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**Searching For Self-Identity in the Movie *All Quiet on The Western Front* (2022)**Muhammad Abdul Jabbar Febriyan<sup>1</sup>, Abu Fanani<sup>2</sup>

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This study aims to analyze the search for identity of the main character, Paul Bäumer, in the movie *All Quiet on the Western Front* (2022). The purpose of this study is to explain how Paul's life journey illustrates Jean Paul Sartre's concept of existentialism, particularly the concept of personal freedom. The data for this study was obtained from scenes in the movie that show changes in Paul's emotions and personality. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method using Sartre's existentialism theory to analyze the development of Paul Bäumer's identity throughout the story. The results of the analysis found that Paul's identity began to change from an innocent young man who followed others to an individual who began to understand the meaning of freedom and responsibility. This discussion confirms that Paul's journey illustrates Sartre's theory of existentialism, which states that human identity is not fixed but is shaped through actions and choices. In conclusion, this study illustrates that the movie successfully shows the existential steps humans take in searching for meaning in a harsh world, and it is hoped that it will inspire further research with different characters or perspectives.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Ross (2005) explain that Selfidentity refers to a person's selfconception, self referent cognitions, or selfdefinition that folks apply to themselves as a consequence of the structural role positions he or she occupies or a specific behaviour he or she engages in regularly. In a simple way, self identity referese to personal understanding that reflect to our self definition. Also, Horowitz (n.d.) inform that Identity exists in past, present, and future time frames. The concept of self identity itself is an important aspect to analyze in literature and movie because characters mostly face struggles in defining who they really are, especially when external pressures and personal desires conflict.

The movie *All Quiet on the Western Front* (2022) depicts the journey of Paul Bäumer, a young Germany soldier who enters World War I with a sense of duty and loyalty to his country. Like many of his partners, Paul is influenced by patriotic propaganda that glorifies war as an honorable service to the nation. However, when he goes to the battlefield, Paul realize the true condition of him that being loyal to the government and always obeying orders make him lose his own identity. As a soldier, he has to follow every single command from his batalion captain, even when it brings pain and sadness. This fight between his duty and his own feelings becomes the main part of his identity struggle in the movie.

This study focus on the main character, Paul Bäumer, in the movie *All Quiet on the Western Front* (2022). The analysis explores Paul's struggle in searching for his selfidentity as he faces the realities of war, using Jean Paul Sartre's existentialist theory as the main framework. The discussion in this research focuses on how the ideas of existentialism, especially about freedom, despair, and living an authentic life, appear in Paul's identity struggle throughout the movie. This study does not discuss other elements, such as the war's historical background or the movies.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The researcher found six prior studies based on the theory the researcher chose for the novel. The first is a journal article titled "Identity and Meaning: Contrasts of

Existentialist and Essentialist Perspectives" by Waterman (2014). The article says that to live your best life, you need to know yourself, grow your strengths, set meaningful goals, and live them out. The second data is "The Existentialist Dilemma: Analyzing Nihilism, Anxiety, and Self-Identity in French Philosophy at the End of the 20th Century" by Cropper & Browne (2024). The journal explores how French existentialist philosophers address nihilism, anxiety, and self-identity, showing how these themes shape the human search for meaning and authentic living.

The third data is "Existentialism: A Brief Introduction" by Flynn (2009). The journal is an early information about existentialism as a philosophy about human freedom, responsibility, meaning, as well as explaining how people define themselves through choices in an uncertain and absurd world.

The fourth data is "What is existentialism?" by Bauer (2014). It explains that existentialism is a philosophy that focuses on human existence, freedom, and the search for meaning in life. It discusses key thinkers such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus, who all emphasize that humans must create their own identity and purpose through choices and actions.

The fifth data is "Existentialism A revolt against traditional metaphysics" by Dr. V.K.Maheshwari (n.d.). The article explains about existentialism is a new way of thinking that is about how each person lives, their freedom, and their job to make life have meaning. Instead, it explains that "living comes before being," which means people aren't born with a fixed plan for life. So they can choose what they want to be.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The researcher uses a descriptive qualitative methodology. This approach is particularly suitable for the ways in which existential issues like identity, which makes this method especially appropriate for examining the movie *All Quiet on the Western Front* (2022). Descriptive qualitative methodology is another name for this research design Kim et al. (2017). The all data was taken from the internet sources, which is intended to help explain the data to be analyzed. Kim et al. (2017) emphasize that qualitative analysis is the analysis of qualitative data such as text data from interview transcripts. By using the qualitative analysis method, the researcher listed the movie transcripts as the required for analyze the data.

