

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### B.1 Theoretical Framework

##### B.1.1 Semiotics

Semiotics is a branch of science that studies signs and the process of signification in human life. The word semiotics comes from the Greek word *semeion* which means "sign". According to Chandler (2007), semiotics is the study of how meaning is produced, disseminated, and understood. Simply put, semiotics discusses how something, be it a word, image, sound, or gesture, can function as a representation of something else in a social or cultural system. Since its inception, semiotics has emphasized that a sign is not something that carries meaning by itself, but rather its meaning is produced in the relationship between signs in a particular social system. Human life is filled with signs, from the use of language, cultural symbols, fashion, to artistic expression. Therefore, semiotics becomes an important analytical tool in revealing how meanings are constructed and manipulated in social life. Eco (1976) stated that "semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign", anything that can be seen as a sign can be an object of semiotic study. This approach makes semiotics relevant not only in linguistics, but also in anthropology, sociology, media studies, and cultural analysis. By understanding semiotics, one can dissect the structures of meaning hidden behind various cultural products.

Theoretically, modern semiotics is rooted in the thoughts of two main figures, namely Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce. Saussure, a Swiss linguist, introduced the concept of a sign as an entity consisting of a signifier and a signified. The signifier is the material form of the sign, such as a sound or image, while the signified is the concept or meaning referred to by the form. Saussure emphasized that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, meaning that there is no natural relationship between form and meaning; this relationship is determined by social convention (Saussure, 1959). On the other hand, Peirce, an American philosopher, developed a triadic approach to signs, involving the representamen (the sign itself), the object (what the sign represents), and the interpretant (the interpreter's understanding of the sign). Peirce also differentiates signs into icons (signs that resemble their objects), indices (signs that are causally related to their objects), and symbols (signs whose relationship to objects is conventional). Saussure's approach is more structural and focuses on the sign system, while Peirce is more pragmatic and pays attention to the process of interpreting signs. Both of these approaches are important foundations in the development of contemporary semiotic theory. With this framework, semiotics does not only see signs as individual entities, but as part of a wider network of meanings in a social and cultural context.

The development of modern semiotics cannot be separated from the contribution of Roland Barthes, who expanded the scope of sign analysis to the fields of popular culture and ideology. In *Mythologies* (1957), Barthes developed

the concept of denotation and connotation to explain how signs work on two levels of meaning. Denotation refers to the literal or descriptive meaning of a sign, while connotation includes additional meanings formed by social, cultural, and ideological contexts. According to Barthes (1972), connotation can build myths, namely cultural narratives that appear natural, but are actually ideological constructions. Barthes also introduced the concept of anchorage and relay in the relationship between text and image: anchorage limits the meaning of an image through text, while relay creates new meaning through the interaction between text and image (Barthes, 1977). Using Barthes' framework, semiotic analysis can reveal how mass media, advertisements, films, and other cultural texts not only convey information, but also instill certain ideological values.

Barthes shows that meaning is not something that is passively received by readers or viewers, but is formed and negotiated through a system of signs. Therefore, Barthes' semiotic approach is very relevant to analyze representation in contemporary culture, including in modern dramas that are full of symbolism and ideological struggles. The application of semiotic theory in cultural studies allows for an in-depth analysis of social, political, and cultural representations in the media. Recent studies have shown how semiotics is used to dismantle cultural myths and hidden ideologies. For example, Floch (1990) used Barthes' semiotics to analyze commercial advertisements in France, revealing how products are promoted not only as goods, but also as symbols of social identity.

Likewise, Fiske (1990) in *Introduction to Communication Studies* explains how mass media constructs and reinforces stereotypes through the use of certain signs. In the context of this study, namely the analysis of the drama *The Cursed*, Barthes' semiotics provides a tool to understand how ritual objects such as cursed dolls, blood, and incantations in the drama function not only as story elements, but also as representations of cultural tensions between tradition and modernity in Korea. Through the concepts of denotation, connotation, anchorage, and relay, this study is able to dissect the hidden meaning structure in the visual and verbal narrative of the drama. Thus, Barthes' semiotic approach plays an important role in opening up invisible layers of meaning, enriching the analysis of modern cultural products.

### **B.1.2 Existentialism Jean Paul Sartre**

Sartre's philosophy, as articulated in 1957, is grounded on two primary concepts: *être en soi* (being-in-itself) and *être pour soi* (being-for itself). 'Being-in-itself' refers to entities that exist independently, while 'being-for-itself' is the capacity to act within a given situation. For Sartre, consciousness is pure subjectivity, enabling humans to exercise freedom in shaping their future. Existence is the core of human nature, with freedom as its primary attribute, stemming from the *pour soi* consciousness that transcends the materiality of *en soi*. However, confronted with this freedom, individuals may respond in two fundamental ways: by concealing their freedom through subterfuge or

psychological determinism, thus remaining unaware of their liberty; or by embracing freedom and assuming full responsibility for their actions.

