

PICTURING EXISTENTIAL FREEDOM IN *THE ALCHEMIST*

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Abstract

The Alchemist is an adventure novel which highlighted the journey of the main character of this novel, Santiago, a shepherd who endeavored to realize his dream and desire, he who definitely felt at free to pick himself out to where he brings himself to somewhere or being what he had ever desire for his existence. This study focuses on how the depiction of existential freedom is pictured in the novel which is analyzed by existentialist approach. The objective of this study is to mention how existential freedom is pictured in the novel and to analyze the portrayal of existential freedom by the main character of the novel. The study employs document analysis to reveal how Santiago can become a man with freedom that is able to realize his existence, meanwhile in collecting data, the study uses note-taking. This study that applies Sartre's conception of freedom shows the result that somebody who has their own independency can realize their existence through several stages, which are aware of their existence; aware of their life's purpose, being in anguish, then them took their choice conscientiously, and committed to themselves for the decisions they had choose nevertheless in the situation which require to change by turns.

Keywords: Existentialism, existential freedom, Paulo Coelho, Sartre, *The alchemist*

INTRODUCTION

Human is set to long for a freedom in their life as in the former time people had fought to liberate from several matters, such as slavery, colonialization, and the other kinds of suppression on one's life. People are free to carry out their plans in life as long as it is not contradicting the rules and laws applied. Making meaning of one's life could be had the same meaning as creating one's own destiny. Even though destiny had written previously, yet human is commanded to determine all the best for their life based on their pronouncement as the one who can control oneself is only themselves. In destiny making there must be existential freedom through the process. There were many artworks which highlighted

the existential freedom as its central theme; one of all is a novel entitled *The Alchemist* which is written by Paulo Coelho.

The author of the novel chosen; Paulo Coelho was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1947. It is globally acknowledged that he had written numerous works which underlined the humans' existence. One of the most famous novels written by Coelho is *The Alchemist*. That novel was published in Brazil first in 1988 and then translated to English in 1993. *The Alchemist* novel delivered a simple nevertheless complex with many life lessons conveyed to its global readers. The story emphasized the essential of bringing desire into reality which utilized the freedom to conclude the chosen way.

In this study, the writer is interested in analyzing the aspect of existentialism in the novel that is existential freedom which is portrayed by its main character, Santiago. The writer had motives in writing this article. Firstly, it has a simple storyline yet highlighting the deep meaning for its readers, because that simple storyline, the readers could easily comprehend the meaning behind the story. Secondly, the depiction of a man who could recognize his existential freedom is portrayed well by Santiago. Lastly, the story of the novel is in accordance with the theory of existentialism, Coelho exemplified the story which could happen around readers' daily life. The references for this issue made the writer concerned about this topic since it is a real deal in humans' daily life. This study will be analyzed by using existentialist perspectives with the help of Sartre's conception of freedom.

There are numerous studies which have analyzed the novel as well, though the theme which is being observed is different. The first article from Indrajani (2010) examined the nature's meaning of the protagonist of the novel, Santiago. The study applied literary philosophy theory, specifically transcendentalism theory. The result of the study was that nature had helped Santiago in reaching his dream, things such as a commodity, beauty, discipline, idealism, spirit, and also prospects were provided from nature. Based on the article written, it concluded that in the end with the help of

nature Santiago could find his own treasure which is his fate to encounter Fatima and he could find the treasure as well.

Another study from Irawan (2005) dealt with analyzing cultural studies, mainly Islamic culture. The main results of the study were that there were several Islamic cultures which are portrayed in the novel such as shepherd, caravan, broker and commission, and the last is falconry. Those considered as Islamic cultures since those had been written in Islamic history which were in accordance with Islamic laws.

