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The Existential Crisis in the Novel *Lho*: An Existential Psychological Analysis Based on Rollo May's Perspective

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Abstract

This study examines the existential crisis of the main character in Putu Wijaya's novel *Lho* using Rollo May's existential psychology theory. The primary aim of this research is to analyze the concepts of *being-in-the-world* (existence) and *non-being* (non-existence) in the life journey of the main character. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method, with data consisting of the main character's dialogues and monologues. The findings reveal that the concept of *being-in-the-world* is represented through three dimensions: (1) the character's relationship with the physical environment (*Umwelt*), (2) the character's relationship with others (*Mitwelt*), and (3) the character's relationship with themselves (*Eigenwelt*). Meanwhile, the concept of *nonbeing* is represented through: (1) fear of consequences, (2) a crisis of trust, and (3) destructive behavior. These findings do not function merely as adverse conditions but as forces that shape the character's efforts to negotiate meaning and existence. This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how the concepts of being-in-the-world and non-being can be applied to explain individual existential crises in literary studies, as well as in broader human experiences.

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INTRODUCTION

Existential crisis constitutes a fundamental human experience that emerges when individuals confront questions of meaning, freedom, responsibility, and mortality (Tongeren, 2024). In the context of modern life, such crises are intensified by increasing social pressure, shifting value systems, and the fragmentation of stable life orientations (Nguyen & Truong, 2023). These conditions often manifest as feelings of alienation, anxiety, and uncertainty regarding one's position in the world (May, 1953)). Within existential psychology, these experiences are not viewed merely as psychological disturbances, but as intrinsic aspects of human existence that arise from awareness of limitation and non-existence (Nguyen & Truong, 2023).

In Indonesian literature, many of Putu Wijaya's works explore themes of absurdity and the search for life's meaning. In the novel *Lho*, the main character undergoes an existential crisis that reflects the condition of modern humanity (Wijaya, 1992). The main character, referred to as "I" in the novel, feels trapped in a state of uncertainty and a search for self-identity. Putu Wijaya portrays the internal struggles of the character with depth and significance (Wijaya, 1992). In addition to illustrating life's absurdity, this novel serves as a medium to understand human emotions that are often challenging to articulate. Through the character's monologues and thoughts, feelings of alienation and anxiety are evident, revealing the internal conflicts the character experiences. The silence within their thoughts creates a distance between themselves and the real world (Wijaya, 1992).

This study utilizes Rollo May's existential psychology to analyze how the concepts of *being-in-the-world* and *nonbeing* are represented in the existential journey of the main character in the novel *Lho*. The main character exhibits feelings of alienation and anxiety, reflecting fears of losing life's meaning and of death (Wijaya, 1992). The concept of *being-in-the-world* refers to the manner in which a character exists and engages with reality through relationships with the self, others, and the surrounding environment (May, 1983). This concept emphasizes existence as a lived experience shaped by interaction, awareness, and the creation of meaning. In contrast, *non-being* denotes the awareness of potential loss of existence, meaning, and existential security, which manifests in experiences of anxiety, alienation, and emptiness (May, 1953). In Rollo May's existential psychology, these two concepts are dialectically related, as the threat of *non-being* continually accompanies and shapes human existence in the world (May, 1953;

May et al., 1969)). Through the character's internal journey, readers are invited to gain a deeper understanding of the existential struggles that individuals face in contemporary life.

Based on the aforementioned background, several previous studies were found that also discussed existential psychology in novels. For instance, the study conducted by Pratiwi & Ahmadi (2022) Explored existential psychology in terms of anxiety, guilt, and expressions of love in the novel *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* by Andina Dwifatma. However, this study has weaknesses in terms of interpretation. The limitation lies in its insufficient exploration of the existential struggles experienced by the characters.

Aryani & Abdalah (2022) Examined existential psychology in the form of freedom, courage, care, love, and the will of the main character. However, this study only focused on the aspect of *being-in-the-world* (existence) without delving into the aspect of *non-being* (the absence or threat of emptiness). In Rollo May's theory, the concept of *non-being* is an essential part that explains how the fear of losing the meaning of life, death, or alienation influences human existence. The absence of a discussion on the concept of *non-being* makes this study less comprehensive in its portrayal of the individual's existential crisis.

The study by Kurniawati & Ahmadi (2023) analyzed the manifestations of love, alienation, and the impact of alienation on the characters. However, the alienation experienced by the main character, based on the concept of *non-being*, was insufficiently analyzed. The study provided only a surface-level discussion of the main character's alienation, without elaborating on the reflective processes the character undertakes in finding new meaning and existence. Meanwhile, the study by Yusriansyah (2023) described existential mental disorders in the main character. However, based on the data, this study failed to demonstrate a dialectical connection between the concepts of *being-in-the-world* and *non-being* in Rollo May's theory.

The novel *Lho* by Putu Wijaya has also been studied previously by Andi (2016) and Susetya (2023). Andi (2016) discussed the main character's personality aspects in terms of the *id*, *ego*, and *superego*. However, this study is limited to Freud's psychoanalysis, thus neglecting the existential and philosophical reflections of the main character. Meanwhile, Susetya (2023) examined the manifestations of alienation in the main character. However, this study only focused on the character's alienation without connecting it to the more complex existential conflicts.

