



## Existential crisis reflected in Louis-Ferdinand Celine's Journey to The End of The Night

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**Abstract.** This study discusses the existential crisis that occurs in Louis-Ferdinand Celine's *Journey to the End of the Night*. The aim of this research is to examine the aspects of existential crisis and examine the cope of existential crisis found in the Louis-Ferdinand Celine's *Journey to the End of the Night*. The researcher chooses this novel because the novel depicts the issue of existential crisis through a person who live in different places with different socio-cultural context. The researcher hopes that this research can be a reference for other research conducted with the same issue, and provides understanding for the reader concerning existential crisis. The novel itself is a semi-autobiographical novel which is based on the author's experience. The novel is written in first person point of view. The researcher focuses to examine the main character of the novel. The researcher uses a qualitative descriptive method and a psychological approach to connect existential crisis and literature. To analyze the conflict in the novel, the researcher employs Joana Buténaitè, Jolanta Sondaitè, Antanas Mockus's existential crisis theory to breakdown component of existential crisis. The theory is practicable in order to gain more understanding about existential crisis. For the coping of existential crisis, the researcher employs the theory by Uddin. The researcher finds all three components of existential crisis points to several aspects, namely emotional, cognitive, and behavior component. And Bardamu coping of existential crisis, namely formulating a deeper understanding of himself in his place in the world through exploring his inner thoughts.

**Keywords:** Existential Crisis, Emotional, Cognitive, Behavior

### INTRODUCTION

As a human, from the first time we were born, we cannot avoid to live in a particular society. There is no reason why our existence belong to particular society. However, there are universal necessities of our existence in this world as a human: we have to work here, we have to live here, and we also have to die here. The necessities may always brings forth state of alienation for an individual. There is a phenomenon when an individual detached in engaging some activities in his life. The phenomenon can be seen, for example, on a student. Being a student in any institute, bounded and imposed by rigid system of education, he feel as if he confined inside the prison wall.

What people must always have is reason to justify why they engage on activities. The simplest values can be a justification for them such as, love, solidarity or obligation; and that is the coping of the crisis – to find purposes in life whatever it is. There is always an imbalance between human subjectivity and reality. And every places has its own convention that could be the cause of limit situation. The quest for meaning is the consequence of human as a complex creature. They always have different background, different personalities, different way of life, different faith, etc.

Louis-Ferdinand Céline wrote her first book, *Journey to the End of the Night*. The travels of Ferdinand Bardamu throughout World War I, colonial Africa, the United States, and the impoverished Paris suburbs where he practices medicine are chronicled in this semi-autobiographical work. The novel is an utter depiction of how an individual can suffer from existential crisis, as the main character experience living in different place with different condition. Therefore, the aims of this study are to unfold the aspects of existential crises subjected to Ferdinand Bardamu,, and to find out how Ferdinand Bardamu overcome his existential crises.

Existential crises might arises from such kind of condition in our life. All the estrangement, all the alienation suffered and be the cause of inner conflict within individuals might be the cause of question concerning about meaning. Experiencing an existential crisis is part of being alive; it means you are working through an important life task to avoid negative consequences (Jacobsen, 2006).

The feelings that are inherent for the condition are: emotional pain, disturbed sense of integrity, hopelessness, helplessness, anxiety, guilt, fear and loneliness. Existential crisis is characterized not only by negative consequences but also by the positive aspects – the discovery of new meaning and personal values (Buténaité, 2016).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This research employs psychological approach in examining the novel. Psychological approach is literature criticism approach which stresses on psychological aspects that exist in a literature work (Atar Semi, 2012:45).

Existential crises can be defined as a confrontation and an experienced relationship with existential realities (Buténaité, 2016). The research can be used as an useful tool to examine the aspects and attains holistic understanding about existential crisis (Andayani, 2018). As stated in previous studies, the definition of existential crisis is not unite and has different meaning.

Existential crisis can arise from several factors. Each person's existential crisis is uniques, influenced by their experience, beliefs, and the context of their life circumstances (Adi Martinus & Marsih, 2022). In *Journey to The End of The Night*, Bardamu experiences living in different places with different conditions. In each places, Bardamu's existential crisis arises according to different context of each conditions of his experience.