The other study by (Fahad, 2015) underlined the orientalism aspect in the novel which described that Coelho represented two dissimilar cultures in his novel on each character, and besides situations written in the novel, he characterized west and east cultures together. In the novel, it was explicitly shown that Coelho described that the west was more powerful than the east. This study implied that this novel illustrated the point of view of how the way western saw eastern which was contrary in reality. Research by (Puspitasari, 2017) discoursed the motivation in reaching the dream portrayed by the main character of *The Alchemist* novel; it applied Alfred Adler's personality psychological theory. The result of the study was that Santiago could reach his dream with the urge of the motivation which appeared in him, he got a higher spiritual level as well in his journey to find his treasure, also love that he had been seeking. It could be regarded that Coelho wanted the

readers to have dreams and never surrender on reaching it while also having motivation within ourselves. Nuri (2018) discovered the existentialism aspect in *The Alchemist* novel such as defending the main character's existence, and the relation with his freedom of choice. It employed existentialism theory from Sartre. The outcome of this study was that in maintaining one's existence he had to obtain the freedom of choice, felt the anguish which occurred after taking any decisions, be responsible for every action, and also separating himself from others as the consequence of being different in decision making.

In analyzing the novel, the writer applied an existentialist perspective from Sartre; especially based on his conception of freedom to respond how the main protagonist of the novel could portray the freedom for realizing his existence in the novel. Since according to Sartre (2007) freedom was the fundamental matter of being-for-itself for each human who was conscious of their existence and acknowledged their anguish for being free. Sartre argued that freedom did not have significance to attain what one needed, nonetheless freedom to choose what one wanted to become. Freedom could be infinite and pointless yet itself as the basis of all values of one's life. Sartre offered existentialism theory by his lecture which presented about "Existentialism and Humanism" to a wide audience in Paris late 1945 (Yunus, 2011) Sartre wrote roughly about what freedom was and how humans were able to find freedom in themselves.

Moreover, Sartre's widespread statement was that *existence precedes essence* (Kaufmann, 1956). What existentialists mean by *existence precedes essence* was that man initially existed, found himself out, experienced suffering in the world, and then he was able to define himself. If *existence precedes essence* was right, man was responsible for what he was (Sartre, 2007). Existence meant a realistic condition which happened in time and space, a man who actively formed himself, being and planning for himself was the one who created his only existence. Meanwhile essence was the meaning, purpose, or value that lied within something commonly (Yunus, 2011).

Sartre (2007) proposed the main principle of existentialism was that man was nothing else but what he made of himself. Since existentialism was linked to freedom, he emphasized that freedom involved freedom of choice. To be free did not denote that one could acquire what one wished but rather by oneself shaping what he wished. Since freedom was the most basic thing of being, it made humans in condemned to be free. Condemned meant that human did not create himself, yet on the other hand was in liberation, at that moment oneself was responsible for entire what he did. There were central concepts of existentialism; the first was having a freedom to choose among the choices, the second was being responsible, then the feeling of anguish and anxiety would entail the responsibility, and consistently took an act of doing was being an important part in

this concept of existentialism; with the lack of doing, all of decisions became pointless (Rajkhowa, 2018).

The researches which explored the novel *The Alchemist* were already numerous. This study was different from the previous studies before. This study focused on how existential freedom is pictured in the novel which seen by Sartre's freedom existentialist perspective.

METHODS

In this study, the researcher employs Sartre's conception of freedom in existentialism. This study applies existentialism approach in analyzing the topic which being observed as well. The primary data source of this study was *The Alchemist* novel, and the secondary data sources were previous studies which observed the novel and other documents which related to the topic to be observed, for instance articles, and the other information on the internet. This study also used document analysis that was the novel as the method of collecting data.

The steps of collecting data of this study, as follow; firstly, the data was collected through reading comprehensively and repeatedly. Secondly the writer found the problem out which being the theme of this study. Next, the writer categorized the significant parts which related to the topic. And the last was arranged the analysis of those data which have been collected that were appropriate to the topic.

The technique of analyzing data of this study was descriptive qualitative. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) there were three activities in analyzing the data, those are: Data reduction, it implied the act of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and changing the data into transcription. The next step in analyzing data was displaying the data, it meant that after the data being reduced and sorting the important data only then the data was being displayed so as to provide organized information that got the conclusion drawing. The succeeding step after reducing and displaying the data was drawing conclusions. This involved considering the meaning of analyzed data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cited from Sartre in (Nuri, 2018) existentialism underlined its scopes on humans' being. It was obliging each person to grasp that the world and also humans' existence was in an unfinished and inadequate condition. It meant that was why human always confronting existential problems for instance anxiety, fear and unsteady, freedom, death, etc. Likewise, Simone de Beauvoir in (Collins, 2017) detailed that the chances of human freedom was equal to all people, it was possible to determine one's fate and recognized one's freedom. Furthermore, her analysis on existential freedom appeared dissimilar since each individual was born free and could flourish a proper freedom by being responsible for their life.