#### 1. Consciousness

The central theme of Sartre's (1957:11) philosophy revolves around two fundamental concepts: être en soi (being-in-itself) and être pour soi (being-for-itself). Sartre (1957:11) defines "being-in-itself" as entities that exist without the involvement of consciousness, in contrast to "being-for-itself" which is the human ability to make choices and act in the situations they face. According to Sartre (1957:11), consciousness is a form of pure subjectivity that allows humans to have the freedom to determine their future. Thus, human existence, characterized by freedom, arises from the pour soi consciousness that transcends the limits of materiality or en soi. Faced with this freedom, humans can choose between hiding their freedom through psychological determinism or accepting freedom and taking full responsibility for their actions.

Consciousness is a fundamental concept in Sartre's (1957:13) philosophy and is heavily influenced by Edmund Husserl, a phenomenologist. Husserl invited people to return to the reality of themselves, which is called "Zu den Sachen selbst" or "return to the transcendental ego." Husserl's phenomenology is defined as "the study of the essence of consciousness and its various fundamental structures". However, Sartre rejected Husserl's idea of the transcendental ego because, according to Sartre (1957:13), this concept would

lead consciousness to an abstract idealism. Sartre (1957:13) preferred to lower the ego to the existential level as a concrete human being or *réalité humaine*.

In Sartre's view, consciousness is closely related to human existence, where "existence precedes essence." In other words, a person's essence or identity is formed through their free actions. Human consciousness, for Sartre, is an active consciousness that is inherent in individual existence and allows humans to adapt to the world around them and respond to the complexities they face.

## 2. Freedom

Freedom in Sartre's (1957:17) philosophy is seen as a fundamental element that characterizes human existence. Sartre (1957:17) defines freedom as the absence of limitations, coercion, or obligation. However, this freedom is often confronted with the question of whether the choices a person makes are truly freedom or merely a form of unfreedom due to psychological determinism. For example, a person may be bound by social norms that require them to appreciate gifts, thus limiting their freedom by the assumptions within themselves (Fauzan, 2023).

In the face of their freedom, Sartre (1957:20) identifies two fundamental attitudes: first, humans can hide their freedom by following external authorities or norms; second, humans can realize and affirm their freedom through responsible action. For Sartre (1957:20), human freedom is absolute and is not bound by a predetermined essence, but rather through human choices and

actions themselves. Sartre also states that the freedom of others can be a threat to individual freedom, considering that interpersonal relations tend to be conflictual when individuals see each other as objects that hinder their own freedom.

### 3. Responsibility

Responsibility is an important aspect of Sartre's (1957:27) existentialist philosophy. He argues that humans who are aware of their existence also realize that they have a responsibility for the future they choose. Sartre emphasizes that this responsibility is not only limited to oneself but also to all of humanity. By stating that "human beings choose themselves, it means that they also choose for all of humanity," Sartre (1957:27) means that the actions chosen by an individual essentially shape a universal image of humanity.

According to Sartre (1957:27), this concept reflects the increasing moral responsibility of humans along with their existential freedom. The philosophy of responsibility becomes significant in the context of the crisis experienced by Western society after World War II, where the social, economic, and political conditions of the world influenced how humans understood their existence. Sartre (1957:27) affirms that individual freedom is always followed by responsibility for the actions taken, both for oneself and for the wider community.

## **B.2 Review of Related Studies**

First article titled *Kebebasan Individu Pada Konteks Childfree: Kajian Eksistensialisme Jean-Paul Sartre dalam Novel Ours Karya Adrindia Ryandiza* written by Pane and Adisaputra (2023). The article explores individual freedom in *Ours*, a novel by Adrindia Ryandisza, through Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism. Using a descriptive qualitative method, it analyses texts and dialogues to uncover existential themes. The research focuses on three steps: selecting a character, identifying relevant dialogues that reflect existentialist issues, and applying Sartre's theory to analyse the character's thoughts and actions. Findings reveal that characters in *Ours* embody Sartre's concept of human freedom, making independent life decisions, asserting autonomy in relationships, and rejecting societal expectations, especially in the context of the "childfree" choice. Specifically, characters Prita and Andi maintain their principles despite societal pressures around family norms, facing criticism that isolates them socially. The study identifies 18 key instances of narrative and dialogue that exemplify these existential struggles, supporting Sartre's view of freedom and responsibility in personal choices.