Researcher did the research by using data from the transcript in the movie. Each part of the transcript that appeared in the story was used as a data source for analysis.

So, the researcher listed the parts of the timeline that were the setting for the events in the movie as the main reference in the analysis process. This approach helps researcher understand the relationship between the timeline and the events.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the movie "All Quiet on the Western Front" (2022), Paul Bäumer's search for identity is clearly visible through the various emotional experiences and inner conflicts he experiences during the war. Each incident he encounters shows how he gradually realizes who he truly is, what freedom means, and how he must take responsibility for his choices. To understand this process, the author identifies several key scenes in the movie that depict existentialist values such as freedom, despair, authenticity, and the search for meaning in life. These scenes demonstrate Paul's transformation from a naive young man to an individual beginning to understand the meaning of his existence in a harsh and uncertain world.

The following table shows several key moments that illustrate the development of Paul Bäumer's identity and existential awareness in the movie "All Quiet on the Western Front" (2022).

No	Time	Important scene and dialogue	Existentialism Concept	Interpretation
1	00:09:44	Paul signed the military enlistment papers with his friends. Afterward, he said softly, "A dead man walking."	<b>Awareness and Despair</b>	This scene shows that Paul is fully aware of the significant risks of his choice. He is not entirely sure about it, but he still does it due to social pressure. This scene signals the beginning of his existential awakening, where he begins to feel fear and anxiety about the path he is taking.
2	00:20:49	When there was a bomb attack, Paul tried to calm Ludwig who was panicking by jokingly telling him to stay calm.	<b>Anxiety</b>	Behind his jokes, Paul was actually scared too. He began to understand that war was not what he had imagined. This moment illustrated the realization that life is full of uncertainty and that humans must face that anxiety with courage.
3	01:27:23	Paul is in the crater with the dying French soldiers. He said remorsefully, "Comarade... I'm sorry."	<b>Authenticity</b>	This scene marks a turning point in Paul's life. He begins to see the enemy not as an enemy, but as a fellow human being. His decision to apologize demonstrates an action born of personal conscience, not military orders or obligation. It reflects authenticity and the freedom to act humanely.

No	Time	Important scene and dialogue	Existentialism Concept	Interpretation
4	01:43:15	Paul reads the letter from home and says quietly, "I didn't know," after realizing life at home continued as normal while he was on the battlefield.	<b>Alienation</b>	Paul felt alienated from his life before he decided to go to war. The letter symbolizes his realization that he no longer belonged to his old world. It shows his search for new meaning in life, as he realizes that his old identity has been lost.
5	01:50:53	When talking to Kat (Paul's friend) after stealing food, Paul says in a disappointed tone, "What good did it do me?"	<b>Identity</b>	This part shows Paul's disillusionment with the values he once believed in. He begins to question the meaning of his education and his past. This moment marks his understanding that identity is shaped by choice, not by social roles or the past.
6	02:00:08	Paul carries the injured Kat and says, "I'll shoot myself in the foot so we can stick together."	<b>Freedom and Responsibility</b>	Although this part sounds like a joke, it shows Paul's personal decision to remain loyal to his friend. He chooses his own actions, not those dictated by orders.

The movie *All Quiet on the Western Front* (2022) tells the story of Paul Bäumer, a young German soldier who struggles to find his identity in the middle of world war. Paul's journey describes several important ideas from Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy of existentialism, such as freedom, despair, and authenticity. This paper explores several important moments in the movie that show how Paul's identity changes and how he tries to find meaning of his life in a violent and chaotic world.

