

## Existentialism In Kafka's Short Story A Hunger Artist

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### Abstract

*This study aims to describe and analyze the ego and psychological aspects of the philosophy of existentialism in Frank Kafka's A Hunger Artist, as reflected in the protagonist's inner conflicts, the form of the psyche, and tenets of existence—freedom, responsibility, and loneliness. To attain its goal, the research attempts to elaborate on the tenet of existentialism. It is defined as boredom manifested in eating behavior and impulsiveness. The audience's recognition and appreciation of the artist in The Hunger Artist comes from the realization that a hunger artist fasts to gain his freedom and identity. He is an important element for the analysis of existentialist ideas in the literature of Kafka because he often deals with the issue of human mentality by which he struggles to find himself and his place. The habit of fasting is an effective method that the protagonist tries to avoid; it serves as a strategic approach he uses to cope with the absence of meaning in his life. A detailed analysis of the novel clearly indicates that the author of this literary work has a life filled with isolation, personal conflicts, and limitations. Therefore, he does strange things to escape from such feelings by smothering them to find his life and be free.*

**Keywords:** *A Hunger Artist; Conflict; Existentialism; Freedom.*

### 1.0 Introduction

The philosophy and literature movement that originated in the 19th century is known as existentialism. It is focused on ideas such as freedom, individual will, the nature of being human, and the fact of dying. It resulted from the moral and cultural conundrum that World Wars I and II caused, producing an overwhelming disillusionment with the prevailing moral ideals of that time. As part of existentialism, according to this philosophy, human existence is focused on its ideology; it is more important to talk about the individual than the overall importance of existence. This movement is considered a transition from the main philosophies, which focused more on abstract ideas and the nature of objects. It criticizes traditional philosophy for neglecting the individual's significance, advocating instead focusing on the philosophy of being and transcendental thought (Rakymzhan et al., 2022, p. 104).

Existentialism can be understood within the context of boredom and its effects on eating behavior and impulsiveness. This concept is a reaction to the apparent lack of meaning in one's current situation or life in general. People experiencing boredom interpret their situation as lacking purpose and feel dissatisfied, restless, and unchallenged. Consequently, boredom acts as a self-regulatory mechanism, prompting individuals to seek more meaningful, satisfactory, or stimulating activities to address this perceived lack of meaning (Moynihan et al., 2021, p. 4). Iwuagwu (2019, p. 355) pointed out that existentialism is a philosophy where the structure of consciousness is seen as a lack, a flight towards what it is not. This concept is central to

Sartre's view of freedom. Bhutto et al. (2022) define existentialism as a philosophical perspective that explores the inherent meaninglessness of life in a society that values finding purpose and wanting to better itself in every aspect. It questions the human condition and the search for meaning in an indifferent universe.

It is worth mentioning that existentialism is associated with inner conflicts. Krasilnikov (2021) examined the correlation between existentialism and internal conflicts within existential-phenomenological ontology. The study examines how that philosophy—which emphasizes individual life, freedom, and choice—affects inner conflicts. These internal tensions frequently originate from existential preoccupations, such as the quest for significance, confronting the irrational, and grappling with the inescapability of mortality. The study analyzes these dynamics in-depth, exploring how existential challenges influence personal conflicts and personality development.

Regarding the tenets of existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre (1996, p. 345) indicates that existentialism's central tenets include the concept that "existence precedes essence." This means humans are "beings for themselves" and can transcend, possessing consciousness and deep thought. Such an idea by Sartre leads to the conclusion that there is no human nature and no predetermined purpose. As Killinger (1961, p. 304) points out, freedom is another tenet of existentialism, which is not merely the absence of external constraints but a fundamental aspect of human existence. According to existentialist thought, freedom is defined as the inherent capacity for individuals to make authentic choices and take responsibility for their actions, regardless of external circumstances or societal expectations.

### **1.1 Statement of the problem**

This research aims to analyze this short story by Franz Kafka, *A Hunger Artist*, from an existential perspective based on existentialism's deep philosophical foundation. Of course, existentialism was the major theme in literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, understanding how Kafka's tale represents the existentialist outlook, especially concerning the concepts of freedom, choice, and the search for meaning in an apparently indifferent universe, has not been found. *A Hunger Artist* is essential for analyzing existentialist ideas in Kafka's literature because he often deals with human mentality issues and struggles to find one's self and place. In this research, the researcher aims first to identify and analyze existential elements present in this novella and then compare how Kafka represents this concept, conventionally or non-conventionally existentialist philosophy.