Based on a mapping of previous studies, it can be concluded that research on existential psychology in novels generally remains focused on particular aspects of characters' existence, such as anxiety, alienation, freedom, love, and inner conflict. Studies on Putu Wijaya's works, including *Lho*, likewise tend to emphasize themes of alienation, absurdity, or personality through partial psychoanalytic or existential approaches. However, these studies have not comprehensively examined the concept of non-being from Rollo May's perspective, nor have they articulated the dialectical relationship between being-in-the-world and non-being as mutually constitutive elements of individual existential crisis.

This indicates a research gap in the absence of a systematic analysis that integrates both concepts in examining the protagonist's existential journey in *Lho*. The present study seeks to address this gap by positioning being-in-the-world and the threat of nonbeing as an integrated analytical framework.

From the perspective of Rollo May's existential psychology, being-in-the-world and non-being cannot be understood as separate entities. They form a dialectical relationship in which human existence is continuously confronted with the possibility of meaninglessness, alienation, and emptiness. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the protagonist's existential crisis requires an analysis that not only examines modes of existence in relation to the world but also explores how the threat of nonbeing shapes existential experience.

Based on this framework, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) how is the concept of being-in-the-world manifested in the existential journey of the protagonist in Putu Wijaya's novel *Lho*? and (2) how does the concept of nonbeing influence the existential crisis experienced by the protagonist?

This study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of psychological conflict in Indonesian literary works by examining existential experience as a dynamic process shaped by self-awareness, social relations, and situational pressures. Accordingly, this research contributes to literary psychology by positioning literary texts as spaces for reflection on the human condition rather than merely as narrative representations.

Theoretical Framework

Existential Psychology

Existential psychology is an approach within psychology rooted in existential philosophy, which emerged in the mid-nineteenth century and emphasizes the understanding of human existence

as it is lived and experienced in concrete situations (Uddin, 2024). This approach focuses on understanding human experiences and the unique situations individuals face. Rollo May is one of the pioneers in introducing existential psychology. According to him, existential psychology is an effort to understand human beings within the context of their experiences and the purpose of their existence (Semiun, 2021).

Existential psychology examines human actions as an effort to understand humanity by overcoming the separation between subject and object. It is an approach to humanity and a response to psychotherapy (Sofia et al., 2025). The fundamental concepts of Rollo May's existential psychology are divided into two main ideas:

Being-in-the-world

The concept of being-in-the-world originates from the tradition of existential philosophy and was later employed by Rollo May in the development of existential psychology (May, 1983; Ratner, 2019). It refers to the way human beings exist and experience their presence holistically within a concrete world, not merely as biological organisms, but as conscious subjects engaged in meaning-making and relationships with the environment, others, and the self. Within this framework, being-in-the-world serves as a basis for understanding human existential experience, including awareness of limitation and the emergence of anxiety in confronting (May, 1983).

Since being-in-the-world is always experienced within concrete situations involving relationships with the world, others, and the self, Rollo May divides human existence into three main dimensions: Umwelt, Mitwelt, and Eigenwelt (May, 1975). This classification aims to demonstrate that human existential experience is not singular, but is formed through multiple interrelated relations.

Human beings experience being-in-the-world through these three modes of existence: (1) Umwelt, which refers to the relationship with the surrounding environment, including experiences of loss and emptiness; (2) Mitwelt, which refers to relationships with others, characterized by conflict, sympathy, and the desire for recognition; and (3) Eigenwelt, which refers to the individual's relationship with the self and consciousness, encompassing experiences of guilt, self-contempt, identity confusion, and the search for courage.

These three dimensions suggest that, from Rollo May's perspective, human existence is constantly unfolding within tension-laden relational contexts, thereby opening the possibility for existential anxiety.

Non-being

In Rollo May's existential psychology, nonbeing refers to an individual's awareness of the possible loss of existence, meaning, and the values that sustain life (May, 1953; May et al., 1958, 1969). The threat of nonbeing is not understood as an abstract absence, but as a psychological experience that accompanies the way human beings live their existence in the world. According to May, this awareness of possible loss constitutes the primary source of existential anxiety (May, 1953).

The threat of non-being is experienced concretely through various forms of anxiety and psychological responses. In everyday life, existential anxiety may manifest in the form of fear, destructive behavior, shame, alienation, and emotional breakdown (May, 1950). These manifestations indicate that non-being operates not as a passive condition, but as a psychological pressure that shapes human experience and the way individuals live their existence.

In this regard, non-being cannot be separated from being-in-the-world, as the threat of non-existence continually accompanies the process of human existence and influences how individuals confront and respond to life choices (May, 1983). However, existential anxiety arising from nonbeing also opens the possibility for growth (May, 1953). As awareness of existential threat encourages individuals to act with greater responsibility, honesty toward themselves, and courage in determining the direction of their lives. Thus, the relationship between being-in-the-world and non-being is dialectical, in which non-being not only constrains but also contributes to human existential development (May, 1953).

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach. The research aims to examine the existential experience of the main character in *Lho*, a novel by Putu Wijaya, based on Rollo May's existential psychology. This approach is applied because literary studies emphasize textual interpretation in revealing representations of human experience (Mekarisce, 2020). This study utilizes both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data are dialogues and internal monologues of the main character in *Lho*. These dialogues and monologues are treated as units of analysis because they represent the character's consciousness and existential relations with the world. The data include words, sentences, and narrative units that reflect experiences of being-in-the-world, which encompass Umwelt, Mitwelt, and Eigenwelt, as well as experiences of non-being in the form of fear, crisis of trust, and destructive

behavior. The secondary data are obtained from books and journal articles discussing Rollo May's existential psychology and its application in literary studies.

