru n datte. Jibun de choutatsu shite yakugaku no benkyou wo shitakute, machi no kusuriya san ni yakusou ga saishuu dekiru basho o ikutsuka oshiete morattan da. Zen : Hou. Benkyoutte, omae motomoto yakuzaishi daro	Zen: Why do you want to go there? Shirayuki: I want to find supplies of plants and learn more about medicine. I asked the owner of the drugstore in town to tell me some places where medicinal plants can be picked.

This trait reflects her intellectual nature. Shirayuki, who is in a new environment, tries to rebuild her life by looking for a job. In order to get the job, she tries to learn as much as possible about medicinal plants so that she can pass the selection process.

Data 3

This scene explains that Shirayuki passed the entrance exam to become a palace pharmacist after undergoing a series of tests to plant herbal plants and keep them growing well. This success was achieved after she underwent a series of selection stages that required knowledge and skills in the field of herbal plants. In the exam, participants were asked to plant various types of medicinal plants and care for them properly so that they could grow well. This process not only tested technical skills in planting plants, but also accuracy, patience, and understanding of the functions of herbal plants that would be used as medicinal ingredients. Shirayuki managed to do everything without any mistakes.



Figure 3. Shirayuki try hard to pass the pharmacist exam.

Minutes (12:35 – 12:54) Episode 4 Season 1

Dialogue		
Kanji	Romaji	English
室長: ヤツフサ、シラユキ君は? ヤツフサ: 文句なしに合格です ね。 室長: というわけで白雪君、君 を宮廷付き薬剤師見習いとして 正式に迎えるわ。	Shitsuchou : Yatsufusa, Shirayuki kun wa? Yatsufusa : Monku nashi ni goukaku desu ne. Shitsuchou : To iu wake de Shirayuki kun, kimi o kyuuteitsuki yakuzaishi minarai to shite seishiki ni mukaeru wa.	Chairwoman: Well, Yatsufusa, what do you think of Shirayuki? Yatsufusa: He passed without any mistakes. Chairwoman: Therefore, Shirayuki, we officially accept you as the palace's assistant herbalist.

This trait reflects that women can work. Shirayuki's efforts to pass the Imperial Pharmacist selection yielded good results; she was accepted with a score of "No Mistakes," which is an extraordinary result for someone who is just beginning to learn about medicinal plants in that country.

Data 4

There is this scene shows that Shirayuki is trying to convince Prince Zen that she is capable of helping to care for the sick soldiers. Even though she is a beginner, Shirayuki is trying her best to heal the soldiers who are falling ill from a disease that came from nowhere.

The scene at 09:54 shows Shirayuki thinking hard about the cause of the mysterious illness that has infected the soldiers. In this situation, the soldiers' health is declining without a clear source of the cause. This situation is causing concern because the disease is spreading rapidly and no appropriate treatment has been found. Shirayuki, who plays the role of a novice physician, tries to understand the symptoms experienced by the soldiers by observing their condition directly and thinking about the possible sources of the disease. However, in the process of her investigation, Shirayuki is exposed to the same disease as the soldiers. Nevertheless, this does not stop her from searching for answers. On the contrary, the experience of feeling the symptoms of the disease firsthand makes her try even harder to understand the cause.

Scene at 10:34 – 11:26 Shirayuki realizes that the cause of this mysterious illness is the ashes from the fireplace wood, which should not be burned. These ashes cause problems in the body when inhaled.



Figure 4 Shirayuki, as a novice, tries to help heal the soldiers.

Minutes (07:46 – 11:26) Episode 5 Season 1

Dialogue		
Kanji	Romaji	English
シラユキ：私なりに力になれる ようやってみるから。 ゼン：しらゆき.....俺も、残る 。 ミツヒデ：ゼン、それは日没ま でだと言っただろう。 ミツヒデ：今は自分の立場を考 えないとダメだ。 ゼン：わがままを言った。とり あえず、何かあったら呼んでく れ。	<i>Shirayuki : Watashi nari ni chikara ni nareru you yatte miru kara. Zen : Shirayuki... ore mo, nokoru. Mitsuhide : Zen, sore wa nichibotsu made da to itta darou. Mitsuhide: Ima wa jibun no tachiba o kangaenai to dame da. Zen : Wagamama o itta. Toriaezu, nanika attara yonde kure.</i>	Shirayuki: I'll do my best to help everyone. Zen: Shirayuki... I'll stay too. Mitsuhide: Zen, didn't you say it was only until sunset? Mitsuhide: Now you have to think about your position. Zen: I've been selfish. Anyway, if anything happens, call me.
シュカ：シラユキ殿! 大丈夫です か? シラユキ：そんな、すぐにはか からないはずじゃ。人によって 違うの? シュカ：シラユキ殿 シラユキ：シュカさんは、外で 見張りしていることが多いって 、言っていましたよね。 シュカ：あ、はい。 シラユキ：ということは、室内 に理由が。入り口から遠い場所 にいる人たちは、重症に見える 。	<i>Shuka : Shirayuki dono! Daijoubu desu ka? Shirayuki : Sonna, sugu ni wa kakaranai hazu ja. Shuka : Nona Shirayuki Shirayuki : Shuka san wa, soto de mihari shite iru koto ga ooi tte, itemashita yo ne. Shuka : A, hai. Shirayuki : To iu koto wa, shitsunai ni riyuu ga. Iriguchi kara tooi basho ni iru hitotachi wa, jyuushou ni mieru.</i>	Shuka: Miss Shirayuki! Are you all right? Shirayuki: Ah, it shouldn't be contagious right away. Does it depend on the person? Shuka: Miss Shirayuki... Shirayuki: You said the knights often guard outside, right? Shuka: Ah, yes. Shirayuki: Then the cause must be inside the room. The people who are farther from the entrance seem to have more severe symptoms.
シラユキ：事変は暖炉の薪だよ 。この木は燃やしたりしちゃい けない。この木は燃やしたりし ちゃいけない。有害な粒子が散 って、吸い続けると影響が出る 。	<i>Shirayuki : Jihen wa danro no maki da yo. Kono ki wa moyashitari shicha ikenai. Yuugai na ryuushi ga chitte, suisuzukeru to eikyou ga deru.</i>	<i>Shirayuki: The incident is the firewood in the stove. This wood must not be burned. This wood must not be burned. Harmful particles will scatter, and continued inhalation will have an effect.</i>