### **1.2 Objectives of the study**

The primary objective of this research is to analyze and grasp the existential notions portrayed in Franz Kafka's *A Hunger Artist*. This involves comprehensively examining the main character's psychological landscape, including their internal conflicts, mental state, and the existential concepts of freedom, responsibility, and isolation. The study tries to illuminate the reflection and embodiment of existentialism in the narrative by attentively scrutinizing the protagonist's actions and motivations.

This study aims to utilize Jean-Paul Sartre's (1996) theory of existentialism theory, also outlined in "Existentialism is Humanism" (1996, p. 35), which centers on the notion that "existence comes before essence." Activities and choices shape the identity of human beings who lack a preordained purpose or essence rather than any inherent nature or heavenly blueprint. Sartre maintains that individuals have the burden of constructing their essence through autonomous decisions and acts, underscoring the concepts of absolute freedom and individual accountability. Sartre's theory of existentialism prioritizes individual autonomy and accountability, highlighting the notion that individuals can exercise their own choices and

behaviors, especially when confronted with difficult or constraining situations. Sartre highlights the principles of existentialism, which state that human freedom is not dependent on external circumstances but rather on an individual's perspective toward those circumstances. This viewpoint emphasizes that individuals possess the capacity to select their reactions and behaviors, especially when confronted with difficult or constraining situations.

### **1.3 Significance of the study**

This study is precious as it enhances our comprehension of existential philosophy in the context of literature. The study explores the characters' existential crises in Kafka's *A Hunger Artist*, particularly by examining the artist's battle with freedom, existence, loneliness, and inner conflicts. This analysis enhances the understanding of Kafka's literature and provides a broader outlook on human experience and the philosophical obstacles humans encounter in their quest for purpose and selfhood. This work provides a distinctive and valuable contribution to existentialism in literature, specifically by examining the psychological expressions of existential philosophy in Kafka's tale. To elucidate the deficiency in the current scholarly works and the contribution of this research to the preexisting pool of information, look into the subsequent paragraph: The current corpus of existentialism in literature, specifically Kafka's works, has thoroughly examined multiple aspects of that philosophy. Rakymzhan et al. (2022) and Moynihan et al. (2021) have offered a comprehensive outlook on existential themes, including loneliness and the existential escape hypothesis. Meanwhile, Krasilnikov (2021) and Iwuagwu (2019) have explored personal conflicts and the notion of freedom within existential philosophy. Additionally, the research by Akbar & Khan (2021), Bhutto et al. (2022), and Farjana (2022) have primarily focused on existential distress, irrationality, and the search for significance in the narratives of Kafka and Camus. Nevertheless, though enlightening, those studies have not thoroughly explored the main character's precise psychological manifestations and internal conflicts in Kafka's *A Hunger Artist*, particularly the intricate interconnection of existential themes such as freedom, responsibility, and loneliness in the protagonist's mind and behavior. The current study addresses the lack of analysis of the protagonist by examining how Kafka portrays existential topics through the character's psychological state. It goes beyond past research to explore the protagonist's interior world more deeply. It investigates how his actions, specifically his decision to fast, serve to express his existential freedom, address his feelings of loneliness, and navigate his inner conflicts. The method provides a fresh viewpoint on Kafka's work by emphasizing the intricate psychological nature of existential challenges and how they are expressed via individual actions. Thus, it enhances the broader discussion of existentialism in literature.

### **1.4 Limitations of the Study**

The study is limited to the novella of Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Hunger Artist* and Kafka. Its strengths are demonstrated in the understanding of the protagonist's existential conflict. Still, its weakness may be that it focuses on Sartre so much to the point where a lot about Sartre is mentioned in the play. Existentialist philosophers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Camus provided an alternative point of view on existentialism by introducing different interpretations of Kafka's works. From which the researcher chose "*The Hunger Artist*".