Data collection is conducted through a thematic reading and note-taking method. The novel is read thoroughly to gain a thorough understanding of the plot, characters, and conflicts. The text is then reread intensively, applying the concepts of Umwelt, Mitwelt, Eigenwelt, and Non-being as the reading framework. Relevant dialogues and internal monologues of the main character are identified, recorded, and classified. The data recording process uses a coding guideline developed based on these four categories. This guideline is applied to ensure that all data relevant to the research objectives are systematically identified and recorded.

Data analysis follows the model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Huberman & Miles, 2002). These three stages are implemented sequentially and are interrelated. During the data reduction stage, the categories of Umwelt, Mitwelt, Eigenwelt, and non-functioning entities serve as the principal analytical codes. Data that do not correspond to these categories are excluded from further analysis. The data display stage presents selected dialogues and internal monologues in a narrative form, organized by each existential category. The conclusion-drawing stage synthesizes the analytical findings to explain the relationship between being-in-the-world and nonbeing in *Lho*.

The validity of the analysis is ensured through consistent application of the theoretical categories during textual reading and interpretation. Each data unit is analyzed by referring to its narrative context and to Rollo May's existential psychological framework. Comparisons with relevant theoretical sources are conducted to strengthen the accuracy of interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results and discussion of the existential experiences of the main character in *Lho* by Putu Wijaya, analyzed through the framework of Rollo May's existential psychology. The analysis focuses on the dynamics between being-in-the-world and non-being as reflected in the character's relationships with the physical environment, other people, and the self.

Table 1 presents the distribution of 'being-in-the-world' and 'non-being' themes identified in the novel *Lho* by Putu Wijaya. The table summarizes the frequency of each existential category based on the dimensions of Umwelt,

Mitwelt, Eigenwelt, and forms of non-being found in the data.

Table 1. Distribution of being-in-the-world and Non being Themes in the Novel *Lho* by Putu Wijaya.

Existential Category	Dimension	Frequency
Being-in-the-world	Umwelt	2
	Mitwelt	3
	Eigenwelt	3
Non being	Fear of consequences	3
	Crisis of trust	2
	Destructive behavior	2
Sum		15

The distribution shown in Table 1 indicates that experiences of being-in-the-world and non-being recur across different dimensions of the character's life. These patterns form the analytical basis for tracing how existential disruption unfolds and how the character's responses to such disturbances develop throughout the narrative.

The analysis begins with situations in which the character's sense of stability is gradually disrupted. Experiences of loss, relational tension, and inner conflict introduce nonbeing as a condition of threat that undermines the character's sense of grounding, meaning, and control over life. As these disturbances persist, previously relied-upon strategies of avoidance lose their effectiveness, and instead, they intensify psychological pressure. Under such conditions, the character is compelled to reevaluate their relationship with the world, with others, and with themselves. The responses to these pressures mark the emergence of being-in-the-world, understood not as a state free from disturbance, but as the process through which the character takes a stance through self-reflection, guilt, and the decision to act honestly despite ongoing threat. These moments of pressure do not restore equilibrium; instead, they initiate a shift in the character's way of living. Accordingly, the dimensions of Umwelt, Mitwelt, and Eigenwelt are approached as existential processes shaped by a continuous tension between experiences of non-being and the character's efforts to sustain their existence.

Being-in-the-world

In this study, being-in-the-world is understood as the way the main character inhabits and negotiates his existence in relation to the physical environment, other people, and himself

(Saputra, 2022). Based on the data, this experience is articulated through the dimensions of Umwelt, Mitwelt, and Eigenwelt.

Umwelt (Relationship with the physical environment)

Loss (Protection)

Loss is a phenomenon that can serve as one of the sources of anxiety in human life. Forms of loss vary, including the loss of family, possessions, or a place to live (Rahmat & Alawiyah, 2020). In the following excerpt, the main character experiences emotional upheaval due to the loss of their home. Losing a place that previously symbolized security can transform into something alien, leading to a sense of disconnection from familiar reality. The following excerpt illustrates this shift, where losing a home also means losing protection and emotional stability.

Kupandangi jalan itu dengan rasa yang remuk. Kini aku tidak punya tempat kembali lagi. Kini aku tidak bisa berpaling. Kini aku merasa tidak punya perlindungan (Wijaya, 1992: 108).

(I stared at the road with a broken heart. Now, I have no place to return to. Now, I cannot turn back. Now, I feel I have no protection.

Loss (Personal effort)

A product of hard work, built through personal effort, often transcends its material value, becoming a symbol of life's achievement. When such a product is destroyed, the meaning it embodies also disappears because something important and valuable has been lost (Hardianti & Pamungkas, 2023). The following data illustrate how the main character's experience of losing their home is not just about losing a place to live but also about parting from the result of their own struggles.

Aku berdiri lama-lama di pinggir jalan itu. Sulit sekali rasanya menerima. Rumah yang pernah kuisi dengan berbagai ulah. Di sana aku terbenam, kelelap dengan segala soal-soal yang paling pribadi. Begitu saja musnah. Aku tak bisa membayangkan, betapa tembok yang kubangun sebata demi sebata dengan cucur keringat sendiri telah mereka ratakan dengan tanah (Wijaya, 1992: 110).

