

Female Existentialism in *Monkey Grip* by Helen Garner

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Abstract—This study aimed to analyze female existentialism in Helen Garner's "Monkey Grip" using a descriptive qualitative method. In this context, the data obtained were carefully reviewed, presented, and analyzed through stylistic analysis. The results showed that female existentialism was expressed in two patterns. Firstly, the female speech was similar to the male, accompanied by the open expression of sexual desires and male circle words. Secondly, female actions contained the feminine movement to overcome discrimination problems and interact with many males. The results showed that the female character was considered a feminist representative against male stereotypes.

Index Terms—man, woman, existentialism, sentence, stylistics

I. INTRODUCTION

The social phenomena of language are connected to many facets of human life due to its relation to several symbols, opinions, and other relevant properties (Jourdan & Tuite, 2006, p. 17). The existence of characters is closely related to the cultural aspects of social life (Hasyim et al., 2023; Takwa et al., 2024, p. 763). According to Arafah and Hasyim (2019, p. 571), a language system and linguistic functions were investigated, with the primary focus being on the interaction of conversations (speech actions) between the sender (speaker) and receiver (interlocutor) in the context of emoji pragmatics. This explorative analysis included how people read, interpret, and react to a linguistic or text (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023a, p. 20). Since language is connected to many facets of human life, communication, interpretation, and thinking usage can increase effectively (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023b, p. 3944; Arafah et al., 2023, p. 113). Furthermore, communication using spoken and unspoken language has changed in line with the existence of digital media (Hasyim & Arafah, 2023a, p. 96). This shows that internet users can exchange messages easily through chats as a communication medium (Hasyim & Arafah, 2023b, p. 220; Yudith et al., 2024, p. 826).

Gender discrimination or sexist language is also observed when society implements dialect to pressure females, a phenomenon not equally applied to males. Since language is considered a carrier of ideas, it is essential in overcoming ineffective communication. This proves that the solution to inefficient interactions emphasizes the mutual understanding of speakers and listeners by adhering to agreed logical rules (Yulianti et al., 2022, p. 189). Language must also comply with grammatical standards and context to prevent misunderstandings and misinterpretations (Anggrawan et al., 2019, p. 1; Kuswanti et al., 2023, p. 1474). In this context, culture is significant in ensuring a shared understanding of the spoken language tradition between the speaker and the listener (Arafah et al., 2023, p. 168;

Kaharuddin et al., 2021, p. 79).

Based on Robin Lakoff in Cuellar (2006, p. 1), a hypothesis was explored, with females traditionally dominated in the environment due to linguistic rules. These rules included the expectations that daughters do not ask (should obtain things) and are forbidden to be rough (should speak politely). In this case, the existence of females emphasized the awareness of the societal position. Sartre (2007, p. 4) also formulated awareness into two types, namely *lecture-en-soi* (being in itself) and *l'etre-pour-soi* (being for itself). From this context, *letra-en-soi* prioritized inanimate nouns, such as animals and trees, which should not express activeness, negativity, or resistance against the primary societal roles.

Meanwhile, the concept of *l'etre-pour-soi* focused on the self-development of human lives. For example, the existence of an individual was purposeful when considered a tree among other plantations, indicating the absence of issues due to being smoothly integrated into the world. Regarding the expression of a self-aware human being, the individual is situated in this world despite the present state (Sartre, 2007, p. 77). Simone de Beauvoir (1989, p. 1), in *Second Sex*, also argued that female existentialism focused on the relevant actions of females, emphasizing the following question, "What is a female?". This proved that the interactions between males and females showed existentialism activities by implementing stylistics. Many issues, including domination, sex, liberty, inequality, independence, slavery, female rights, and male wishes, were connected to females (Afiah et al., 2022, p. 214).