### **1.5 Methodology**

The primary method of data collection adopted by the researcher for this study is a literary analysis of Kafka's original work and a wide range of secondary sources. The extra materials include critiques, scholarly articles, and comments that provide more profound interpretations of Kafka's subjects and various styles. Moreover, the author analyzed texts to provide an in-depth critique of Kafka's narrative structure, words, and literary devices, emphasizing how such elements help determine the existential character of the story. To clarify this, the

researcher used contextual research to improve understanding of Kafka's works. This included analyzing Kafka's historical and biographical background and the socio-cultural milieu to understand existential motifs in his writings properly. The data analysis method adopted for this study was very diverse and multi-faceted; it tackles themes in *A Hunger Artist*, including locating and analyzing instances that reflect freedom, responsibility, and loneliness. The analysis not only relates to the main storyline but also delves into symbols and metaphors, the hidden depths of the text. Comparative analysis plays a crucial role in analyzing the themes where existentialism in *A Hunger Artist* is also adopted. This involves contrasting themes of Kafka's previous works with existentialist literature to establish the patterns repeated in all works and the elements that stand out as unique rather than typical.

In this study, interpretative analysis is essential. It concentrates on the symbolic, metaphorical, and distinctive devices that Kafka utilized to portray existentialistic ideas. The study also presents a scholarly discussion incorporating academic opinions and theories from the literature covering Kafka and existentialism. Not only did this method provide a broad overview, but it also helped identify commonalities and controversies in Kafka's studies. Finally, the final form used for analysis in the study was reflective, which evaluated the timeliness of the existential motif in *A Hunger Artist*. This dictated a close analysis of how Kafka's assessment of freedom, responsibility, and loneliness were interpreted in modern worlds and how those interpretations could differ from the writer's time. Finally, the qualitative descriptive approach, combined with the literature review, textual and contextual analysis, as well as comparative and interpretative methodologies, provided a holistic and multi-facet understanding of existentialism for Kafka's *A Hunger Artist*, adding insights to his literary heritage and perpetuity to existentialist ideas.

### **1.6 Summary of A Hunger Artist**

It is a story that revolves around a man who is a professional faster. He starves himself for several days in a cage with the support of a business manager, in which spectators come to watch his ability to starve himself, i.e., living without food or water for a prolonged period. To put it differently, the story is about an artist who abstains from fasting for several days and sits in a cage for people to watch him with interest. However, their interest has changed over time, and the artist has become marginalized.

In the story, Kafka's imagination frighteningly meets his reality because he was ill at the end of his life, preventing himself from eating until he died of starvation. According to Updike (1971), "Kafka's death wish death returns in *A Hunger Artist*—the saddest, I think, of Kafka's stories, written by a dying man who was becoming less sanguine (his correspondence reveals) about dying." (16).

The sections below present and analyze existentialism that incorporates a comprehensive philosophy of life and existence and its tenets presented in *A Hunger Artist*. Accordingly, in this story, the researcher seeks to investigate the depiction and psychological manifestations of existential philosophy, such as Kafka's inner conflicts, psychological status, and the tenets of existentialism, namely, loneliness, contradictory feelings, representation of reality, and symbolism.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Studies on Existentialism in Literature**

Rakymzhan et al. (2022) studied existential loneliness in Kazakh literature and its global literary context. Their research aimed to define and conceptualize existential loneliness through a cross-cultural analysis of metaphors and framing in literature. They utilized a theoretical

framework based on the conceptual metaphor theory and frame semantics. The literary work they analyzed included a range of novels and writings that address themes of existential loneliness. Their findings revealed the multifaceted nature of loneliness as depicted in literature, highlighting various linguistic metaphors and thematic elements associated with the concept. This study contributed to a deeper understanding of how existential loneliness is portrayed and perceived across different cultures.

Moynihan et al. (2021) examined how boredom, as a threat to meaning in life, influences eating behavior and impulsiveness, framing this within the existential escape hypothesis. The study incorporated both boredom and eating into the existential escape framework; it unraveled that boredom promoted eating unhealthy foods as a means of existential escape, particularly among those high in objective self-awareness. It also fostered a desire to snack rather than to eat healthily. This notion copes with the existential escape hypothesis, which suggests that 'exciting' food may serve as a potent distraction from boredom and its inherent meaninglessness. Additionally, the study discussed the lack of research on the long-term effectiveness of such escape strategies as coping mechanisms and highlighted practical applications in this field. The study comprehensively analyzed the existing existential escapism and ennui literature, providing valuable insights into future research endeavors.