(I stood for a long time by the roadside. It was so hard to accept. The house I had filled with so many antics. There, I was immersed, consumed by the most personal matters. It has just gone like that. I cannot imagine how

the walls I built brick by brick with my own sweat have been reduced to rubble.

Both excerpts above reflect the concept of Umwelt, which is the individual's relationship with their physical environment (Saputra, 2022). In Data 1, the character loses a place to return to and a sense of security. The living environment that once provided protection now feels alien, leaving no supportive space for their existence. Meanwhile, in Data 2, the loss extends further, involving the erasure of meaning attached to the process of building, inhabiting, and investing personal effort in the house.

The background of the character's internal monologue reveals that they had previously fled their home due to unresolved internal conflicts. After a long period of absence, their decision to return is met with a reality that has radically changed, intensifying their emotional turmoil (Wijaya, 1992).

In line with Rollo May's perspective, the loss of an environment that provides safety and continuity disrupts an individual's sense of existence and gives rise to existential anxiety (May, 1983). These findings show that the loss of a home functions not only as physical displacement but also as a loss of protection and personal meaning tied to the character's existence. This perspective helps situate the Umwelt dimension as a key source of existential anxiety, shaped by the character's relationship with the physical environment (May et al., 1958).

Mitwelt (Relationships with Others) Interpersonal Conflict

Interpersonal conflict refers to a clash between characters caused by desires, expectations, or principles that collide with one another (Ahmad & Indarti, 2021). The tension experienced by an individual leads to actions driven by frustration or the need to release inner pressure. The following excerpt illustrates how interpersonal conflict contributes to the main character's existential crisis.

Tetapi kemudian aku mencoba juga. Kupegang karung itu dengan tangan kiri. Kuraih leher kucing itu. Kemudian kuangkat pisau. Lalu kubayangkan yang kupegang adalah leher Zen. Dengan menghilangkan seluruh pertim-bangan kujatuhkan pisau itu. Aku tak tahu darimana aku dapatkan keberanian. Aku telah siap membunuh. Tapi Zen kemudian meloncat menyergap tanganku. Dipegangnya erat-erat. Lalu ia mendekatkan mukanya ke

telingaku. "Tahan. Tahan...." (Wijaya, 1992: 34).

(But then I tried anyway. I held the sack with my left hand. I reached for the cat's neck. Then I raised the knife. Moreover, I imagined that what I was holding was Zen's neck. Removing all considerations, I struck the knife. I do not know where I got the courage from. I was ready to kill. However, Zen then leaped to grab my hand. He held it tightly. Then he brought his face close to my ear. 'Hold it. Hold it...")

The excerpt above shows that the character imagines a cat as his friend, one that is ready to be killed. This imagery arises because the character harbors unresolved emotions toward his friend, who has recently been preoccupied with himself. This scene occurs under the friend's own urging, who realizes the buried emotions within the character. Through this scene, the friend attempts to find a way to liberate the character from the chains of these emotions (Wijaya, 1992).

The conflict and pent-up emotions of the main character align with Rollo May's idea about the importance of human relationships. May (1983: 84) asserts that tension or conflict in relationships can lead to anxiety and alienation. Suppressed sympathy or unfulfilled expectations for recognition add to an individual's psychological burden (May, 1983).

Interpersonal conflict in this context does not merely indicate friction between individuals, but reflects a more profound disturbance in the character's relational world. The emotional tension that emerges from conflict with someone personally close intensifies his inner turmoil, as unresolved feelings are repeatedly confronted rather than released. Within the Mitwelt dimension, such conflict transforms social interaction into a source of anxiety, where closeness paradoxically heightens vulnerability and emotional pressure (May, 1950, 1953).

Suppressed Sympathy

Sympathy is an emotional response that connects an individual to the suffering or condition of another person (Nisa & Rahmawati, 2022). However, when this sympathy cannot be expressed, it turns into an emotional burden that reinforces the distance between individuals. In the following excerpt, the main character experiences this dilemma when the sympathy he feels for others cannot be fully articulated, creating inner tension.

Aku termenung di depan pagar mereka. Setiap kali aku merasa kan simpati yang lebih besar. Pada saat itu rasa-rasanya aku bagian dari mereka. Air muka ibunya bila masuk ke mobil-mungkin sekali hendak menjenguk anak-nya di penjara membuatku iba sekali. Juga adik-adiknya kelihatan murung. Tidak seorangpun diantara mereka yang tertawa lepas seperti anak-anak lain (Wijaya, 1992: 61-62).

(I stood in front of their gate, lost in thought. Each time, I felt greater sympathy. At that moment, it felt as if I were part of them. The expression on the mother's face when entering the car—probably on her way to visit her child in prison—moved me deeply. So did her younger children, who appeared sullen. None of them laughed freely like other children.

The excerpt above reveals the main character's deeply buried sympathy. The character sympathizes with a family whose son was accused by the community of hitting him and causing him to fall to the roadside. In reality, the young man did not intentionally hit him; it was the main character himself who collided with the vehicle but survived (Wijaya, 1992).

The suppression of sympathy places the character in a prolonged emotional conflict. Although he experiences a strong sense of connection toward the suffering of others, his inability to express this sympathy creates a persistent inner tension. Over time, this unexpressed emotional response reinforces distance in social relationships and deepens the character's sense of isolation.

