

Desire in Hakuji's Identity as Akaza in Kimetsu No Yaiba: Infinity Castle

Fidella Eka Maheswari

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, West Java, Indonesia

Fenny Febrianty

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, West Java, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to analyze the construction of Hakuji's identity as Akaza in the anime Kimetsu no Yaiba: Infinity Castle. Data were collected through the observation of dialogues, monologues, and scenes illustrating Hakuji's transformation into Akaza. The analysis was conducted by interpreting the data in light of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic concepts, namely the mirror stage, the symbolic order, and the real. The research findings show that the transformation of Hakuji's identity into Akaza is influenced by a traumatic experience the loss of a loved one as well as by a relationship with another party playing the role of the Other. This relationship provides Hakuji with recognition and new meaning, thereby forming a new identity as Akaza. Thus, Akaza's identity can be understood as a construction that takes shape through the dynamics of the relationship between the subject and the Other within the symbolic structure.

Keywords: *Identity, The Other, Akaza, Psychoanalysis, Kimetsu No Yaiba*

INTRODUCTION

According to studies in literary psychology, the psychological dynamics of characters are an essential aspect of understanding character development in a literary work. Literary psychology allows researchers to analyze how emotional experiences, trauma, and social relationships influence the way characters perceive themselves and act within a narrative. According to René Wellek and Austin Warren, cited in Astuti et al. (2016), the literary psychology approach helps shed light on the characters' mental states as representations of complex human experiences. Along the same lines, Febrianty (2018) asserts that the character is one of the intrinsic elements that directly construct the narrative, as it is through the character that events and conflicts unfold. Consequently, the character is understood not only as a constituent element of the narrative but also as the representation of an individual endowed with psychological drives, desires, and a process of seeking meaning in life. Sayaka & Madoka (2024) assert that in stories, including anime, character psychology is often used to describe how people form their identities, which can be unstable. A character may change their identity when they experience life events that affect how they see themselves. In Koyoharu Gotouges anime Kimetsu no Yaiba, the process of forming an identity is shown through the character Hakuji in the Infinity Castle arc, who becomes known as Akaza. Hakuji's transformation is not just physical, but emotional and psychological as he becomes a demon.

Hakuji's transformation is closely tied to his journey, which is filled with hardships and suffering. Before becoming Akaza Hakuji is a character with emotional bonds with his father, teacher Keizo and Koyuki. These relationships give his life meaning and purpose driving him to protect those he loves. However tragic events lead to the deaths of his loved ones. Destroy the framework of meaning that defined his life. These losses forced Hakuji to change the way

he perceived himself as well as the purpose of his life. In literary psychology, an experience of profound loss often influences the formation of a person's identity as well as the meaning they ascribe to their life, as highlighted by Mancone et al. in (Anisah et al., 2025). In such circumstances, a person is generally driven to seek new meaning to fill the void caused by this loss. For Hakuji, this marks the beginning of an identity shift that will ultimately lead him to become Akaza.

To explain this dynamic, this study draws on Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic approach. According to Lacan (2007), human identity is not constructed in a static manner, but rather dynamically, through psychological processes linked to language, symbols, and relationships with others. Lacan also asserts that human beings always feel a sense of lack within themselves, so that they never truly feel whole. This feeling then gives rise to a desire that drives the individual to seek recognition and meaning in their life.

This desire becomes the force that drives a person to forge an identity. Along the same lines, as stated by Fadhil et al. (2026) assert that desire plays a role in the construction of our identity. Hakuji's experience of loss can be understood as an example of this, as this event had a profound impact on him. In this context, the concept of lack takes on particular importance, as it is what motivates Hakuji's actions and decisions.

Several previous studies have examined the psychological dynamics of characters in literary works and anime using a psychoanalytic approach. One such study, conducted by (Fadhil et al., 2026) focuses on the character Light Yagami in the anime Death Note. The study shows that the development of the character's identity is closely related to his internal drives and his desire for power, which influence how he perceives himself. In addition, another study conducted by Aqil (2025) on the character Akaza in the manga Kimetsu no Yaiba by Koyoharu Gotouge, using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, reveals that the trauma caused by the loss of his father, teacher, and fiancée affects the character's personality structure and drives him to transform into a demon. This study also emphasizes that life experiences, trauma, and psychological drives play a significant role in shaping the actions and identities of characters in literary works.