Krasilnikov (2021) examined the internal struggle of an individual's character within the framework of the existential-phenomenological ontology paradigm. The study sought to examine the complexities of personal conflicts from the perspective of such philosophy. The literary piece, *Inner Conflict of Personality in the Paradigm of Existential-Phenomenological Ontology*, presented a thorough theoretical structure by merging existentialist ideas with phenomenological examination. The results demonstrated an intricate interaction between an individual's existential challenges and internal disputes. They disclosed how existential concerns, such as the search for purpose and the confrontation with life's irrationalities, greatly influence personal growth and the emergence of conflicts in one's personality.

Iwuagwu (2019) analyzed Jean-Paul Sartre's existential philosophy, emphasizing human freedom when faced with mortality. He meticulously examined Sartre's existential stance on freedom and death in *\*Being and Nothingness\**, which served as the principal literary piece. The study utilized existential philosophy, namely Sartre's conceptions of freedom, consciousness, and human existence, as its theoretical foundation. Sartre's findings demonstrated that although he emphasized the inherent and unrestricted nature of human freedom, he also recognized death as a constraint on this freedom. He also unveiled that death, as an external influence, limits human autonomy, questioning Sartre's unrestricted freedom concept.

### **2.1.2 Studies on Existentialism in A Hunger Artist**

Akbar & Khan (2021) examined Kafka's literary pieces, specifically "A Country Doctor and The Starvation Artist". The study employed a qualitative methodology that involved meticulous analysis, concentrating on the existential themes in those stories. The theoretical framework drew upon Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism by focusing on themes of agony and emptiness. The findings disclosed that Kafka's protagonists frequently grappled with existential difficulties and the irrationality of their circumstances, indicating a profound sense of distress and a quest to comprehend their existence and real nature in a seemingly purposeless universe.

Bhutto et al. (2022) examined absurdity in the Myth of Sisyphus and Franz Kafka's *A Hunger Artist*. Their research was based on Albert Camus' absurdist philosophical piece, *The Myth of*

Sisyphus. They used Camus' ideas of absurdity, alienation from society, and the endless cycle of trying to find meaning in an indifferent universe. The study examined the starving artist's existential struggles and response to his absurdity. The researchers used a qualitative approach to analyze texts through the assistance of relevant experts to interpret Kafka's absurdist themes. They found that *A Hunger Artist* explored the difficulties of seeking meaning in a meaningless world, thus echoing Camus' Absurd world depicted in the aimlessness of humans in a worthless existence.

Farjana (2022) conducted a comparative analysis between Kafka's novella *A Hunger Artist* and Camus' novel *The Plague* to examine the relationship between manufactured meaning, identity, and essence and the unavoidable absurdity depicted by both authors. She utilized the theoretical framework of the absurd and the caged self to delve into existential themes in literary works. Through her analysis, she found that both Kafka and Camus depicted the struggle of humans to solidify an entity of life within a constructed system, which eventually led to a false sense of self and an inevitable, endless struggle. She concluded that Camus' idea of embracing the meaninglessness of life was also echoed by Kafka's characters, thus highlighting the interconnectedness of existential themes in their respective works.

### 3.0 Discussion and Analysis

Existentialism is a key aspect that drives scholars and philosophers to understand the underlying motives of the unconscious and human mind. According to Flynn (2006), identity in existentialism is considered "more a matter of decision than discovery" (p.10); therefore, life is not restricted to society's norms or morally acceptable issues.

Escaping from reality does not happen in a vacuum; instead, it is considered a will-and-heart decision. The story *Hunger Artist* under discussion unravels two primary elements of existentialism, i.e., existence predates freedom and essence in unravels existentialism. To clarify, the notion that existence predates essence means that an individual's personal decisions and thoughts affect his or her reality. Existentialism entails that every person has the complete freedom to determine his or her present and future without being haunted by the past. According to Rajkhowa (2018), in Sartre's philosophy and his Existentialistic Humanism, "Man is condemned to be free. Man is born free, as he also holds that our existence is absolutely free and consists of developing our life in full freedom, which brings responsibility" (p. 875).