Coping strategies to navigate existential crises encompass psychotherapeutic approaches like existential therapy and logotherapy, philosophical and spiritual frameworks like mindfulness and Buddhism, and social interventions such as community building and

civic engagement. Ultimately, finding meaning and purpose in life and fostering meaningful connections with others are central to coping with existential crises (Uddin, 2024).

## **METHOD**

This research was a qualitative research. In this type of research, the researcher collected, classified, analyzed, and drew conclusion based on the data analysis without making a generalization. Qualitative research is a study to investigate and understand the meaning individuals or groups assume to be a social or a human problem (Uddin, 2024).

The primary data is taken from the novel *Journey to The End of The Night* by Louis Ferdinand Celine. The novel published in Great Britain in 1988 by John Calder (publishers) Ltd. The novel is originally published as *Voyage au bout de la nuit* in 1932 by Editions Gallimard, Paris. The novel is translated by Ralph Manheim. The novel contains 448 pages.

There are some techniques in collecting the data. The first is reading *Journey to The End of The Night* carefully and comprehensively and highlighting the fragments of the novel that indicated existential crisis of the main character. The second is taking notes of the fragments highlighted, in accordance to the problem questioned in the research question. By this direction, the researcher notes some story-words, conversations and events assisted by the theory employed in the research.

For the techniques of examining the data consist of: dividing and classify the data into three components of existential crisis, namely emotional, cognitive, and behaviour component, Dividing and classify the data into the cope of existential crisis in accordance to the theory employed. In this step the researcher found two data, namely namely realization of one's own limitation and acceptance. Interprets the data that has been divided and classified by describing the context, and giving the argument in order to support why it can be classified into the subject questioned.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Result**

From the analysis, the researcher found several points of the research. Based on the analysis it is found three components of existential crisis: emotional, cognitive, and behavioral component. And two ways of Ferdinand Bardamu's cope of existential crisis namely, realization of one's own limitation, and acceptance.

For the aspects of existential crisis, the researcher found seven aspects consists in emotional component, namely, despair and helplessness, fear, disturbed sense of integrity, loneliness, emotional vulnerability, anxiety, and guilt. In cognitive component, the researcher found two aspects namely, loss of meaning o purpose and realization of own end. And in behavior component, the researcher found four aspects, namely, anti-social behavior, restricted action, relationship loss and health problem.

### **2. Discussion**

In this chapter, the researcher discuss the analysis that is already included in the statement of problem. This analysis will discuss the aspects of existential crisis which consist of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral component. And the next is to discuss how the main character cope his existential crisis.

## **2.1. The Aspects of Ferdinand Bardamu's Existential Crisis**

### **2.1.1 Emotional Component**

The component consists of several aspects. It can be explained by analyzing Ferdinand Bardamu's emotion Emotion may be a complex physiological involvement characterized by sentiments, physiological changes, and behavioral reactions. Throughout the novel, Bardamu experiences a range of emotions that are revealed through the narratives and conversations depicted.

Those unknown soldiers missed us every time. But they spun a thousand deaths around us, so close they seemed to clothe us. I was afraid to move. Could I, I thought, be the last coward on earth? How terrifying!... All alone with two million stark raving heroic madmen, armed to the eyeballs? With and without helmets, without horses, on motorcycles, bellowing, in cars, screeching, shooting, plotting, flying, kneeling, digging, taking cover, ready to demolish everything (Celine, 1932: 18)

The quotation above show how Ferdinand Bardamu suffers from fear. In World War I, France is at war against German. The author opens the narration with description of the situation of war. The war made no sense at all for him, and he was afraid of it. He describes, how down the road, in the distances, two black dots that actually two Germans who had been busy shooting them for the last fifteen or twenty minutes. He describes, how the bullets were whistling through the hot summer air over their heads. How the Germans squatting on the road, shooting so obstinately, and he thought they seemed to have ammunition to burn, whole warehouses full

The feelings of despair and anxiety suffered by Ferdinand Bardamu is the emotion of an individual who is experiencing an existential crisis. In addition, Ferdinand Bardamu also experiences various forms of emotions that alternate while he is in a certain situation. The citation below show how Ferdinand Bardamu suffered despair.

I was seized with fear that he'd murder me there on my folding bed and make off with what was left in the money box... The idea paralyzed me. But what could I do? Call for help? Call who? The village cannibals?... I thought of myself as missing. (Celine, 1932: 157)

There is a situation where Bardamu stays in a hut in the middle of forest in Africa. Living there, he disturbed by the condition of the environment, because it is new experience for him to live in such a place. The hut itself, he stated, belonged to the lowest, most ramshackle category.