This aligns with Rollo May's existential psychology theory, which states that the inability to express sympathy reflects a fear of opening up and facing possible rejection (May, 1975). Within the Mitwelt framework, suppressed sympathy functions as a subtle yet continuous burden that shapes the character's experience of alienation.

Expectations of Social Recognition

The need for social recognition is an inherent part of human existence (Ahmad & Noor, 2022). It arises when individuals seek validation for their actions through positive responses from others. However, this desire is often accompanied by the fear of negative judgment that inhibits the courage to be honest with oneself and the environment. In the following data, the main character faces a dilemma between pursuing social recognition and accepting the consequences of his confession.

Pemuda itu barangkali saja masih menjalani hukuman. Kalau aku datang sebagai pembebasnya, aku akan mendapat sedikit kehormatan dari diriku sendiri. Bahwa aku tidaklah sepegecut yang kusangka (Wijaya, 1992: 99-100).

(The young man might still be serving a sentence. If I came as his liberator, I would get a little honor from myself that I am not as cowardly as I thought.

The quote shows the protagonist's inner turmoil and his anxiety about the possibility of social recognition if he chooses to be honest. The character is not only worried about the potential negative judgment from others (even though it is only his own perception), but also feels pressured by the urge to reveal the truth that he has been suppressing (Wijaya, 1992).

The expectation of social recognition situates the character in a state of sustained ambivalence. His desire to be acknowledged by others coexists with a deep fear of negative judgment, producing continuous inner conflict. This tension prevents decisive action and prolongs hesitation, as social validation becomes both a motivation and a source of anxiety.

This is in line with Rollo May's opinion in his book *The Meaning of Anxiety* 1950, that the fear of negative judgment tends to create existential anxiety that inhibits individuals from being honest. (May, 1950). In this condition, relationships no longer provide emotional support, but instead exert pressure that shapes the character's existential unease.

Eigenwelt (Relationship with self) Self-hatred

Self-hatred is a manifestation of an individual's inner conflict when they are unable to accept their mistakes or failures (Setiyoningsih et al., 2022). This kind of thing arises when individuals face the reality that contradicts the ideals they have built. In the following quote, the main character shows self-hatred that arises from the realization of his actions and their impact on others.

Aku mengganggu. Lalu kupejamkan mata. Aku tak kuasa lagi menahan rasa benciku pada diri sendiri. Aku merasa marah. Lalu kugerakkan tubuhku. Bing dan sopir itu segera menangkap maksudku. Mereka segera memegang. Salah seorang berlari ke luar memanggil zuster. Aku tidak bisa lagi membendung diri. Aku menangis. Kurasa tubuhku dibekuk kuat-kuat.

Kemudian mereka memberikanku suntikan penenang (Wijaya, 1992: 96).

(I nodded. Then I closed my eyes. I could no longer contain my self-hatred. I felt angry. Then I moved my body. Bing and the driver immediately caught my meaning. They immediately took hold. One of them ran outside to call the zuster. I could no longer contain myself. I cried out. I felt my body being bent tightly. Then they gave me a tranquilizer injection.

In the quote above, the character appears to be struggling with his own internal conflict. In this context, the character regrets having been about to harm his own friend. However, what happened was that he was the one who was harmed while his friend survived. However, in his dialogue with the character, the phrase given by his friend suggests that he knows the main character's true intention. So that when the main character realizes this, he feels ashamed and very hateful towards himself (Wijaya, 1992).

Self-hatred in this context functions as an existential indicator of internal disintegration within the *Eigenwelt* dimension. Rather than operating as a transient emotional response, it signifies the self's failure to reconcile guilt with self-understanding. In line with existential psychology, Rollo May states that self-rejection is an individual conflict and shows an existential crisis about oneself (May, 1983).

The inward direction of judgment positions the self as both subject and object of condemnation, intensifying existential tension. This condition reflects a critical moment in which self-awareness no longer stabilizes identity but instead deepens fragmentation and inner rupture (May, 1950).

Identity confusion

Identity confusion arises when individuals struggle to understand themselves in new relationships or situations (Rusuli, 2022). The identity referred to here is a set of values, beliefs, and behaviors that are influenced by those around them (Rusuli, 2022). It is often accompanied by doubt, overinterpretation, and confrontation with something previously held as accurate. In the following data, the main character grapples with questions of orientation and the meaning of her existence, reflecting the complexity of the search for self-identity.

Malam hari, kupikirkan dalam-dalam. Apakah aku mempunyai kelainan-kelainan. Kenapa Bing jadi begitu membuat aku puyeng. Kenapa

dia men-imbulkan rasa kangen. Sebagaimana juga aku A dulu selalu kangen kalau Zen tidak ada. Kuteropong diriku sendiri, Aku mulai curiga kalau aku mempunyai hasrat kelamin yang lain. Mungkinkah seorang lelaki jatuh cinta pada lelaki yang lain? Aku tak pernah merasa diriku bencong. (Wijaya, 1992: 87)

(At night, I thought deeply. Do I have any abnormalities? Why Bing is so upsetting to me. Why did he cause me to miss him? Just as I used to miss him when Zen was not around. Looking at myself, I began to suspect that I had other sexual desires. Is it possible for a man to fall in love with another man? I never felt myself to be a transvestite).

In the data quote above, the character seems to contemplate his true identity due to the feelings that arise. This is motivated by the appearance of Bing, a new friend with whom he gets along, after his best friend Zen died. Here, the main character's wild thoughts begin to act, leading to conjectures related to homosexuality. Although in the end it cannot be proven and is limited only to the perception of his wild mind (Wijaya, 1992).