Contextual stylistics analysis subsequently identified more than a text, focusing on the similarity with several aspects of human life, such as gender. This was in line with Bradford in Nurgiyantoro (2017, p. 83), where cultural perspective and ideology were essential in stylistics. Feminists also proved that text (language) characters exhibited a sociocultural hierarchy dominated by males capable of controlling style and meaning (Nurgiyantoro, 2017, p. 82). Furthermore, stylistics analyzes literary works, where sentences commonly portray reality. In this context, the implemented type often interested readers (Asriyanti et al., 2022, p. 790; Ismail et al., 2020, p. 293). This style commonly prioritizes using signs and symbols or figurative language, such as metaphor (Baa et al., 2023, p. 132; Kaharuddin et al., 2022, p. 50). The implementation of characters subsequently focuses on representing various meanings perceived by interpreters (Hasjim et al., 2020, p. 2271; Iksora et al., 2022, p. 2461). This explains that the reference to specific symbols is embedded in the mental connection of the interpreter to the object, event, or fact indicated by a sign (Takwa et al., 2022, p. 983). Signs and symbols in semiotics also serve as the distinctive branding or identity of specific sociocultural environments (Hasyim et al., 2020, p. 4). Moreover, the connotation is a social or symbolic meaning constructed by the public (Arafah et al., 2020). In this case, literature portrays language as a significant component of an artwork using aesthetic elements (Manugeran et al., 2023, p. 1321).

Letters, languages, and actions are also explained by literature (Fadillah et al., 2022, p. 66), which focuses on writing about new and old cases within a literary composition (Yudith et al., 2023, p. 108). According to Pradopo in Mursalim (2019, p. 271), literary writings were commonly performed by writers closely related to society and culture. This was due to the expression of culture through language as a part of human life records (Arifin et al., 2022, p. 2696). The cultural values in every literary work were also a guideline for an excellent attitude to the readers (Takwa et al., 2022, p. 1602). Moreover, literature can connect with various elements, enabling the incomprehensibility of the real meaning. This was in line with Connors (2010, p. 57), where literature often shared its secret quickly. Literary works are also connected to the social conditions in human life (Suhadi et al., 2020, p. 1216), possessing a societal purpose where life is portrayed within public reality (Arafah et al., 2023, p. 1414). These works commonly express the actual and non-actual reality of human life in fiction (Mutmainnah et al., 2022, p. 350; Sunyoto et al., 2022, p. 2551), playing an essential role in showing the cultural values of society influencing other people during reading activities (Mokoginta & Arafah, 2022, p. 691). Furthermore, anthropological linguistics believes a sentence or discourse will have meaning and precise information with the presence of its condition (Arafah et al., 2020, p. 1594). This was similar to Arafah and Kaharuddin (2019, p. 504), where the connections between sentences and society were expressed, analyzing the patterns by which norms and habits increased cultural interaction. In this case, literature was considered a source of cultural norms describing reality (Sunardi et al., 2018, p. 318).

Monkey Grip is subsequently considered a novel prioritizing the status of women in the family, with the main character experiencing discrimination. This was explained by Pierce (2009), whereas Helen Garner's (1977) *Monkey Grip* was commonly considered a symbol of the feminist movement. The novel was also sold to construct a female life and was eagerly read by many people, advocating for the positions of identificatory people (Webby, 2000, p. 199). In this context, Garner *Monkey Grip* literature had several positive factors for the reader's knowledge as an ordinary mirror of human life (Arafah et al., 2021, p. 936). This was due to forcing the writer to be more imaginative in developing novels connected to real problems within the community (Siwi et al., 2022, p. 1279; Kaharuddin, 2022, p. 274) while describing female interaction (Asri et al., 2023, p. 1656). Therefore, this study aims to examine female existentialism using stylistic analysis, specifically in Australian literature. Language (or a style) is also implemented to describe females because feminism and dialect, as communication tools, are both societal issues.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Existentialism

According to Sartre (2007, p. 40), the statement of Descartes about human existentialism was protested, leading to the following remade idea, "*I exist and I am thinking*". This explained that the existence of humans was considered due to the

ability to "think", showing that people only lived when thinking was implemented. Despite the explanation, existence was impossible when humans were considered non-believers (Yunus, 2011, p. 268; Usman et al., 2024, p. 889). This concept of "thinking" only focused on the function of humans, whose existence ceased when the ability to think was absent. It also narrowed various relevant definitions, leading to the following questions: (1) What is thinking? and (2) What should thinking be? In addition, the concept was designed by societal perceptions, prioritizing a sign that humanity was not accessible.