- At the minute of 00.09.44 in the movie, Paul and his friends are excited to sign up for the army after hearing a speech about love for the country. They are influenced by the enthusiasm and pressure from their friends. After signing the registration form, his superior congratulated him, but Paul only muttered softly, "A dead man walking." This sentence shows that deep down, Paul realized that this decision could lead to death. Although on the outside he appeared as enthusiastic as his friends, his words revealed his deep fear and doubt. This is where Paul's identity conflict began. He did not really choose freely, but only followed social pressure. In existentialism, this is called bad faith, a term coined by Jean Paul Sarte. The term bad faith itself refers to when a person is not honest with themselves and acts only because of external pressures, not because of personal choice.
- At the minute of 00.20.49, Paul and his friends hide in a trench during a massive bomb attack. The atmosphere is chaotic, and one of his friends, Ludwig, begins to

panic. Paul tries to calm him down by joking and telling him to warm his hands inside his jacket. Although he sounds calm, Paul is actually scared too. This scene shows an initial change in Paul. He begins to realize that war is not what he imagined. There is no honor or pride there, only fear and the struggle to survive. His attempt to remain calm is a form of awareness of reality. Sartre believed that humans must dare to face anxiety as part of freedom. Here, Paul begins to realize who he is in the midst of an uncertain situation.

- At 01:43:15, Paul sat with Kat at night and read a letter from home. The letter contained simple, happy stories about family, such as Kat's child's birthday, while they themselves were sitting in the mud and hearing the sounds of war in the distance. After reading the letter, Paul simply said softly, "I didn't know." This short sentence shows his realization that his old world was gone. The peaceful life he once knew now felt foreign and unattainable. This is where Paul began to lose the meaning of his old identity as a student, a young man, and a patriot. From an existentialist perspective, this is the moment when a person realizes that the essence they have always believed in has collapsed. Now, Paul must rebuild himself through his own choices and actions.
- At the time 01.27.23 in the movie, one of the most emotional scenes in the movie takes place. Paul is trapped in a crater with a dying French soldier. At first, Paul attacks the soldier out of fear, but upon seeing him suffer, he regrets his actions and changes his mind. He kneels beside him, repeatedly saying, "Camarade... I'm sorry. I'm sorry," and tries to speak in French. He even promises to take care of his family. At this moment, Paul stops seeing the enemy as someone to be killed and begins to see him as a fellow human being. From an existential point of view, this is a turning point for Paul. He no longer acts out of orders or rules, but out of his own choice. He chooses humanity and personal responsibility. This is where he began to live honestly and authentically according to his conscience.
- At 1 hour 50 minutes and 53 seconds, Paul and Kat take a break after stealing food. They talked about life after the war ended. Paul said he wanted to do something big, but Kat replied realistically that they were just ordinary people. Paul was just a student and Kat was a shoemaker. Paul then said disappointedly, "What good did it do me?" This sentence shows his disappointment with the

values he once believed in. His education and dreams felt futile amid the destruction of war. This moment shows that Paul no longer sees himself as he once did. He realizes that identity is not something given by society, but something that must be formed through personal experiences and decisions. Although his words are full of despair, he begins to understand the true freedom that only he can determine who he really is.

The time of 2 hours and 8 minutes, the final scene between Paul and Kat takes place. Paul carries the severely injured Kat through the forest. When a truck passes by without stopping to help them, Paul tries to comfort Kat by saying, "I'll shoot myself in the foot so we can stick together." Although it sounds like a joke, this sentence shows his deep loyalty and concern. He is willing to hurt himself in order to stay with his friend. This action reflects the true meaning of freedom in an existential perspective. Paul chooses his own actions, not because of orders from his superiors or the demands of the state, but because of the values he believes in, namely friendship and humanity. At this point, Paul is no longer just an obedient soldier. He has found his own meaning in life through the choices he has made consciously and responsibly.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Paul's journey in the movie *All Quiet on the Western Front* depicts a person's struggle to find his identity amid the chaos of war. Paul transforms from a teenager who simply follows the crowd into someone who is aware of who he is and begins to make decisions based on his own conscience. From fear to responsibility, from obedience to honesty with himself. Paul Bäumer's story illustrates Sartre's main idea that existence precedes essence. Identity is not something that is predetermined from the outset, but rather something that is shaped by our own choices and actions, even in the midst of suffering and death.

However, this journal entry still has limitations. This analysis only focuses on the main character and does not discuss other characters who could also enrich our understanding of the existential meaning in this movie. In addition, this study does not use other theoretical approaches that could provide different perspectives, such as psychological or moral approaches. Therefore, the author suggests that other researchers or students who wish to conduct similar studies expand their analysis, for example by comparing several characters, relating them to the social context, or using other literary works with existentialist themes. In this way, the discussion of the search

for identity and the meaning of life in literature and movie will become widely.

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