As the name suggests, the story attempts to unravel the aspect of existence that predates the tenets in *A Hunger Artist* by depicting the protagonist's ability to fast for forty days in a cage. Initially, the protagonist is proud of himself because he can endure hunger and thirst, but in the end, he regrets torturing himself. Possibly, the protagonist decided to remain silent and fast to find his existence.

The artist enjoys his existence because of his ability to discipline him. Contrary to popular belief, he is satisfied, for he feels that he is the center of attention, with people traveling long distances to watch him. He is not there to attract attention or to appreciate his work.

It is commonly known that an average person needs food to survive and to please himself or herself. As for the artist, he knows that he has been enlightened. Therefore, he does not only need real food to give him energy and the ability to survive but also for enlightenment. Therefore, he ignored his body's needs to please and satisfy his existence. As far as he is concerned, his being is the cornerstone of his existence rather than his physical entity.

Possibly, several reasons that drive the protagonist too fast may have existed. First, he needs to be responsible for his actions. Second, the need to find his existence., and finally, his inner

conflicts. To clarify, nobody may care about him, which might drive him too fast to attract attention by doing unusual things. Concerning the hunger artist's existentialism, he cleared his mind and sat for several hours contemplating his being or existence. However, he has been enlightened negatively. His enlightenment is attributed to absurdity.

Another existentialism tenet is freedom. The artist does not pay attention to anybody; he only seeks to find existence by contemplating life to attain his freedom. As Kafka (1948) states, "drawing deep into himself, paying no attention to anyone or anything, not even the all-important striking of the clock" (p.1). Based on the preceding quotation, the artist only cares about himself by starving himself to find his existence and freedom, which do not cope with social norms. Moreover, the quotation also shows that the artist differs from others, i.e., he does not care about time for organizing his schedule. The artist does not waste his valuable time on irrelevant activities.

### **3.1 Symbolism**

Fasting in *A Hunger Artist* can be a symbol of death. To clarify, the artist starves himself for a long time without swallowing any food, indicating dissatisfaction with his life; therefore, he seeks to end it indirectly by depriving his body of food. He justifies stating that he is neither fulfilled nor satisfied when eating. It is evident that the artist speaks symbolically because the food does not have an unpleasant taste, as he claims, nor does he hate it.

Besides, the cage in *A Hunger Artist* has different connotations. First, it connotes the artist's alienation from society. In such a manner, it embodies the division between overseers and the scene. The overseers might be suspicious about the artist's fasting. In other words, they might postulate that the artist pretends to be fasting but steals food when nobody is around. The overseers do not truly feel the artist's hunger because they are not with him in his cage. They do not share with him the pangs of suffering, as illustrated below:

People did not believe him; at best, they set him down as modest; most of them, however, thought he was out for publicity or else was some cheat who found it easy to fast because he had discovered a way of making it easy, and then dared to admit the fact, more or less.  
(Kafka, 1948, p.2)

As indicated in the preceding quotation, people presume he lied about fasting. They claim that he convinces them of being in a cage without food or water, but he has not been fasting. Possibly, their inability to believe his endurance to starve without being given any morsel of food that provides the energy he needs to sustain life makes them think he cheats.

It is worth mentioning that the cage reflects the artist's relationship with his body. To clarify, the cage represents his body, in which he feels that he is restricted, locked, and imprisoned. In other words, he thinks the only thing that impedes fasting is his body and its physical needs. Thus, the prison for him is his body, while his efforts to escape from the prison are definitely a death wish. Therefore, the hunger artist, by fasting, seeks to die because it is commonly known that the elimination of food and liquids will ultimately lead to death.

Moreover, the cage can also symbolize security and protection. To illustrate, the artist remains in the cage to protect himself from those who do not believe in him. It is possible that he regrets his decision to isolate himself from others. Still, he is completely aware that his decision stems

from his heart. Nobody forces him to do that; instead, he isolates himself to prove his existence, freedom, and protection.