This is in line with Rollo May's statement in his book that an identity crisis is a confrontation with the question of existence itself (May, 1983). This crisis is not only limited to an individual's inability to understand who he is in a social context, but also includes broader existential struggles about the meaning of life, purpose, and the values he believes in (May, 1983).

Identity confusion reflects existential instability in which the self loses coherence and certainty, shaped by sustained doubt toward internalized values. Within the *Eigenwelt* dimension, identity is experienced as unsettled rather than affirmed (May et al., 1958).

The Search for Courage

Courage is an effort to overcome fear and accept responsibility for acting in accordance with one's believed values and truths (Rakhmat & Fadhilah, 2019). In psychology, courage is a form of self-defense mechanism against anxiety arising from life's demands (Prastya et al., 2023). The following excerpt illustrates the main character's efforts to find the courage to face the consequences of the actions he has been avoiding.

Waktu mobil menjauh, rasanya sebuah topeng terlepas dari mukaku. Lalu tera-sa mukaku yang lama, yang penuh dengan benjal benjol. Kemudian masuk in-gatan pada Zen. Kawan-kawan. Polisi. Pengadilan. Anak muda dalam

penjara itu. Zuster-zuster yang cantik. Lalu segala kebohonganku. Rasanya tidak mungkin untuk pulang kembali dengan menunjukkan mulut bisu dan mata buta. Aku harus berterus terang (Wijaya, 1992: 104-105).

(As the car drove away, I felt a mask slip from my face. Then I saw my old face, full of bumps. Then came the memory of Zen. Friends. The police. The court. The young man in prison. The beautiful zusters. And all my lies. It was impossible to go back with a dumb mouth and blind eyes. I had to be frank.

In the quote above, the main character feels that he is making a mistake, having run away after all this time without saying goodbye to anyone. However, here he tries to emphasize himself to remain honest, even though it does not seem easy (Wijaya, 1992).

This is in line with Rollo May's statement that the effort to be honest reflects existential freedom and responsibility (May, 1983).

Within the *Eigenwelt* dimension, the search for courage can be understood as a moment when non-being, in the form of guilt and fear, enters conscious reflection. The character does not resolve these tensions immediately, but acknowledges their presence while moving toward honest action. Courage thus operates as a mediating process that allows being to take shape through sustained engagement with existential anxiety (May, 1975).

Non-being

Nonbeing means nothingness or loss of existence. The fear of not being encouraged to make decisions and choices that are in line with their identity and will. The forms of non-being data found consist of fear of consequences, a crisis of confidence, and destructive behavior.

Fear of consequences

Fear of consequences is a form of anxiety that often shackles individuals, making them hesitant to act or reveal the (Marwinda & Margono, 2020). This feeling is often accompanied by prejudice against the environment's reaction, thus encouraging individuals to avoid responsibility. In the following data, the main character faces anxiety over the possibilities that will happen if he chooses to be honest.

Ya. Mereka menganggapnya sebagai kecelakaan. Sementara berbaring dan membisu seperti balok mati itu, aku mencoba membu-at analisa, apa kira-kira yang

dipikirkan oleh orang banyak di sekitar pembunu-han itu. Heran sekali. Makin lama, makin jelas bahwa mereka menerima segalanya itu sebagai kecelakaan biasa. Kalau toh ada juga yang menyangkannya sebaga kecelakaan, pembunuhnya adalah anak muda yang ngebut itu.

Aku jadi tak habis pikir.

Tapi diam-diam timbul ketakutan pada penjara, sehingga aku berusaha untuk terus membungkam Aku tak percaya pada mulutku sendiri. Kalau aku buka, kebenaran itu akan terkelupas dan segalanya akan jadi lain. Tak seorang pun akan ngomong manis lagi (Wijaya, 1992: 55-56).

(Yes. They consider it an accident. While lying down and mute like that, dead block, I tried to analyze what the people around the murder were thinking. It was a wonder. As time passed, it became increasingly clear that they accepted everything as an ordinary accident. If anyone thought it was an accident at all, the killer was the young man who was speeding.

I could not believe it.

However, secretly there was a fear of imprisonment, so I tried to keep silent I did not trust my own mouth. If I opened it, the truth would come out, and everything would be different. No one would ever speak sweetly again.

Tak ada yang menyebut-nyebutku.

Mereka sudah lupa kepadaku. Padahal sekiranya akulah yang diadili, aku dapat membayangkan betapa akan busuknya kata-kata yang mengulas keputusan ha-kim. Mungkin mereka akan protes karena hukuman terlalu ringan. Juga pasti mereka mengkritik dengan pedas, betapa seorang sahabat seperti aku, telah be-gitu saja membunuh sahabatnya. Seolah-olah tidak ada lagi yang bisa diharapkan untuk dijadikan pegangan di kota yang rame ini.

Aku sedih.

Aku mengunci diriku dalam kamar, karena malu (Wijaya, 1992: 67-68).

(No one mentioned me.

They have forgotten me. However, if I had been the one on trial, I could imagine how foul the words reviewing the judge's decision would have been. Perhaps they would have protested that the sentence was too light.

They would also criticize how a friend like me could have killed his best friend so easily. It was as if there was nothing to hold on to in this crowded city.

I was sad.