But, most of all, the man who owned the hut itself who is haunted him. The man describes about how the environment is. Furthermore he also gives information on how the water and the food is. He also tell Bardamu about the locals – the niggers – that always frustrated him and make him sick.

Bardamu shocked when the man says his name as Robinson – his acquaintance when they were a soldier and together they tried to escape from war. The name Robinson gnawed at Bardamu more and more insistently. And he has suspicious feeling on the man. He was

seized with fear that the man would murder him there on his folding bed and make off with what was left in the money box. He wants to call for help but, in the middle of forest who are going to help. So, he just killed the times enduring a sense of terror.

### 2.1.2 Cognitive component

The component consists of several aspects. It can be explained by analyzing Ferdinand Bardamu's cognition. Cognitive describes the mental operations needed to acquire information and comprehension. These cognitive functions include knowing, reasoning, remembering, judging, and solving problems. Cognitive refers to everything having to do with how the mind functions and how it processes information.

There is a situation when the thought that show loss of meaning or purpose signify on Bardamu. He has described how the state of war horrified him. While in despair condition, Bardamu still cannot escape from the limit situation of the war. Whether he likes it or not, or whether his perception has changed he enrolled as a soldier on his own own will and must do his duty.

Bardamu is in the midst of a depressing state of war and he himself is aware of it with his own perception. But he cannot get out of that external world, so he is only anxious about his own condition. The citation below depicts how Ferdinand Bardamu suffers loss of meaning or purpose

Anyway, my feelings toward them hadn't changed. In spite of everything. I'd have liked to understand their brutality, but what I wanted still more, enormously, with all my heart, was to get out of there, because suddenly the whole business looked to me like a great big mistake. (Celine, 1932:17)

There is another sign of loss meaning or purpose. Bardamu has heard the speech of the doctor who had been promoted as a major. He considers him really knows how to talk to soldiers. He try to recollect the speech, but far from disturbing him, when he really thought it over, he considered the speech as a justification for death. He can say this because he already loss the purpose of war. Even the speech that is very inciting for others, for him is just a chastisement. The following citation show the case how Ferdinand Bardamu suffers loss of meaning or purpose.

I tried to recollect, and to fathom the meaning of, the speech the man with the beautiful eyes had just made, but far from depressing me, when I thought it over, his words struck me as just what was needed to disgust me with the whole idea of dying. (Celine, 1932: 84).

In the end of the novel, as Bardamu experiencing many events in his life, his mind also become developed. It depicted that he begin to realize his own end. There is a statement that Bardamu finally realized his limitations as a human being. He who has experienced a long journey seeing various differences in the world finally realizes that the time has come that all that is enough for him. This realization of self-limitation is influenced by several factors. In Bardamu's case, he realized this after witnessing the death of Robinson - a man of strong determination and courage. Ultimately all living beings will die. Then Bardamu did some self-reflection and found he had achieved nothing so far, he became aware of his limitations.

My wanderings were over. No more knocking about for me. The world had closed in. We had come to the end! Like at the carnival! (Celine, 1932: 437)

### 2.1.3 Behavior component

The component consists of several aspects. It can be explained by analyzing Ferdinand Bardamu's behavior. The behavioral component is an element that relates to a person's behavior. It takes concern in communication, attitude, social interaction, and work (Buténaitė-Świtkiewicz et al., 2016).

For an individual that suffer existential crisis, the behaviour that can be understood as an effect of the crisis could directly affect the life of that individual. In the novel, it is not uncommon that his behavior become an obstacle to live his life. In addition, Bardamu's behavior also worsens his social relationships.

There is a situation in the novel where Ferdinand Bardamu show the tendency of anti social behaviour. Bardamu's statement above indicates his intention to harm other people. It reported, that Sergeant Barousse has been killed when he is on his way to meet the bread wagon on the Etrapes. Ferdinand Bardamu feel glad because he has an ill experience with Sergeant Barousse; he wanted Bardamu to have court-martialed for a can of meat. To express his satisfaction, he declares that the war seemed to serve a purpose now. Bardamu even wishes the death of another four persons he knew in the regiment.