With regard to the "panther," the assumed substitute for the artist at the end of the story, is entirely different from the hunger artist. This is evident in the case of the panther, who is lively and powerful, whereas the artist is lifeless and weak. The artist only aims to be recognized and achieve spiritual satisfaction. He was substituted with the panther, representing the overwhelming power beyond that of a human being. Hunger only needs two things, namely, recognition and appreciation, whereas the panther does not want anything. As indicated below:

The panther was all right. The food he liked was brought him without hesitation by the attendants; he seemed not even to miss his freedom; his noble body, furnished almost to the bursting point with all that it needed, seemed to carry freedom around with it too; somewhere in his jaws it seemed to lurk; and the joy of life streamed with such ardent passion from his throat that for the onlookers it was not easy to stand the shock of it. However, they braced themselves, crowded around the cage, and never wanted to escape. (Kafka, 1948, p.7)

From the quotation above, one can see that the panther feels more comfortable in his cage. To clarify, the overseers brought him food willingly. His freedom is manifested in his strength and his noble body. It is embodied somewhere in his jaw. Moreover, he sounds active and lively; his ardent passion has left a deep impression on them. They are crowded around the cage and do not want to waste time. It can be deduced that the panther and the artist are locked in cages doing the same things, but the panther is more appreciated and noticed by onlookers than the artist. Generally speaking, the panther represents the grace and power that constitute the reason that drives people to crowd around his cage. He attracts people's attention and recognition, unlike the hunger artist.

As for the clock, it stands for the biological clock of the artist and calls attention to the limitations of his body. It signifies the immortality and nobility of his art. The artist has been immersed in his mistaken belief that his abilities and powers of starvation will never end. The clock reveals illusions of the artist because the clock reminds him of the physical needs, like the passage of time, that are needed for all human beings, as illustrated below:

Paying no attention to anyone or anything, not even to the all-important striking of the clock that was the only piece of furniture in his cage, but merely staring into vacancy with half-shut eyes, now and then taking a sip from a tiny glass of water to moisten his lips. (Kafka, 1948, p. 1)

As illustrated above, the narrator indicates that the artist did not pay attention to anything, including the clock he placed in the cage. Nevertheless, he is only concerned with taking a sip of water to moisturize himself. The clock reminds him that both time and food are required. The clock mocks the efforts of the hungry artist to become immortal.



It is worth mentioning that the freedom that the artist practices is not manifested in violating social constraints but rather entails the artist's ability to create his own value by guiding and inspiring others to do certain things that nobody can do for them. Freedom for the artist is considered an inner concept that gives him enough room and liberty to think and live as he wants and deems appropriate.

### **3.2 Society**

Various views are expressed regarding the artist's ability to starve himself. To illustrate, the hunger artist astonished people at the beginning, as indicated below:

There were people who bought season tickets for the last few days and sat from morning till night in front of his small barred cage; even in the nighttime, there were visiting hours when the whole effect was heightened by torch flares; on fine days, the cage was set out in the open air, and then it was the children's special treat to see the hunger artist; for their elders, he was often just a joke that happened to be in fashion, but the children stood openmouthed, holding each other's hands for greater security, marveling at him as he sat there pallid in black tights. (Kafka, 1948, p.1)

Based on the quotation mentioned above, it is clear that people used to spend a considerable amount of time watching the artist's ability to starve himself. His actions are considered by the elderly to be a joke, but for children, they are treated, particularly when the cage is placed in the open air.

People's reactions to his fasting were astonished by his ability to starve himself without complaining or collapsing. To illustrate, they used to gather and stare at him because his bizarre actions and powerful determination entertained them. However, the people started to feel bored because they got accustomed to the idea of starvation to the extent that nobody cared about his death; this might be because the form of art that attracted them at the beginning did not attract them any more of being unable to understand such art. However, his efforts to draw people's attention were unsuccessful because they were uninterested in his accomplishments.

Other people are no longer interested in looking at the hunger artist, who locks himself in a cage without swallowing any morsel of food. They considered it embarrassing, and he was not worth living for. Nobody was able to believe the reasons that drove him to do so.

### **3.3 Representation of Reality**

After a thorough reading of the story, it has been observed that the tenets of existentialism represent reality. As indicated earlier, the artist decides to fast and spend his life in a cage to become spiritually enlightened and to find his existence. In reality, several people decide to live their lives alone and undertake unusual matters to gain satisfaction.

In addition, the story depicts how the artist's work becomes dull and unnoticed when the overseers get used to it. The artist fasts daily to attract people's attention without swallowing a morsel of food or water. However, he succeeded in that for a short period, after which they got bored. Naturally, some try to attract people's attention by doing unusual things, but all of them will be in vain whenever they are unnoticed or appreciated.