I locked myself in my room, ashamed.

Lalu kubayangkan apa yang bisa kulakukan seandainya aku berada dalam penjara. Mungkin aku akan dibunuh oleh salah seorang hukuman yang lain. Atau aku terbetot oleh penyakit, karena makanan tidak teratur. Mungkin juga aku bisa terus bertahan. Setidak-tidaknya karena tidak menanggung beban rasa bersalah. Itu modal yang paling ampuh untuk hidup. Perasaan bersih. Perasaan tidak bersalah. Itu yang kata orang bisa membuat kita berbahagia dan sehat, dalam lumpur yang paling busuk dan lengket (Wijaya, 1992: 105-106).

(Then I imagined what I could do if I were in prison. Maybe I would have been killed by one of the other prisoners. Alternatively, I would have been struck down by disease due to irregular meals. It was also possible that I could continue to endure. At least because I do not bear the burden of guilt, that is the most powerful asset for living. The feeling of being clean. The feeling of innocence. That is what people say can make us happy and healthy, in the most rotten and sticky mud.

The three quotations above share the same theme and context, highlighting the main character's fear of consequences. The background of the three internal monologues is the scapegoating incident inflicted on a young man. The incident began when the main character attempted to push his friend onto the highway, despite many vehicles passing by. However, this failed, and instead, he was hit by a car. He was taken to the hospital. It was later discovered that the driver of the car was a young man. The young man was tried and sent to prison. The protagonist experienced considerable inner turmoil due to his feelings of guilt. Because it was not the young man who crashed deliberately, but he himself who harmed himself (Wijaya, 1992).

This is in line with Rollo May's opinion in his book *The Meaning of Anxiety* (1950:139) that the fear of negative judgment tends to create existential anxiety, which inhibits individuals from being honest (May, 1950).

Aku merasa lumat. Kubiarkan seluruh saraf-sarafku bergetar untuk merasakan nasib jelek itu. Aku terang-terangan menangis. memakai topangan bersama sudah mengalahkan pribadiku. Kalau aku berontak, semua orang-orang di pinggir jalan itu akan menudingku sebagai penjahat atau pengacau. Lalu polisi itu akan datang lagi untuk mengamankanku (Wijaya, 1992: 111)

(I feel pulverized. I let all my nerves vibrate to feel the bad luck. I openly cried. using the collective support was overpowering my personality. If I rebelled, all those people on the side of the road would accuse me of being a criminal or a troublemaker. Then the police would come again to secure me.

In the quote above, the main character is feeling emotionally devastated when he witnesses the house he built being leveled to the ground. However, he did not dare to voice his own emotions because he was afraid of the social consequences he might get, even though it was only his own perception (Wijaya, 1992).

In addition, the fear of consequences reflects the concept of non-being described by Rollo May. This fear often leads individuals to avoid difficult decisions and painful realities of life (May, 1950). The fear of consequences functions as existential anxiety, restraining the character from confronting responsibility. The anticipation of punishment and social judgment sustains inner conflict and encourages avoidance, positioning fear as a central expression of non-being (May, 1950).

Crisis of trust

A crisis of trust arises when individuals feel that the world around them cannot provide the certainty they need. This condition is a reflection of internal uncertainty that is then projected outward, such as trauma (Putra & Gulo, 2023). In the following quote, the main character reveals how her distrust of others reflects her own inner conflict in understanding her actions and her position in society.

Seperti dulu juga, bila sedang sendirian, aku mulai menimbang- nimbang. Apa sebenarnya yang bersembunyi di balik semua ini? Rasanya tak mungkin semua orang ngibul serentak. Seakan-akan ada sesuatu yang sedang bersiap melanda. Kadangkala aku merasa kekeliruan mereka, kesalahpahaman mereka yang ajaib itu seperti semacam penghinaan keras, pada ketidakjujuranku. Seakan-akan dengan demikian mereka berusaha untuk

menghukumku, dalam penjara batin yang lebih kejam ((Wijaya, 1992: 59).

(Just like before, when I was alone, I began to consider. What exactly is hiding behind all this? It did not seem possible that everyone was bluffing at the same time. It was as if something was preparing to go wrong. Sometimes I felt that their confusion, their miraculous misunderstanding, was like some harsh insult to my dishonesty. As if by doing so, they were trying to punish me in a crueler inner prison.

Aku curiga kalau-kalau orang banyak sudah mempermainkanku. Aku memerlukan kepastian. Aku pergi ke penjara. Penting sekali rasanya untuk menemui pemuda yang telah dijadikan biang keladi kejahatanku itu. Aku was-was kalau-kalau itu hanya jebakan saja untuk menunggu pengakuanku yang sebenarnya. Artinya, penjara masih tetap siap menganggang untuk menyekapku setiap saat (Wijaya, 1992: 59-60).

(I suspected that the crowd was playing me. I needed reassurance. I went to the prison. It was essential to meet the young man who had been the ringleader of my crime. I wondered if it was just a trap to catch me in my true confession. That is, the prison is still ready to straddle me at any time.

The two quotations above share a similarity in theme, specifically the crisis of trust. The background is also similar, namely, when the main character feels that he has made a big mistake and believes he should be punished for it, but the public does not agree with his assessment. This is because the public's perspective on him and the character's perspective on himself are different. The public sees him as a victim of a car crash driven by a young man, while the character sees himself as the one who deliberately crashed himself, then let the young man be tried (Wijaya, 1992).