The writer considered that existential freedom was comparable with freedom in actualizing one's existence. At this point, existential freedom assumed that somebody was able to represent their existence in various ways which one's believe based on the desire for being what they like which could define their existence (Pormouzeh & Nilchian, 2019). With the intention of realizing one's own being or in defining one's existence, it was unescapable that somebody certainly had been through these kinds of sequences, for instance aware of his existence; aware of his purpose in life, feeling anguish after taking that decision, then he brought out his choice responsibly, and doing self-commitment for the decisions he had made even in the situation which always changing (Sartre, 2007).

Aware of his existence

Study by Otegbulu (2018) stated that a man could be considered for being conscious of his existence was when he put other beings into reflection in their thoughts, actions, and behaviors. It could be seen from following lines below.

“That he had attended a seminary until he was sixteen. His parents had wanted him to become a priest and thereby a source of pride for a simple farm family. But ever since he had been a child, he had wanted to know the world, and this was much

more important to him than knowing God and learning about man's sins”
(Coelho, 1993, p.19)

Based on quotation above Santiago represented in what way a man was considered as a being who conscious of his existence, at this point Santiago recognized his purpose of life into his thoughts, actions, and also behaviors (Otegbulu, 2018). It could be seen from quotation above which presented Santiago admitted that his fate was not to be a priest however his destiny was becoming an adventurer who traveled and visited many places. He thought that his purpose in life was to travel, not as a priest who purely learned about God and man's sins, correspondingly he established his behavior comparable to what he desired to be as a shepherd.

In the passage above, it implicitly explained that Santiago knew what his true desire to become in his life. Cutamora (2020) detailed that firstly man must be existed, and attained his own essence through his own actions. Recognizing what ones desired was the first step of making meaning of one's existence. Opposing the other child who enjoyed their leisure time, Santiago's hope was eager to know the world while he had not been reach adulthood yet. He accentuated that traveling around the world was more important as well than caged in a seminary where he had to catch in a condition that he did not fit into such as learning Latin, Spanish, and

Theology as well. It was better to follow the desire than living meaningless without realizing what was the actually essence of ones being. According to (Sartre, 2007) a man would live genuinely, also he would nearer to realize himself as truly human, by seeking beyond himself as one of freedom realization, thus that man could grasp himself as a truly human who knowing his essence of living. By recognizing that desire, one could know what one exactly had to do to reach that desire. He, Santiago, encountered himself as an adventurer who journeyed to see many places, not as a priest who only learned about God and man's sins. He realized that he did not want to turn out to be a priest since he found there was no meaning to live under an undesirable circumstance that he did not belongs to.

Freedom of choice

Freedom of choice could be implicated as the condition when a man was able to decide for what would they turn out to be in their own life (Nuri, 2018). Based on that concept about freedom of choice, it could be represented by these lines on the quotation novel below.

“Well, then I’ll be shepherd”
(Coelho, 1993, p.34)

“They wanted me to be a priest, but I decided to become shepherd”
(Coelho, 1993, p.36)

Based upon those lines, it assumed that later Santiago knew what he wanted to do in his life, and then he decided to be a shepherd who could freely went around many places which he would like to visit. As he took that decision, he correspondingly took action which he encouraged himself to tell his big decision to his father. It was not something easy to do with the lack of freedom to choose. This statement is in accordance with Berlin in (Manzi, 2013) who emphasized that one could lack their political freedom when they excluded from gaining what they desired. It was simply concluded that one was being incapable of achieving one's goal.