The study tackles a significant tenet of existentialism: loneliness. To put it differently, the artist spends his days and nights alone, neither speaking nor eating. He is all alone without anyone

to entertain him. For him, living in a cage and fasting are the only things that ease the pain of loneliness. To avert that, he decides to spend his life away from people, as he has no friends or company, hoping to attain consolation.

### **3.4 Responsibility and Human Power**

The ability of the hunger artist to endure starvation and thirst reflects persistence to be himself. He was able to separate his mind from his body. Even though the majority of people were no longer interested in looking at him while experiencing torture in the cage, his last words did not unravel remorse but rather a strong will and adherence to his beliefs. He wanted to be remembered. Undoubtedly, the artist suffers from hunger and thirst but pretends to be rigorous and steadfast. Therefore, he pretends to be strong and rigid by insisting on fasting to find his existence and power, as illustrated below:

No one could watch the hunger artist continuously, day and night, so no one could produce first-hand evidence that the fast had been rigorous and continuous; only the artist himself could know that he was bound to be the sole delighted spectator of his fast. (Kafka, 1948, p.2).

The quoted lines reveal that the artist suffers from hunger and thirst, which is not reflected in his feelings. Moreover, that shows he is the only spectator satisfied with his fast, but other people neither notice nor appreciate his prowess in fasting for a long time.

Melchionne (2007) argues that “Kafka’s Hunger Artist remains distant from his audience. He is neither buoyed by their adoration nor deflated by their vulgarity. Instead, the hunger artist seems entirely sustained by his practice. In his self-possession, we glimpse a familiar ideal of the authentic artist devoted to his practice for the sake of its intrinsic rewards. Indeed, doubts about the authenticity of his performance only fuel the hungry artist’s determination. The earnestness of the referees pleases the hunger artist, though we are assured that their presence hardly matters. As in any authentic art, the by-standing critics are hardly necessary to ensure the integrity of the performance.” (143)

According to the researcher’s point of view, Kafka's hunger in life was a desire to understand himself and the world around him. So, he seems satisfied when he expresses his feelings and explains what is happening around him in writing. Therefore, his power manifests his challenge to himself in fasting; he is sure that he could break the record, so he insists on fasting. Fasting thus reveals that the artist has been suffering from a manifested will to maintain fasting against the natural human will of the need to feed himself.

Why stop fasting at this particular moment, after forty days of fasting? He had held out for a long time, an illimitably long time; why stop now when he was in his best fasting form, or rather, not yet quite in his best fasting form? Why should he be cheated of the fame he would get for fasting longer, for being not only the record hunger artist of all time, which presumably he was already, but for beating his record by a performance beyond human imagination, since he felt that there were no limits to his capacity for fasting? His public pretended to admire him so much, so why

should it have so little patience with him? If he could endure fasting longer, why shouldn't the public endure it? (Kafka, 1948, p. 3)

The excerpt reveals that Kafka has a strong desire to fast for a long time; he does not want to fast only for forty days but wants to break records to become famous and prove to people that he can do it without getting tired. On the other hand, considering what was mentioned about his power and survival revealed that his health conditions were disastrous, reflected in using phrases such as 'suffering martyr,' 'the emaciated waist,' 'his legs and body tottered and swayed' (Kafka, 1948, p. 3). This shows how weak he is and how harsh his fasting is. In other words, 'while he sat in a kind of half-fainting trance.' (Kafka, 1948, 3) As a result, we can see that he is fatigued as he cannot move properly.

### **3.5 Inner Conflict and ambivalent feelings**

A careful reading of the story reveals that the artist's act of fasting represents contradictory emotions. Generally speaking, the protagonist fasts to find his existence and freedom. On the other hand, it restricts his freedom when he locks himself in the cage. In other words, fasting might be a reflection of both his freedom and his imprisonment. This is the ambivalence of feeling.

Another contradictory feeling is implied in the claim that he experienced fasting was not the artist made that he did the artist to find his existence. As a matter of fact, he fasts to be noticed and appreciated "Because I could not find the food I liked." If I had found it, I should have made no fuss and stuffed myself like you or anyone else." (Kafka, 2009, p. 6). As indicated above, the artist gives up food to attract people's attention and be appreciated by others. To sum up, the contradictory feelings manifest in the claim that the artist wants to find his existence by fasting and the confession he seeks for public admiration.