However, most previous studies have focused more on analyzing the characters' psychological conflicts or personality structures through Freud's psychoanalytic theory. There are still few studies that specifically highlight the process of Hakuji's identity formation as Akaza through the Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective, particularly with regard to the concept of desire. Consequently, this study aims to examine the identity formation of the character Hakuji as Akaza using the Lacanian psychoanalytic approach in order to observe how desire, as well as relationships with others, influence this character's identity transformation process in the anime Kimetsu no Yaiba: Infinity Castle. This study provides a perspective on literary psychology particularly in understanding how desire plays a role in character identity construction in popular works like anime.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the psychoanalytic theory developed by Jacques Lacan, the formation of human identity revolves around three main domains: the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real. These three domains explain how the individual constructs their understanding of self and how they interact with the social world around them. Lacan asserts that human identity is not fixed, but is always in the process of formation, influenced by life experiences, social relationships, and the symbolic system that governs human life (Lacan, 2007).

To quote Fadhil et al. (2026), the imaginary realm is linked to the formation of the self-image through a process of identification. This concept is related to the Lacanian notion of the "mirror stage," that is, the phase in which the individual begins to recognize themselves through a reflection or a given image. At this stage, the individual forms an image of themselves based on the images they see or on the recognition of others. However, according to Lacan, the identity that forms in the imaginary domain is illusory, because the individual is in reality merely identifying with a particular image that does not fully represent them as they truly are. The individual feels whole and stable, whereas this image is merely a psychological construct resulting from a process of identification with a certain representation. This is why the imaginary realm is often associated with the formation of an ideal identity that influences how the individual perceives themselves and the world around them Lacan in (Sayaka & Madoka, 2024).

Furthermore, according to Alfadlilah (2024), the symbolic realm is linked to language, social norms and cultural structures that shape how individuals see themselves in society. Human beings cannot construct their identity as it is influenced by the symbolic structure in their social environment. Language plays a role in the symbolic realm as it helps individuals understand themselves and relate to others. When a person enters the realm they learn social rules, moral values and their place in society.

In contrast the Real, as described by Fadhil (2026), refers to experiences that cannot be fully expressed through language or symbols. The Real exists outside the order making it hard to grasp or articulate. This domain often appears through events, loss or deep psychological shock. When an individual encounters something it resists being processed within language or symbolic systems and therefore remains in the realm of the Real.

Jacques Lacan (2007) also introduces the concept of the Other, which plays a crucial role in the formation of an individual's identity. Drawing on Lacanian theory, Fadhil et al. (2026), explain that the Other refers to an external source of recognition, which may come from other individuals or from broader social structures such as language, cultural norms, and societal values. Through interaction with the Other, individuals begin to develop an understanding of themselves and gain a sense of recognition for who they are. In this sense, identity is not formed solely from within, but is also shaped by how a person is seen and acknowledged by others. Lacan distinguishes between the "little other," which refers to other individuals in interpersonal relationships, and the "Big Other," which refers to a broader symbolic system such as language and the social rules governing human life (Amalia et al., 2025).

Thus, the concepts of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, the Real, and the Other are closely intertwined in the process of forming individual identity. The Imaginary shapes self-image through the process of identification, the Symbolic constructs identity through language and social structures, the Real is linked to traumatic experiences or feelings of pleasure that are difficult to express symbolically, while the Other plays the role of the one who recognizes the individual's identity. It is through the interaction between these concepts that the individual constructs an understanding of themselves and determines how they respond to the life experiences they encounter.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method. Strauss and Corbin as cited in Safrudin et al., (2023) explain that qualitative research is a type of research in which results are not obtained through statistical calculations or other numerical procedures. According to Rasyid (2015), qualitative research aims to understand the context or situation of the participants by visiting the site and collecting data focused on interpreting the meanings contained in the dialogues, scenes, and behaviors of the story's characters.

Furthermore, this study employs a psychological approach to literature, using Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory as the primary analytical framework. This approach serves to understand how the process of character identity formation unfolds through psychological dynamics linked to the concepts of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, the Real, and the Other. Through this approach, the researcher analyzes how the characters' life experiences give rise to a state of lack that subsequently generates a desire and influences the formation of the characters' identities within the story.

DISCUSSION

This study looks at how Hakuji's identity is formed before he eventually becomes known as Akaza in the anime *Kimetsu no Yaiba*. Instead of seeing identity as something fixed, Jacques Lacan views it as something that develops through ongoing psychological processes. In his theory, the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real are interconnected, and a person's relationship with the Other also plays an important role. By using these ideas, this study tries to show how Hakuji's life experiences gradually shape the transformation of his identity into Akaza.