He had summoned up the courage to tell his father that he did not want to become a priest. That he wanted to travel (Coelho, 1993, p.19)

From quotation above, Santiago had full freedom he could use thus he was able to choose what he wanted to become and contrasting his parents' wish with the help of his bravery to speak to his father that he wanted to travel around the world by being a shepherd. Since the one and only option that could freely jumped from one place to another wherever and whenever was being a shepherd. By that quotation above, he proved that he was not stopping his action by just wishing something however he took a little action nearer to his desire. He began with made up his mind that being shepherd was his

only desire so he could transportable around the world which also made his parents disappointed with his decision so he put all of his bravery to tell the truth to his parents especially his father. This action was in closeness with Sartre's conception of freedom, which was that he could decide something essential to his life and took a single step as the extension of the decision since decision without any action was just an inadequate idea. Meanwhile by actions and decisions, man gradually improved and drag to their missions and self-identity (Elpidorou, 2017).

Feeling of anguish

Sartre emphasized that individuals were at liberty to determine their own choices, but they were fated to constantly endure a responsibility of the consequences for those choices, moreover anguish was the feeling felt by an individual when he confronted the world, then realized his full freedom and responsibility, and knew that there was no base on which to stand on his actions (Gardner, 2009). Furthermore, man was opposed with countless possibilities involved with a lack of external guidance (Nuri, 2018). The anguish appeared in the line below.

"...but he was no longer happy with his decision, maybe because that wasn't really his dream" (Coelho, 1993, p.146)

Santiago sensed anguish right after he made a decision that he wanted to go to new place, Africa terrain. He thought that his choice has been mistaken as he decided to realize his dream, to look for a treasure near pyramid. At second, he re-experienced anguish afterward he chose to go back to his usual habit on Andalusia, to become an ordinary shepherd. Somehow, he even felt disappointed with his latest decision to turn back became shepherd in his country. However deep inside his own thoughts, Santiago still craved to search for his treasure near Pyramids, so he felt anguish when he thought that he took decision wrongfully. As One bunne (2021) stated that freedom was sustained with an unavoidable anguish when one totally realizes of how complicated the consequence of one's freedom was; then man was required to choose prickly decision among those ruthless options. Nevertheless, man was occasionally looked-for direction for aiding them in organizing decision basically to guarantee that man is deciding something right.

"he still had some doubts about the decision he had made" (Coelho, 1993, p.157)

From the quotation above, it could be perceived that Santiago still possessed some hesitations for his decision he had choose. It was a usual that human feels doubts or even in anguish afterwards they were making a

decision for their life. According to Sartre in (Jennings, 2020) anguish arose after man has made a choice. Santiago acknowledged that when he decided one thing, it must be followed by other things. So, the other things which would follow his latest decision made him feel in anguish because he did not know what would happen to him, or where would he go after that consequence he had took.

“he was tense and upset, because he knew that the old man was right.”
(Coelho, 1993, p.60)

From that line above, Santiago showed the other kind of anguish. He upset since he knew what the king said was right back then when he did not want to acknowledge it. Moreover, he tensed that he did not take any action resembling what the old man said as it was the true decision. As claimed in research conducted by Duan et al., (2018) some people would feel upset when they made a poor decision. It also happened to Santiago when he thought he mistook the decision in his life, even it was a normal situation when a man took a wrong decision as man could not avoid the wrongness.

Being responsible

Being responsible meant that if somebody was at a state of their freedom, they were certainly responsible for what they took (Mishra, 2021). Responsibility considered as the main result of freedom existentialism;

commonly when someone struggled to realize his existence, this act of freedom established responsibility on his own shoulders. Being responsible indicated that man was free (More, 2016). The act of responsibility could be seen from following lines.

Dusk was falling as the boy arrived with his herd at an abandoned church. The roof had fallen in long ago, and an enormous sycamore had grown on the spot where the sacristy had once stood. He decided to spend the night there. He saw to it that all the sheep entered through the ruined gate, and then laid some planks across it to prevent the flock from wandering away during the night.(Coelho, 1993, p.1)

The passage above showed that when Santiago decided for being a shepherd, he caught the consequence as a homeless person. He lived freely everywhere he brought his flock. He was responsible for his choice by providing his flock a good shelter. However, he got no feeling of regret nor sad by being a shepherd as he desired to be however he did not have the basic necessities equal to other such as a home to be lived in; he seemed satisfied with his latest decision since it would bring his wish into reality. As in accordance with the study by (More, 2016) described that one ought to stop sad or worrying with what they had at present since

the past had gone, then the secret of happiness is put in the present time.