Existence also allowed humans to be authentic, regarding the exploitation of individual perception. From this context, the impact of humans, concerning essence, focused on the correlation with societal norms. Based on Sartre (2007, p. 481), the necessity for appropriate consciousness was evaluated, prioritizing the independent positions of people. In the book *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre stated, "*I exist in my body: this is the first dimension of being*" (1956, p. 351). This showed that every individual should exist or be first before the consideration and understanding of authenticity.

Discrimination was subsequently considered the primary challenge of freedom and humanism. Amartya Sen explained this in the book entitled *Inequality Reexamined*, where the following concepts of freedom were mentioned: (1) the extent of attainment and (2) the capacity to reach (Sen, 1992, p. 31). From this context, the people with no adequate capabilities needed more space, accompanied by considering opportunities enabling people to determine their lives without any external intervention (Sen, 2002, p. 10). Therefore, people without adequate capabilities or knowledge were not accessible due to their inability to make good decisions. In this case, consciousness was similar to capability in Sen concept, as described by Sartre. This showed that both ideas focused on the foundation of humans, as freedom was commonly achieved with the existence of freedom.

B. Feminism

The cooperation of females and males was expected to maintain society without gender dominance. This suggestion was considered due to the typical domination of females by males.

According to Mill in Arivia (2003, p. 54), justice was often absent when one community or gender dominated another. From this context, people were expected to advocate for equality between males and females during the demand for liberty. Purwaningsih et al. (2020, p. 1) also stated that each perspective related to the psychology of relation between males and females was influenced mainly by ego and social interaction. In this case, women and men should learn to work together, specifically in a big or small community. Furthermore, Taylor argued that sameness was significant for evaluating the female position (Rowbotham, 1992, p. 68). This emphasized the importance of identifying the different rights of both genders, which should not be wrongfully equated.

Women were commonly framed as flawed characters in several literary activities, with only a few participating in literary events. For example, Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672) was the only female author who wrote about the feelings of females in poetry during the early days of American literature. However, the female community could not be represented because the published poems focused on loving the husband (Miller et al., 1979, p. 119). Jane Austen (1775-1817) was a famous female writer whose literary works connected reality and love.

C. Stylistics

Language was highly considered a communication tool and social function, although Lecercle argued that no individual understood or cared about stylistics (1993, p. 14). This was because only several students were initially interested in implementing styles, with the situation changing periodically. The shift of needs in learning stylistics also academically increased due to the era development and the existence of easily acquired compatible materials (Arafah et al., 2023, p. 17). The absence of a positive learning attitude causes students to lose motivation in learning and developing skills (Kaharuddin et al., 2023, p. 436). Furthermore, only a few university students strongly desired to pursue the analysis of stylistics (Simpson, 2004, p. 2). It can be caused by the fact that academic students are required to write intellectual essays where language style is unnecessary (Mardiana et al., 2023; Kaharuddin et al., 2024, p. 270). This led to the writing constraints of students needing more relevant strategies (Arnawa & Arafah, 2023, p. 690; Arafah et al., 2024, p. 249). The statement of Lecercle was also wrong at the beginning of the twentieth century, as various higher institutions taught and analyzed stylistics in language or literature studies (Simpson, 2004, p. 2; Halil et al., 2024, p. 963). Besides emphasizing diction or language style, stylistics could also exhibit social problems. This was in line with the evaluation of a statistician, where sentences or phrases were identified as essential items of the text function from several parts, systems, and linguistic features. In this context, the text was portrayed as a step implemented for appropriate interpretation (Simpson, 2004, p. 2). Various linguists also argued that stylistics only analyzed the structure of literary works without considering relations with other aspects.