Mirror stage

Lacan (2019) explains that at this stage, the subject begins to construct an image of himself through the reflection or recognition of the other. This image forms an ideal identity that is often imaginary and does not fully correspond to the individual's reality. The identity that forms is a construct that creates the illusion of a unified self.

In one scene from the anime *Kimetsu no Yaiba* Keizo tells Hakuji that he must strive to become a version of himself than he was, in the past. This statement can be understood as a form of reflection that serves as a “mirror” for Hakuji in the construction of his self-image. From Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic perspective, the mirror stage explains that an individual's identity is formed through a process of identification with an ideal image derived from another person. Thanks to Keizo's remark, Hakuji begins to construct an ideal image of himself as an individual who must continue to evolve and become stronger. This image went on to shape Hakuji's sense of self as a student at the dojo with a purpose in life: to protect his loved ones and uphold the honor of the place where he trains. Thus, Keizo's influence did not merely serve as a moral guide, but also acted as a mirror that helped Hakuji forge his initial identity as an individual seeking to become stronger.

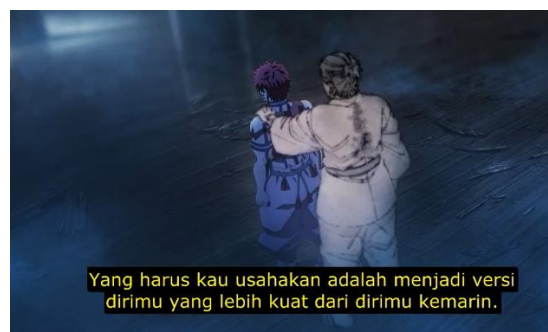


Figure 1 & 2.

However, from a Lacanian perspective, this ideal image is of an imaginary nature, since the identity that forms during the mirror stage always depends on the recognition of the other. When the structure of Hakuji's life collapses in the wake of the tragedy that strikes his family, the ideal image that previously shaped his ego is also destroyed. The destruction of this image opens the way for the emergence of psychological conflict, which then influences the process of forming his new identity. The scene in which Hakuji stands face-to-face with Keizo in the dojo further emphasizes the role of the mirror stage in shaping his identity. Their face to face position represents a reflective relationship between the subject and the “mirror,” where Keizo acts as an external figure contributing to the formation of Hakuji's self image. In this context, Keizo appears not only as a teacher, but also as the embodiment of the ideal figure that Hakuji aspires to become.

Through this interaction, Hakuji indirectly identifies himself with the values embodied by Keizo, such as strength, discipline, and responsibility. The structured and formal setting of the dojo also reinforces the process of symbolization, where Hakuji begins to understand his position as both a student and an individual with a purpose. Thus, the ideal image that is formed does not come solely from Keizo's words, but also from the overall situation that places Hakuji in a hierarchical relationship as a subject who admires and aspires to become like the figure before him.

Furthermore, the scene in which Keizo touches Hakuji's shoulder, as seen in the second image, can be interpreted as a form of symbolic recognition that strengthens this process of identification. This gesture is not merely physical, but also represents acceptance and the legitimization of Hakuji's existence as an individual with potential. From the perspective of Jacques Lacan, recognition from the Other becomes an essential element in the formation of the self, as it is through such recognition that the subject gains validation of their ideal identity. However, since the identity that forms at this stage is imaginary and depends on the presence of the Other, when Keizo the source of this reflection disappears in the wake of the tragedy, the foundations of Hakuji's identity crumble. The absence of the

one who previously served as a “mirror” causes Hakuji to lose the reference point that allowed him to preserve his ideal self-image. This then paves the way for the formation of a new identity that no longer rests on previous values, but on a traumatic impulse and a new need for recognition.

Real

In Lacanian theory, the Real refers to an experience that cannot be fully explained by language or symbols. In Lacan’s view, as referenced by Jacques Lacan in Fadhil et al. (2026), this realm usually appears through traumatic or extreme experiences that can disrupt a person’s sense of identity. This can be seen in Hakuji’s story, especially in the moments when he loses the people closest to him. These events do more than just destroy his life as a human they leave behind emotional wounds that are difficult to explain in a logical way. In fact, the impact of these experiences goes beyond what can be fully understood, and they continue to shape his psychological state.



Figure 3 & 4.