One might better understand the existential concerns depicted in Kafka's writing by relating observations made in *A Hunger Artist* to Jean-Paul Sartre's idea of existentialism. Sartre's existentialist philosophy, namely the notion that "existence precedes essence," as expounded in *Existentialism is Humanism* (1996, p. 345), provides a relevant theoretical framework for examining the protagonist's journey in the narrative. Thus, the protagonist in Kafka's *A Hunger Artist* personifies Sartre's existentialist idea that people are defined by their actions and choices rather than by any innate essence or divine blueprint. The *Hunger Artist's* decision to abstain from food and to lock himself in a cage is a distinct declaration of his existence. He does not conform to a preexisting essence or purpose; instead, he actively molds his identity and reality through fasting. This is consistent with Sartre's claim that individuals are responsible for constructing their essence through their autonomous decisions and acts.

The *Hunger Artist's* decisive struggle reflects Sartre's emphasis on radical freedom and human responsibility. Notwithstanding the body's and society's limitations, the *Hunger Artist* demonstrates his profound autonomy by abstaining from eating. Such a choice results in isolation and distress, but it is evidence of his independence and the will to shape his own life. His acts, particularly against the backdrop of his apathetic world, emphasize Sartre's notion that personal liberty and accountability are paramount in determining one's fundamental nature.

Moreover, Sartre's perspective that human autonomy does not depend on external circumstances but on one's disposition towards those circumstances aligns with the *Hunger Artist's* encounter. Despite his physical confinement in a cage and the societal misunderstanding he faces, the artist preserves his existential freedom by maintaining a steadfast mindset and persistence in fasting. His fortitude amid hardships echoes Sartre's

concept that humans can select their reactions and behaviors, irrespective of difficult circumstances.

Ultimately, when analyzed from the perspective of Sartre's existentialism, Kafka's *A Hunger Artist* presents a deep examination of existential concepts such as liberty, accountability, and the formation of essence through one's actions. The protagonist's trip symbolizes the existential battle to establish his existence in a sometimes apathetic and restrictive world. This narrative aligns with Sartre's beliefs and offers a distinct perspective on the existential discussion by portraying these ideas via the psychological and existential odyssey of the Hunger Artist.

#### **4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations**

The researcher's approach to analyzing Kafka's *A Hunger Artist* with regard to the theme is similar to those conducted by Rakymzhan et al. (2022), Moynihan et al. (2021), Krasilnikov (2021), Iwuagwu (2019), and Akbar & Khan (2021). The approaches are distinct for exploring the existential aspects of Kafka's writing, each contributing unique insights into our understanding.

To summarize, *A Hunger Artist* explores the psychological aspects of human existence, delving into issues such as freedom, responsibility, loneliness, and the search for meaning in a frequently apathetic world. The protagonist's inner struggles and psychological conditions offer a profound analysis of the human experience, mirroring the existential principles that shape our quest for meaning and selfhood in a convoluted and unfathomable universe. This analysis aligns with the findings of the previously mentioned studies and introduces a fresh perspective by examining the individual psychological expression of these existential themes in Kafka's narrative.

#### **4.1 Conclusion**

The study highlighted the significance of employing an interdisciplinary methodology for literary analysis, illustrating how existential philosophy can enhance comprehension of literary texts. It also enhanced our understanding of the influence of existentialism on literature by emphasizing the existential themes presented in Kafka's *A Hunger Artist*. The analysis of such themes reinforces the notion that literature is a powerful representation of the human experience, for it helps understand the intricacies of the human mind, existential challenges, and the quest for significance. It implies that literary studies can gain advantages by analyzing how literary works explore and express existential problems. The study also has ramifications for education, specifically in instructing literature and philosophy; it can be utilized as a valuable tool for educators aiming to familiarize students with existential concepts in literature.

#### **4.2 Recommendations**

The researcher would like to recommend the following:

- To conduct further studies on works of other existentialists such as Nietzsche, Camus, and Simon de Beauvoir to understand existentialism better.
- Conduct further studies on stories similar to Kafka's "*A Hunger Artist*" to compare and contrast.
- To elaborate on how existentialism impacts cultural and social perceptions of the society that pertain to freedom and existence.

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