I thought of Sergeant Barouse, who had just gone up in smoke like the man told us. That was good news... I knew of three or four more in the regiment, real scum, that I'd have gladly helped to make the acquaintance of a shell, like Barrouse. (Celine, 1932: 22)

Bardamu also suffers from health problem. His health problems were exacerbated by the restrictive situation of the war that caused his existential crisis.

Ferdinand Bardamu's suffers health problem when he has a task to pick up meat for the regiment in the distribution point behind the church. Bardamu describes that on sacks and tent cloths spread out on the grass there were pounds and pounds of guts, chunks of white and yellow fat, disemboweled sheep with their organs every which way. Further he describes on how the squadrons were fighting tooth and nail over the innards, especially the kidneys, and all around them swarms of flies such as one sees only on such occasions, as self-important and musical as little birds.

He feel disgusted with the blood that spread everywhere all over the grass. Then he suffers enormous urge to vomit and passed out. This is common physiological reaction where a person sees blood, it can triggers a drop in blood pressure and heart rate, leading to nausea and sometimes fainting.

Leaning against a tree, I had barely time enough to honor that alimentary dispute with two or three glances, before being overcome by an enormous urge to vomit, which I did so hard that I passed out. (Celine, 1932: 25)

Restricted action also can be seen from Ferdinand Bardamu. He recalled to the reader how his living in Paris before the war. He made acquaintance with Little Musyne – a musician, who play violin. She is adorable for bardamu. He was often charmed with her violin's melody and verse.

He was willing to wait for her in order to meet her. He was always agree to what she told. Sometime Musyne made him to go to the butcher's storage cellar. He refused her request, because on the stair he caught a whiff of an acrid odor which he knew only too well and he could not bear. The smell remained him of the smell in the distribution post when meats was hanging up with their organs spread anywhere and blood mud all over the place. The smell that made him vomit and faint.

"Musyne," I said, "are you really going down there? With all that meat hanging on hooks?"

The question surprised her. "Why not?"

"Well," I said, "I have certain memories. I'd rather go back upstairs ..."

"You mean you're leaving me?"

"You'll join me as soon as it's over."

"But it may go on a long time ..."

"I'd rather wait for you upstairs," I said. "I don't like meat, and it'll be over soon." (Celine, 1932: 80)

Another event that depicts Ferdinand Bardamu's restricted actions occurs when he stays in New York. In his state of poverty, Bardamu might have looked for a job in the offices, and make his life financially better. But, his fear aroused at the thought of having to enter those office whose buildings is gigantic, full of convention and order, and the possibility to encounter various people.

From the first time Bardamu arrived in New York, he is extremely agitated and feels alienated by the new environment and the condition of America. He is a foreigner, his way of thinking and behavior are totally different from typical American, even stands at the opposite side. The country where he belongs may have different socio-economic culture differ from America. It is obvious that Bardamu refuse to accept and adapt to the culture he lived in the meantime. The following depicts how the case of Ferdinand Bardamu's restricted actions.

I myself, come to think of it, might have looked for a job in one of those offices, whose dazzling signs I saw outside... But at the thought of having to enter that sort of building I crumpled with fear. (Celine, 1932: 187).

## 2.2 The Cope of Ferdinand Bardamu's Existential Crisis

From the novel, the reseacher found that Ferdinand Bardamu endures several aspects of existential crisis. During his journey through life in different situations and conditions, he shows various aspects of existential crisis which are classified into emotional, cognitive, and behavior components.

Ferdinand Bardamu's character really changes at the end of the novel. The existence crisis experienced by a person can lead to positive things; from instability, through a process the person experiencing it can find new values to apply in life and make his life better. Bardamu who previously showed various symptoms of existence crisis, in the end he seemed to be more in control of himself.

However, individuals facing such challenges can find solace and direction through psychotherapeutic approaches like existential therapy and logotherapy (Uddin, 2024)

Existential therapy is a therapeutic modality that centers on exploring existential themes such as death, freedom, and meaning. It emphasizes an individual's capacity to create their own meaning in life and take responsibility for their choices and actions. The therapist in this approach guides the individual in exploring their values, beliefs, and goals, supporting them in cultivating a sense of purpose and direction (Uddin, 2024)

Logotherapy, developed by Viktor Frankl, also constitutes a form of psychotherapy that prioritizes the pursuit of meaning in life as a fundamental motivating force. It emphasizes the significance of finding meaning even in times of suffering and encourages individuals to view their struggles as opportunities for growth and self-discovery. In logotherapy, the therapist assists the individual in identifying their unique purpose and values, fostering a proactive approach towards achieving these goals (Uddin, 2024).