In this scene, the look of shock on Hakuji’s face, along with the lifeless bodies of Koyuki and Keizo, illustrate the moment when he is suddenly confronted with a traumatic reality that he can neither understand nor accept. The loss of two people who held an important place in his life forces him to undergo a “real” experience that shatters the framework of meaning he once possessed.

The dialogue in this scene also reinforces the portrayal of this traumatic experience. When Hakuji realizes that the people he loves are dead, he expresses his shock by saying:

男：彼らは小雪ちゃんまで殺したのか！

男：Karera wa Koyuki-chan made koroshita no ka!

男：They even killed Koyuki-chan!

Furthermore, another exchange highlights Hakuji’s sadness when he realizes that the people he loves have abandoned him once again.

男：愛する人たちが危険にさらされるとき、またしても大切な人たちが死んでしまった。

男：Aisuru hitotachi ga kiken ni sarasareru toki, mata shite mo taisetsu na hitotachi ga shinde shimatta.

男：Just as my loved ones were in danger, the most important people in my life passed away once again.

Through this scene, Hakuji’s experience of loss can be understood as a moment in which he is directly confronted with the realm of the Real that is, with a traumatic reality that cannot be fully grasped by the symbolic structure that previously formed his identity.



Figure 5.

After going through such traumatic experiences, Hakuji begins to develop a new sense of motivation, mainly driven by his desire to become stronger. In the perspective of Jacques Lacan (2007), desire often appears as a response to a sense of loss or something that feels missing within the subject. In Hakuji's case, the loss of the people he cared about deeply changes the way he sees himself. He starts to believe that strength is the only way to deal with the fact that he could not protect them. This shift can be seen clearly in one of his statements:

Akaza: 俺 が 強 くな け れ ば 、 や り 返 さ れ た と き に 勝 て な い 。
Akaza: Ore ga tsuyokunakereba, yarikaesareta toki ni katenai.
Akaza: If I'm not strong, I won't be able to prevail when my opponent strikes back

Hakuji's response to loss can be seen in the way his inner world gradually shifts toward a strong desire for power. This desire is not only about physical strength, but also reflects a deeper psychological attempt to deal with the helplessness he feels after losing the people who once gave meaning to his life. Strength, in this sense, becomes something he holds onto almost as a way to cope with the emptiness left by those experiences. From this scene, it becomes clear that Hakuji's need to grow stronger is closely tied to his experience of loss. Over time, this desire turns into a central motivation that shapes his actions and decisions, eventually playing a role in the transformation of his identity into Akaza.

The Other

Muzan Kibutsuji's statement about creating twelve powerful demons marks an important turning point in understanding Akaza's identity. From a Lacanian perspective (2007), the idea of the Other relates to a figure who holds authority and gives recognition, which then shapes how a person sees themselves and what they desire Fadhill et al.,(2026). In this situation, Muzan takes on that role. He does not only offer Hakuji power, but also introduces him to a new position within the hierarchy of demons.

By setting power as the highest value, Muzan creates a new kind of order that Hakuji becomes part of. It is through this recognition that Hakuji begins to take on a different sense of self, one that eventually leads to the identity known as Akaza.



Figure 6 & 7.

What Hakuji says in this moment shows how far his transformation has gone. By accepting his condition as a demon, he openly states that he has lost his memories and no longer holds on to his past. Instead, his focus shifts entirely toward becoming stronger, as if power is now the only thing that gives his existence meaning.

Akaza: 俺は鬼になり、記憶を失った。
俺が気にするのは強くなることだけだ。

Akaza : Ore wa oni ni nari, kioku o ushinatta.
Ore ga ki ni suru no wa tsuyoku naru koto dake da.

Akaza : I've become a demon and lost my memory.

The only thing that matters to me is getting stronger.

This statement shows that Akaza's identity is shaped by his relationship with the Other, embodied by Muzan. Having lost his past and his memories as a human, Akaza adopts a new value system that places power at the center of his concerns. Thus, Muzan's presence as the Other not only validates Akaza's new identity but also directs his desire to relentlessly pursue the quest for power as a demon.

Symbolic



Figure 8 & 9.

The scene in which Akaza, despite having been decapitated by Tanjiro Kamado, still cries out, "Not yet! I can still fight! I can still get stronger!" can be interpreted as illustrating how the subject remains bound to this symbolic structure. Although he is physically on the brink of defeat, Akaza retains the identity shaped by the value system he has internalized namely, the conviction that his existence is determined by his ability to keep fighting and become stronger. This statement shows that the language he uses reflects the internalization of a symbolic order that places strength as the primary goal.