The scene above can be understood as women being able to work and become intellectuals. Shirayuki's efforts as a pharmacist and novice physician in Clarines to cure people are commendable. While treating patients, she also thinks hard about the mysterious disease that has afflicted people. With her knowledge, she manages to cure people and discover the origin of the mysterious disease.

Data 5

The scene at 16:11 - 16:45 is a conversation between Shirayuki and a court official named Mr. Brecker who is trying to thwart Kihal's mission to make birds a means of communication for the court. Mr. Brecker throws away the

bird whistle and dismisses the existence of Shirayuki's causing Shirayuki to become angry and recklessly jump from the tower to retrieve the whistle he discarded, ensuring her mission proceeds flawlessly.



Figure 5 Shirayuki jumping from the tower to confront the palace officials who are trying to failed the mission.

Minutes (16:11 – 16:45) Episode 10 Season 1

Dialogue		
Kanji	Romaji	English
シラユキ：確かに、あなたの言う通り、本心では動けない時があると思う。でも、それなら、私は全力であの人を、そんな目には遭わせない。 ブレッカー伯爵：お前に何ができる！ だいたい、何かを守ろうとして いる人の懸命さも目に入らない ような奴なんて、この身分の誇りより低いっての！	<i>Shirayuki : Tashika ni, anata no iu toori, honshin de wa ugokenai toki ga aru to omou. Demo, sore nara, watashi wa zenryoku de ano hito o, sonna me ni wa awasenai!</i> <i>Count Brecker : Omae ni nani ga dekiru!</i> <i>Shirayuki : Daitai, nanika o mamorou to shite iru hito no kenmeisa mo me ni hairanai you na yatsu nante, Kono mibun no hokori yori hikui tte no!</i>	Shirayuki: It's true, as you say, there are times when a person cannot act according to their heart. But if that's the case, I will do everything I can to prevent that person from experiencing such a thing! Mr. Brecker: What can you possibly do! Shirayuki: Besides, someone who can't even see the sincerity of someone trying to protect something... is even lower than this watchtower!

From this trait, we can understand that women can reject their inferiority. Shirayuki did not want to be underestimated even though she was just a woman who appeared powerless compared to court officials such as Lord Brecker. She dared to jump from the top of the tower so that the task she had undertaken would not fail and disappoint someone.

Compared with previous studies, this research has several differences. Athiyah Fina Anggraini (2018) focused on women's existence during World War II through the character of Urano Suzu in *Kono Sekai no Katasumi ni*, emphasizing women's survival in wartime conditions, while Yulia Afifah Andriani (2025) focusing on women's resistance to discrimination in the male dominated field of painting. In contrast, this study analyzes Shirayuki in *Akagami no Shirayukihime*, whose struggles are not centered on war or workplace discrimination alone, but on rejecting objectification, gaining independence, developing intellectual abilities, and proving women's capability in the fields of pharmacy and medicine.

Therefore, this research lies in its exploration of existential feminism through how women's get her freedom, self-determination, and intellectual agency in a fantasy shoujo anime setting. The findings of this study can be summarized in line with (Yusuf & Susilo, 2020), who state that women have the ability to resist the marginalization they experience through their participation in the workforce, to develop as intellectual agents, and to play a role in promoting the achievement of a more equitable social transformation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The anime *Akagami no Shirayukihime* contains many depictions of the free existence of the main female character, Shirayuki. Her hard work to build herself up so that she can be equal to others shows how women strive to overcome the social barriers that often place them in a subordinate position. Through her courage in making decisions, her independence in determining her path in life, and her ability to develop her potential, she shapes her identity and future. Thus, the anime *Akagami no Shirayukihime* not only presents a romance story but also depicts the process of forming the existence of independent and equal women in society.

This study is still limited to analyzing the representation of female transcendence in the character of Shirayuki in one anime work. Therefore, further research is recommended to examine other anime works that feature female characters using different feminist theories, such as liberal feminism, radical feminism, or postmodern feminism, in order to enrich perspectives in the study of Japanese literature and popular culture.

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