These therapeutic methods offer a safe and supportive environment for individuals to explore their inner thoughts and emotions, leading to a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world. Through these therapeutic approaches, individuals can learn to navigate uncertainty and find a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives, even amidst adversities (Uddin, 2024).

The researcher found the way on how Ferdinand Bardamu deals with his existential crisis, namely formulating a deeper understanding of himself in his place in the world through exploring his inner thoughts.

Through reflections from the experience of meeting various people, Bardamu managed to overcome his existential crisis. He had been through a long and lively journey, and after witnessing Robinson's death a new realization dawned on him as reflected in the following citation.

My wanderings were over. No more knocking about for me. The world had closed in. We had come to the end! Like at the carnival! It's not enough to be sad; there ought to be some way to start the music up again and go looking for more sadness. But not for me. We may not admit it, but what we really want is to have our youth back again. We ought to be ashamed. Anyway, I wasn't prepared to endure any more!. Yet I hadn't gone as far in life as Robinson!. All in all, I hadn't succeeded. I hadn't conceived even one good, sound idea, like his idea of getting himself bumped off. That idea was bigger than my head, bigger than all the fear that was in it, a fine, a magnificent idea to die with. How many lives would I need to make myself an idea more powerful than anything in the world? No saying. A flop! My ideas went rattling around in my head with lots of space between them. They were like faint, flickering little candles, trembling throughout a lifetime in the middle of a ghostly, abominable universe. (Celine, 1932: 437).

Bardamu realize what he need mostly is courage to live. All his idea, all his scepticism towards anything that occurs in his live is a sign that he is a person who do not have determination and courage. And the values that is lack in him is reflected on the personality of Robinson – the person whom he hate so much in his life.

Recognizing limitations permits us to accurately measure our strengths and weaknesses. It also leadings to more realistic self-perception and self-improvement efforts. Recognizing our own limitations also is essential for personal growth, effective decision-making, and overall well-being.

In addition, in the end, a sense of acceptance of death arose in him. From the beginning of the novel, Bardamu always seems to avoid death. It can be seen on how his state of emotional, cognitive, and behaviour in certain situation especially when he is enlisted as a soldier. The following statement is an evidence of his acceptance of death:

Of that I had none, or so litde there was no use showing it. I wasn't as big as death. I was a lot smaller. I had no great opinion of humanity. (Celine, 1932: 435).

Bardamu begins to consider death after witnessing how Robinson – a man of strong determination and courage – die. His acceptance affected his attitude. He begin to realize that death is a faith that every human cannot avoid. Bardamu who has experienced a long journey to see various differences in the world finally realizes that the time has come that all is enough for him. By accepting death as a fate that cannot be inevitable, Ferdinand Bardamu can be more sincere to live life.

Previously when he thought of always avoiding death, his life seemed to always be colored with excessive feelings of anxiety and skepticism. The process of accepting death is intricate and very personal, impacted by a range of cultural, psychological, and philosophical viewpoints (Prameswari, 2023; Prameswari and Marsih, 2023). Life always ends, and death is a normal part of it. People can live more fully in the present without being immobilized by fear of the future by accepting its inevitability.

## CONCLUSION

From the analysis, the researcher finds several points of the research. Based on the analysis it is found three components: emotional, cognitive, and behavioral component. For the aspects of existential crisis, the researcher found seven aspects consists in emotional component, namely, despair and helplessness, fear, disturbed sense of integrity, loneliness, emotional vulnerability, anxiety, and guilt. In cognitive component, the researcher found two aspects namely, loss of meaning or purpose and realization of own end. And in behavior component, the researcher found four aspects, namely, anti-social behavior, restricted action, relationship loss and health problem.

The researcher also found the way how Ferdinand Bardamu coping his existential crisis, namely, formulating a deeper understanding of himself in his place in the world through exploring his inner thoughts. The result is that Ferdinand Bardamu's character really changes at the end of the novel. The existential crisis experienced by a person can lead to positive things; from instability, through a process the person experiencing it can find new values to apply in life and make his life better. Bardamu who previously showed various symptoms of existence crisis, in the end he seemed to be more in control of himself.

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