In Rollo May's existential psychology, individual distrust of others is often a projection of distrust of oneself (May, 1983). The crisis of trust reflects a projection of inner uncertainty onto the surrounding world. Social reality is interpreted through suspicion and guilt, indicating how nonbeing distorts the character's perception of relationships and responsibility (Tongeren, 2024).

Destructive behavior

Destructive behavior is an action that arises in response to unresolved internal tension

(Novitasari & Anggraini, 2021). When individuals are unable to channel negative emotions constructively, they may turn to actions that hurt themselves or others (Novitasari & Anggraini, 2021). In the following data, the main character's impulsive actions show her struggle to free herself from inner pressure as well as her inability to resolve her conflicts rationally.

Lalu kejahatan itu menghampiriku lagi. Aku benci sekali melihat mulut Zen. Kupusatkan mataku ke bibir yang tidak cape cape bicara itu. Lalu tiba-tiba sa-ja jiwaku terbakar lagi. Zen seakan-akan setumpukan kaca yang menantang untuk dipecah-kan.

Tanpa banyak pikir lagi, aku mendorongnya ke tengah jalan (Wijaya, 1992: 50-51).

(Then the evil came to me again. I hated the sight of Zen's mouth. I focused my eyes on those lips that were not tired of talking. Then suddenly my soul was on fire again. Zen was like a pile of glass that dared to be broken.

Without much thought, I pushed him into the middle of the road.

The quote above illustrates the moment when the main character loses self-control as impulsive thoughts begin to surface. Even at that time, the main character often had such thoughts, and he expressed them to his best friend. His friend (Zen) often advised him to indulge in these thoughts occasionally so that he could be completely free from distractions. Moreover, once, his friend invited him to go to the side of the highway, so that in case the protagonist's impulsive thoughts arose, he could immediately practice them and be free from their bondage. Although hesitant, the protagonist complied. As the two of them walked hand in hand on the side of the highway, the thought arose again. So, without hesitation and supported by emotion, the main character jerks his friend into the middle of the highway (Wijaya, 1992).

The destructive behavior carried out by the character above is in line with Rollo May's statement that the suppression of individual inner tension makes it manifest as outward aggression (May, 1975).

Barangkali pegangan Bing terlalu kuat dan tiba-tiba. Barangkali karena sua-sananya begitu khas. Kejahatan itu datang lagi. Bing terus menanyaiku.

Keringat dingin menjalari seluruh tubuhku. Kenapa Bing terlalu banyak bicara. Kenapa ia begitu banyak mengeluh dan menyalahkan orang lain? Kedua tanganku tak sadar terangkat ke atas. Kupegang tangan Bing. Lalu ti-tiba-tiba ia kusentakkan ke tengah jalan. Sebuah truk mendesing di samping kami (Wijaya, 1992: 94)

(Perhaps Bing's grip was too firm and sudden. Perhaps because the sua-san is so distinctive. The evil came again.

Bing continued to question me.

Cold sweat broke out all over my body. Why did Bing talk so much? Why did he complain so much and blame others? My hands unconsciously rose. I held Bing's hand. Then I suddenly jerked him to the center of the road—a truck whizzed by us.

Just as in the previous quote, at this moment, the main character is losing control of herself. However, at this moment, he is with another friend. His friend (Bing) often expresses his protest against the justice of life and blames the surrounding environment for what happened. Most of the time, the protagonist listens patiently, but at that moment, he loses control. Seeing the right moment (beside the highway), without hesitation, the main character jerks his friend into the middle of the highway, just like the previous incident (Wijaya, 1992).

Destructive behavior that arises from impulsive impulses often represents an attempt to cope with feelings of pressure and alienation. According to Rollo May, destructive behavior often occurs when individuals cannot deal constructively with existential anxiety (May, 1950).

Destructive behavior emerges as an outward release of unresolved existential tension. The character's impulsive actions reveal the dominance of non-being, where anxiety overrides reflective control and leads to harmful responses (May, 1950)

CONCLUSIONS

This study examines the manifestation of being-in-the-world and the influence of non-being in the existential journey of the protagonist in Putu Wijaya's *Lho*, using Rollo May's existential psychology. The analysis shows that the protagonist's experiences are structured through interactions with the physical environment (Umwelt), interpersonal relations (Mitwelt), and self-awareness (Eigenwelt). The concept of being-in-the-world is reflected in experiences of loss, relational conflict, the desire for recognition,

identity confusion, self-rejection, and the search for courage. These experiences illustrate how the protagonist strives to maintain engagement with life despite ongoing disturbances. In contrast, non-being appears through fear of consequences, a crisis of trust, and destructive behavior, which function as sources of existential threat that intensify the character's inner conflict and anxiety.

The findings indicate that the interaction between being-in-the-world and non-being shapes the protagonist's existential crisis. Nonbeing disrupts stability and meaning, while being-in-the-world emerges as a response to these disruptions rather than their elimination. This relationship explains how existential tension operates throughout the narrative.

This study is limited by its focus on a single novel and its reliance on qualitative analysis of the protagonist's existential experience. As a result, the findings do not yet represent broader patterns across Putu Wijaya's works or Indonesian literature more generally. Future research may extend this study through comparative analyses of other novels by Putu Wijaya to examine the continuity or variation of existential themes. Furthermore, additional studies may consider using online surveys to investigate the frequency and reception of these themes among readers.

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