The second article, titled *Eksistensialisme dalam Cerpen Bh Karya Emha Ainun Nadjib dan Implementasinya Terhadap Pembelajaran Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia* by Meliala (2024). The article examines human self-awareness as a foundation of existence within society, focusing on the short story BH by Emha Ainun Nadjib and its application in Indonesian language and literature education. Using Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist theory, the research emphasizes human

consciousness of self. It employs Gerald Genette's narratology method, analyzing the story's structure through the terms "story," "narrative," and "narrating." Findings reveal that the character Subodro undergoes a transformation into Niken Lestari, reflecting Sartre's existentialism, where self-awareness enables individuals to define themselves. Subodro's journey illustrates Sartre's concept of human subjectivity, distinct from inanimate objects. By recognizing himself as a subject, Subodro accepts responsibility for his choices to "exist." The characters "I" and Niken embody responsibility for their chosen essence in life, upholding Sartre's view that one's choices must respect others' subjectivity. In Indonesian language and literature education, this story fosters literary appreciation through listening, reading, and discussing literature.

The third article, titled *Existentialism of the Main Character in the Professor Movie (2019) Directed by Wayne Roberts* written by Pastrana, Erwing and, Setyabudi (2023). The article analyzes *The Professor*, a film by Wayne Roberts, focusing on the main character, Richard Brown, an English professor diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. His personal life is marked by turmoil: his wife is unfaithful, and his daughter identifies as a lesbian. The film presents various unexpected moments, with Richard serving as a vehicle for Roberts' philosophical ideas. The research addresses two main questions: how Richard Brown's character is portrayed and what existentialist themes emerge through him. Using documentation and Denzin's triangulation method for data validation, the study applies character and characterization theory, along with Jean-Paul

Sartre's existentialism. The findings reveal four aspects of Richard's characterization: rebellious, apathetic, sarcastic, and loving toward his daughter. Through these traits, the research identifies Richard's existential views on love, death, and freedom as central themes, offering a unique existential perspective from Roberts.

The fourth article, titled Existentialism in *The Worst Person in The World Movie* by Oktiviani, Farlina, Djohar (2023). This study examines existentialism through the characters in the film *The Worst Person in the World* (2021), focusing on how they illustrate common existential struggles. Using descriptive qualitative analysis, it explores the dialogues and actions of the protagonists, Julie and Aksel, through the existential theories of Jean-Paul Sartre, Søren Kierkegaard, and Albert Camus. The findings reveal that Aksel, who fears death, gravitates towards material comforts as a coping mechanism, embodying Kierkegaard's ethical stage through long-term commitments. Julie oscillates between the aesthetic and ethical stages, facing her anxieties amidst the film's portrayal of life's inherent absurdity. By contrasting Julie's and Aksel's existential approaches, the study underscores the universal experience of life's uncertainties. It suggests that understanding oneself and recognizing a higher power, or God, are key to addressing existential anguish.

The fifth article, titled An Analysis Film "Everything Everywhere All at Once" Nihilism and Multiversak Methaphors (Literature Semiotics) by Toabnani (2023). This research analyses Everything Everywhere All at Once through literary

semiotics, focusing on themes of nihilism and multiverse metaphors. The film's narrative intertwines various dimensions, presenting existential questions through symbols, signs, and narrative structures. Nihilism is depicted as an absence of inherent meaning, explored through the protagonist's self-discovery amid life's absurdity. The multiverse concept enhances this theme by presenting fragmented realities, mirroring nihilistic views on truth. Visual motifs like mirrors and reflections emphasize interconnectedness and fluidity, while color symbolism and recurring visuals evoke emotions tied to these themes, offering deeper insight into the film's philosophical underpinnings.

The collective analysis of the five studies reveals a rich exploration of existential themes across various literary and cinematic works, each utilizing existentialism to address individual freedom, self-awareness, and the human experience. Pane and Adisaputra (2023) highlight the struggle for independence in the context of societal pressures within the novel *Ours*, while Meliala (2024) emphasizes self-definition through the character transformation in *BH*. Pastrana, Erwing, and Setyabudi (2023) delve into the existential dilemmas faced by Richard Brown in *The Professor*, reflecting on profound themes of love, death, and autonomy. Oktiviani, Farlina, and Djohar (2023) examine the anxieties of Julie and Aksel in *The Worst Person in the World*, framing their experiences within existential stages. The last, Toabnani (2023) offers an analysis with nihilism and multiversal metaphors that have the same data with the research. Then, in this research, will focus on two key questions related to the existential

elements in the Everything Everywhere All at Once movie. First, it will explore the elements that depict the search for meaning in the lives of the main characters. This includes an analysis of the characters' experiences, choices, and interactions, as well as how these elements reflect their struggle to find purpose and meaning amidst various challenges.

Second, this research will investigate how existentialism is reflected in the film's characters and plot. In this context, existential theories proposed by thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre will be applied to understand how the characters in the film confront issues such as freedom, responsibility, and the absurdity of life.