This scene can be understood as a moment when Akaza's identity is still dominated by the symbolic realm, as the way he perceives himself still depends on the value system that shaped his identity as a demon. However, at the same time, this situation also begins to pave the way for the emergence of an internal conflict as his memories of the past gradually return, thereby shaking the symbolic identity to which he has clung until now.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Hakuji's transformation into Akaza in *Kimetsu no Yaiba* cannot be separated from the psychological experiences that shape his character. His change in identity is not only driven by events within the storyline, but also influenced by the emotional and psychological processes he undergoes, particularly those related to his relationships and the losses he experiences. These aspects gradually affect not only who he becomes, but also the direction of his actions throughout the narrative.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, particularly within the framework of Jacques Lacan, this transformation can be understood through several interconnected ideas. Hakuji's early sense of self begins with his identification with Keizo as an ideal figure. The presence of Keizo and Koyuki also plays an important role in providing recognition that shapes both his identity and his desire. However, after experiencing profound loss, a sense of emptiness emerges, pushing him to seek new meaning through strength. His encounter with Muzan then becomes a crucial turning point, as it introduces him to a new structure of power and ultimately leads to the formation of his identity as Akaza.

REFERENCES

- Alfadlilah, M. (2024). Hasrat Tokoh Anak Muda Pada Cerpen " Dari Masa ke Masa" Karya A. A Navis: Kajian Lacanian. *Journal of Culture, Arts, Literature, and Linguistics*, 10(1), 17–26.
- Amalia, D., Hadi, S. R., & Wulandari, E. (2025). Hasrat Kepribadian Tokoh Utama Dalam Cerpen Samurai Karya Kuntowijoyo: Kajian Psikoanalisis Jacques Lacan. *Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia*, 8(1), 311–329. <https://doi.org/10.29408/sbs.v8i1.29054>
- Anisah, P. N., Hapsari, W., & Kusumatuti, W. (2025). Jurnal Psikologi dan Bimbingan Konseling. *Jurnal Psikologi Dan Bimbingan Konseling*, 11(2), 1–10.
- Aqil, M. R. (2025). *Konflik Batin Tokoh Akaa Dalam Manga Kimetsu No Yaiba Karya Koyoharu Gotouge*.
- Astuti, R. E., Mujiyanto, Y., & Rohmadi, M. (2016). *Analisis Psikologi Sastra Dan Nilai Pendidikan Dalam Novel Entrok Karya Okky Madasari Serta Relevansinya Sebagai Materi Pembelajaran Sastra Di Sekolah Menengah Atas*. 4(2), 165–175. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/196255896.pdf>
- Fadhil, A., Arif, A., Oemiati, S., & Nuswantoro, U. D. (2026). *Perubahan Identitas Tokoh Light Yagami Sebagai ' Kira ' Dalam Anime Death Note Menurut Psikoanalisis Lacanian*. 1, 250–262.
- Lacan, J. (2007). *Écrits*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Lestari, M. L., Arianingsih, A., & Febrianty, F. (2018). Hubungan Aspek Sosiologi Pengarang Dengan Unsur Intrinsik Dalam Novel Nijuushi No Hitomi. *Janaru Saja : Jurnal Program Studi Sastra Jepang*, 6(2), 26–35. <https://doi.org/10.34010/js.v6i2.579>
- Rasyid, F. (2015). Penelitian Metodologi Kuantitatif. In *Aswaja Pressindo*.
- Safrudin, R., Zulfamanna, Kustati, M., & Sepriyanti, N. (2023). Penelitian Kualitatif. *Journal Of Social Science Research*, 3(2), 1–15.
- Sayaka, M., & Madoka, A. (2024). *Cinematology : Journal Anthology of Film and Television Studies Penerapan Teori Psikoanalisis Lacan Pada Pengembangan Karakter*. 4(3), 96–111.
- Wolf, B. (2019). *Anxiety Between Desire and the Body*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429025501>

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Fidella Eka Maheswari, email : Fidella.63822012@mahasiswa.unikom.ac.id

Fidella Eka Maheswari is a senior in the Japanese literature program, currently pursuing a bachelor's degree at the University of Information Technology in Indonesia. Passionate about literature, he explores various types of literary works through the lens of the theories he has learned.

Fenny Febrianty, S.S., M.Pd., email : fenny.febrianty@email.unikom.ac.id

Fenny Febrianty, S.S., M.Pd., is a lecturer in literature and Japanese studies at the University of Informatics in Indonesia.