III. STUDY METHODOLOGY

A descriptive qualitative method was experimentally implemented to deeply identify an object (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019). In this analysis, the 245-page *Monkey Grip* novel written by Helen Garner and published by McPhee Gribble in 1977 was analyzed. Based on the data collection process, the information related to feminism and existentialism issues was recorded from the selected databases. Stylistics analysis was subsequently conducted on the obtained data, accompanied by a library survey, where several books, journals, and articles were consulted to acquire supplementary

information (Abidin & Kaharuddin, 2021, p. 7).

A primary data source was also implemented to acquire information, with the Monkey Grip novel repeatedly read and analyzed. The aspect of female freedom was highly assessed from a stylistic perspective during the reading process. In the acquisition of data, the following procedures were conducted:

1. Reading the Monkey Grip novel many times to understand the issues of females.
2. Presenting the data through the stylistics analysis.
3. Analyzing the data obtained, existentialism and feminism were used to determine the movement of females toward the achievement of existence in the novel.
4. Implementing the stylistics analysis to define female existentialism, emphasizing the patterns by which females were asserted during male discrimination. The description method of female existentialism problems was also determined through stylistics, a linguistic style.

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

1. *I had not fucked for a long time* (Garner, 1977, p. 57).

Good female was commonly framed to speak politely and avoided talking about sex freely. However, Nora broke the rule of females by openly speaking on sexual matters without restrictions. This showed that females were limited to speaking freely, compared to males with unlimited freedom.

2. *I'm really pissed off with you. I don't like the way you burst in here tonight'* (Garner, 1977, p. 83).

Nora, the female character, bravely spoke to Javo about the grievances experienced, which were not boldly expressed initially due to the fear of losing the man. Despite the woman's high-level love for Javo, several ignorance and violations were always encountered.

3. *I love you a real lot, but I cannot live with you when you are like this* (Garner, 1977, p. 87).

Nora was in a dilemma because she needed to leave the man she loved, Javo. This showed that the woman encountered many bad situations by following her feelings. In this case, leaving was the right way to show that she loved herself more than the man.

4. *Well, fuck him* (Garner, 1977, p. 90).

Nora describes her power in action and sentence by speaking, such as male and deciding to leave Javo.

5. *I miss you, and I miss fucking with you* (Garner, 1977, p. 118).

Nora did not obey the rule of male to be polite, as her demand to *fuck* was openly and freely stated. Although the situation was unusual for many people, the women's demands were still not met.

6. *That is OK. I have enough for both of us'* (Garner, 1977, p. 232).

Nora showed bravery in stopping her relationship with her toxic boyfriend, Javo. Despite the initial weakness restraining her freedom to decide, the woman still summoned the courage to speak openly after acquiring much discrimination.

7. *Enough of you, Javo, and your death. I've had enough. Now, if only I can live that out. Enough. I will gather my strength* (Garner, 1977, p. 135).

Nora stopped caring about the death of Javo, due to being sure of living without him by acquiring her strength. In this case, the woman became sufficiently free to leave the man.

8. *Whenever he touched cunt, the clitoris seemed to be in the exact spot where he first came in contact with my flesh* (Garner, 1977, p. 210).

Nora described her feelings when she made love with Javo. Although women were not allowed to talk about sexual activities freely, Nora still openly deliberated on her experience. This showed that the woman was not limited to expressing her desire for sex.

9. *It was the first time I had felt cheerful in days. I sang to myself* (Garner, 1977, p. 224).

After leaving Javo, Nora felt free and enjoyed her days beautifully. However, the feelings did not provide a better life because the man only obtained her money, room, and body without any special friend treatment.

10. *However, I just want to make it clear that it's cool if you don't. I wouldn't freak out if you did not'* (Garner, 1977, p. 233).

This conversation showed that Nora did not depend on Javo anymore, as a free woman was expected to avoid the discrimination of a man bravely.