“I can work for the rest of today,” the boy answered. “I’ll work all night, until dawn, and I’ll clean every piece of crystal in your shop. In return, I need money to get to Egypt tomorrow.” (Coelho, 1993, p.112)

The quotation above occurred when Santiago chose to go abroad after selling his sixty sheep to chase his dream that was his treasure near Pyramids, he got no ideas for what he had to do in that new place, new situation that different from where he belongs. Then he bumped into the crystal shop near market around him and he offered himself to work at that shop. Since humans were free to choose their actions, thus they were responsible for their entire actions (Rajkhowa, 2018). Santiago showed the responsible ethic for not blaming his decision yet he carried on with his decision in his new circumstance. So as to get to Pyramids in near Egypt, he offered himself to work at the crystal shop. He projected himself to work hard in that shop so that he could get fair salary as he traded the crystal out of the store. Occasionally, freedom was ensemble with hardships (Bavetta, 2004) then through the hardship that man was directly ascertain his responsibility of his decisions. In the novel, it could not be supposed that Santiago did not

face the hardship through his journey for his treasure, and to be worked at crystal merchant was never something he would imagine for his life before.

He knew it would require a lot of patience, but shepherd know all about patience. (Coelho, 1993, p.105)

In his pursuit of the dream, he was being constantly subjected to tests of his persistence and courage. So he could not be hasty, nor impatient. If he pushed forward impulsively, he would fail to see the signs and omens left by God along his path. (Coelho, 1993, p.208)

Based on those examples above, in pursuing his latest desire that was looking for his treasure, he was responsible to refrain himself from being rushed to chase his goal. As a shepherd, he already had experiences of being patient. Mesel (2021) stated that people were responsible if they knew what they were doing. That was in accordance with Santiago’s consciousness with what he was doing in order to get nearer to his destiny. He knew what he did at that time, which was attempted to get to Egypt to pursuit his treasure. In the first passage above, Santiago tried to resolve his problem in his new habitation. He dared himself to made a living there and got some money from that. He was

responsible by weighed down himself from being hurried in seeking what he had to do at that moment. Meanwhile in the second quotation, Santiago showed that he caught closer to the realization of his dream. After he succeeded in saving some money as of working in crystal store, he began to recollect his main purpose of why he did there. Afterwards, he decided to join the caravan which proceeded to Al-Fayoum in Egypt. He acknowledged that if he rushed the process of his journey of treasure, he would not come across it as the result. Santiago was responsible for keeping his route on the track, he did not think of wasting his time through the development of his process. As Onebunne (2021) stated that Sartre had a notion which individual who had their own freedom must controlled their own decisions and actions. That statement was coherent with Santiago's examples of controlling his decisions and his actions. Santiago was able to control his decisions by deciding what he thought the best for the condition he confronted, and then he could control his action by being patient and not rushing the progress nor being hasty for accomplishing his goal.

Self-commitment

According to Chukwuokolo et al., (2020) self-commitment ethic could be grasped by one committing himself to a certain way of action, a particular way of existing in the world by the help of free will. Moreover, Sartre stated that freedom must be

committed to action since it required responsibility and commitment (Chukwuokolo et al., 2020). Next step in proving that someone was realizing his existential freedom was doing self-commitment which could be seen from these lines.

"...he was feeling sorry for himself, and lamenting the fact that his life could have changed so suddenly and so drastically" (Coelho, 1993)

As he mused about these things, he realized that he had to choose between thinking of himself as the poor victim of a thief and as an adventurer in quest of his treasure. "I'm an adventurer, looking for treasure," he said to himself. (Coelho, 1993, p.101)

"I'm going to go back to doing just what I did before" (Coelho, 1993)

"I can always go back to being a shepherd, the boy thought. But I'll never have another chance to get to the pyramids in Egypt. (Coelho, 1993)

Based on the examples above of Santiago's new situation, in the first place Santiago was unpleasant with the difference of situation around. He habitually lived freely with his flock, moving from one place to

another to find grasslands and shelters. When he got into the new place even just a few miles from Andalusia, the cultures and the situation around was drastically different from where he used to be. Later, he ensured himself that he was not going to lose over that newly circumstance. He recovered his strength to pursue his treasure, yet the fate said different thing. He had to work to make living in his new place after being robbed by a scammer in the market. Then after he succeeded in saving some money from his new place by working at the crystal shop, Santiago still persisted himself that he had to focus on what he wanted to do in his life by arguing himself whether he had to choose being a regular shepherd or being an adventurer who pursuing his treasure. In the end, he chose to take alone in a life time-chance to go get his treasure in near pyramid in Egypt. As he pictured the self-commitment through his action, he was not only taking an important decision to continue his dream but he also willing to do necessary things such as joining the caravan to go to Egypt.

Meanwhile self-commitment according to Sartre (2007) was attempting to carry on doing things even when the situations were constantly changing. In this case Santiago attempted to realize his dream by going abroad yet he unpredicted that the situation around him was completely different from where he used to be, whether its culture, language, and environment as well. He struggled to persist in the track from his first

intention; however, he experienced doubt to become shepherd again when he settled with his life at that time. Later he found that it was not his reason why he got there; he took decision for going to Pyramids once again to realize his destiny. As stated by Sartre (2007) that man was remain the same, confronting a condition that was always changing and choice always still being a choice in the circumstance. It can be seen that the situations around Santiago were always shifting, yet he could keep himself up to his purpose to get to his treasure near pyramids, with the help of his free will to choose as well. Furthermore, As Sartre stated that someone could decide anything, as long as it included free commitment (Jennings, 2020), here Santiago showed that every decision he made, he always committed into that until he decided another choice.

“the closer he got to the realization of his dream; the more difficult things became” (Coelho, 1993, p.208)

From quotation above, Santiago realized that the nearer realization of his dream the more things got difficult by time passed by; he had this thought when he joined in the caravan that brought him into Al-Fayoum in Egypt. He assumed there was no more beginner luck in his new journey into the Pyramids. Cited from Landau (2019) in many difficult situations, actually several

people did not have the freedom to choose the proper attitudes. In this novel, Santiago proved many times even in the difficult situations, in the different circumstance; he could still have the freedom to decide what was more important for his life among those choices. Again in (Jennings, 2020) someone could decide anything as long as responsible and committed to that. Since by the actions and decisions, people always grew and committed to their intention and self-identity. People decided what was worth to their life. Also, the intention which people were committed to was not easy at all times, sometimes it get hard and difficult (Elpidorou, 2017) accordance with Santiago's thought about his journey on realizing his destiny. He warned himself that things would not go smoothly as he wished, on the contrary it even would be harder and more difficult as he required to be committed with his decision on pursuing his treasure.

CONCLUSION

This study had come to the conclusion based on those findings and discussion above that was existential freedom could be implemented when someone had a freedom first on their own hand. In *The Alchemist* novel, Santiago portrayed the existential freedom by his own journey from being a shepherd to search for his treasure. The illustrated of existential freedom in the novel were aware of his existence, freedom of choice, feeling of anguish, being responsible,

and self-commitment. Aware of his existence meant when someone was seeking beyond himself, in the novel it showed when Santiago conscious of his purpose of life. At that moment, he realized that his existence was to be an adventurer who quest his treasure. Then Freedom of choice meant when human was able to decide for what they would choose in their life. Santiago pictured the freedom of choice by deciding his own choice based on his desire. Then he felt anguish which meant that humans were free to determine their own choice faced by countless possibilities yet they lacked of base to stand on their actions. Though he felt anguish he must had been responsible, since he had freedom, he must responsible for everything what he took. Then, the last portrayal of existential freedom in the novel was that self-commitment, which was an attempt done by Santiago to commit himself into a certain way of action to get to his aim. Existential freedom which was pictured by Santiago in *The Alchemist* novel could be more related to people's everyday life since every step in realizing one's own existence was experienced by all of human who was trying to recognize his existence.

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