B. Discussions

(a). Female Sentence

Based on the novel, Nora used masculine language when expressing the demand for touching (sex). This language was observed through the following expressions, (1) *I had not fucked for a long time* (Garner, 1977, p. 57), (2) *I miss you, and I miss fucking with you* (Garner, 1977, p. 118), and (3) *Whenever he touched cunt, clitoris seemed to be in the exact spot where he first came in contact with my flesh* (Garner, 1977, p. 210). From this context, the opinions of Nora on sexual activity were freely and openly expressed without restrictions. People also believed that females should speak

politely without sharing the same speaking freedom as males. This belief emphasized the restrictions on females openly speaking about *sexual activities*.

Furthermore, Nora expressed the lack of sexual activity by saying, "*I haven't fucked for weeks.*" In this context, the woman went against the popular belief that female was prohibited from expressing erotic feelings. This was because society believed that male was only allowed to discuss sexual events, compared to females freely. Nora also described the events boldly, accompanied by the continuous admission of several "*fucking*" moments with a friend known as Clive. However, the woman missed Javo in terms of lovemaking by providing the following statement, "*I miss you, and I miss fucking with you*". This opinion was honestly and boldly stated, admitting to craving sexual activities with Javo.

Nora subsequently explained the feelings when touched by a man through the following expression, "*Whenever he touched cunt, the clitoris seemed to be in the exact spot where he first came in contact with my flesh*" (Garner, 1977, p. 210). This opinion was honestly expressed in a society that limited the speaking ability of females. Since the sentence did not belong to the woman, a female character was often framed to ignore sharing the speech capabilities of a man. Therefore, a feminine character (Nora) shows a masculine speaking capability in the *Monkey Grip* novel, using the words, vagina and clitoris to express sexual feelings. This showed that females are likely to openly and freely express emotions similarly to males.

(b). Female Actions

According to the *Monkey Grip* novel, strength and determination were shown by Nora to live without male control. These characteristics were expressed through several steps, such as the desire to leave Javo and fight against gender discrimination. In this novel, Nora, a single mother with one daughter, lives in a house and works for a better life, as the absence of a husband ensures the daily struggle for money. The woman could also survive without a man because her previous love life with a male was experienced without the support and adequate affection. From this context, Nora expressed a vital opinion by being authentic and leaving Javo, maintaining an excellent reputation toward life and circle benefits. Despite being a powerful and independent female, emulating the existence of the masculine gender was still impossible. This was because gender equality did not require women imitating men, as both genders had equal access to a happy life without discrimination. In this case, Nora felt free and happy without loving or having feelings for anyone due to his ability to resist masculine discrimination as a strong woman.

The novel also shows that Nora enjoyed her time alone by *dancing* and *crying (happiness)* at home. Subsequently, the woman was described as not caring anymore, even after the demise of Javo, through the following statement, "*Enough of you, Javo, and your death. I've had enough*" (Garner, 1977, p. 135). "*I will gather my strength*" also showed that Nora fought against the self-weakness portrayed, focusing on the high level of love for Javo and accepting all the attached stereotypes. In addition, the woman expressed freedom and exhibited masculine speaking abilities without male dependence by saying, "*Well, fuck him.*" These characteristics allowed Nora to overcome the self-weaknesses exhibited due to the freedom from Javo's grip and discrimination.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Nora did not show several limitations when speaking similarly to men in the *Monkey Grip* novel. This was due to the woman's usage of the words implemented by the masculine gender regarding the open and free expression of sexual desires. The novel also showed that Nora was not limited to interacting with other males after leaving Javo. In this case, female language style was observed in both action and sentence during masculine existentialism. This feminine action consists of Nora's movement to overcome the problems encountered by Javo's discrimination.

Meanwhile, the sentence aspect showed the patterns by which the woman used male language style to express personal ideas. The representation of the female character in a feminist movement was also described in two methods: (1) speaking without limitations and (2) standing with no dependence on male existence. In this novel, Nora serves as a feminist representative who challenges male dominance. This result was observed through the implementation of stylistics analysis to identify the specific elements capable of showing the character's speech and actions.

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