

From Despair to Faith: A Stylistic Exploration of Kierkegaard's Existentialism in Sutardji Calzoum Bachri's "Nuh"

Anindita Fikri Amalia^a, Sindah Laili Nurjanah^b

^aFaculty of Humanities, Diponegoro
University. fikriamaliaa@gmail.com

^bFaculty of Humanities, Diponegoro
University. sindahlaili961@gmail.com

085713076481

Article History: July, 22th 2025; Accepted date: August, 30th 2025; Published date:
August, 31th 2025

ABSTRACT

This study uses stylistic analysis with a qualitative descriptive method to looking for the representation of the three stages of human existence based on Soren Kierkegaard's existential philosophy in the poem "Nuh" by Sutardji Calzoum Bachri. Poetry was chosen as the object of research because it has the power of spiritual symbolism and complex existential themes. The analysis focuses on how the physical structural elements of the poem such as diction, figurative language, and imagery show that Kierkegaard's three stages of existence that is aesthetic, ethical, and religious. The results of the study show that the depiction of despair, suffering, and darkness in the first stanza represents the emergence of the aesthetic stage. The repetition of the word */tanah/* (land) which symbolizes moral awareness and surrender represents the emergence of the ethical stage. The plea for a */puncak/* (peak) which depicts spiritual hope and total surrender to God show that the emergence of the religious stage. This poem recounts the poet's spiritual experience and depicts a broad existential journey from despair to transformation. "Nuh" combines poetic language with philosophical depth to interpret existential allegories.

Keywords: existentialism, stylistics, existential stages, Indonesian poetry, spiritual symbolism

1. Introduction

Literary discourse has long discussed questions about human existence. Through language literature functions as a mirror of culture that contains complex matters about human life. Eagleton (2008) explains that questions surrounding the meaning, identity, and morality of human existence are contained in imaginative literature. Existential themes are one of the focuses contained in poetry as a literary genre that has the most expressive form (Abrams, 1999; Aveling, 2001). Structural elements, figurative devices, genre, and historical development are various perspectives that can be analyzed in poetry, which is important in the in-depth interpretation of human experience in the context of literature (Simpson, 2004; Verdonk, 2002) The ambiguity and layered meanings in poetry make it a fertile ground for exploring existential and philosophical issues (Pradopo, 2014).

Nuh by Sutardji Calzoum Bachri published in the collection *O Amuk Kapak: Tiga Kumpulan Sajak* is one of the Indonesian poems that richly embodies existential concerns. In this poem the figure of Nuh (Noah) is not only presented as a religious icon but also as a human subject undergoing a

profound existential struggle. Sutardji is known for his ability to fuse myth, religious archetypes, and personal anxiety into poetic form reflecting a deep psychological and philosophical exploration of being (Orr, 2025; Santosa, 2003; Wright, 2006). Furthermore, Sutardji is one of Indonesia's literary figures. In some of Sutardji's poems Malay and Islamic identities may be the primary basis for understanding the concept of Sufism. It seems that the same thing is also seen in Sutardji's attitude and cultural orientation towards the world especially Western Culture which distinguishes him from Chairil Anwar. Sutardji's cultural perspective and orientation are undeniably based on his close relationship with Islam and the Malay world. Islam's presence as a bearer of mercy for the world is one of the most obvious Islamic principles. In the context of Sutardji's Malayness bringing mercy means "giving" something to world culture (Zaidan, n.d., 2015).

Furthermore, the close relationship between Sutardji, Malay, and Islam made him the one of the literary who adhered to Islamic principles in his literary. This makes the poems that he writes utilize the power of sound thus giving the impression of a very strong magical atmosphere. In line with this, the strong Islamic and Malay principles in his works create a spiritual conflict related to existentialism as seen in the poem "Nuh" (Noah) written in 1981 in the poems anthology of *O Amuk O Kapak* (Bahri, 1981). The internal conflict and spiritual tension embedded in the poem offer an opportunity for philosophical reflection particularly through the lens of Søren Kierkegaard's theistic existentialism which emphasizes individual subjective experience, despair, and leaps of faith as essential components of authentic existence (Cypriani, 2023; Westphal, 1996).

Kierkegaard (1987) as a key figure in existentialist philosophy, postulated that human existence is organized into three stages: aesthetic, ethical, and religious. These phases stand for various states of being that a person must traverse in order to lead a fulfilling life. While the ethical stage signifies the development of moral consciousness the aesthetic stage is frequently linked to the pursuit of pleasure and a resistance to facing responsibility. The religious stage entails acknowledging the divine as essential to human existence and submitting to a higher power. According to Kierkegaard one can only attain true selfhood and authentic existence by moving from aesthetic despair to ethical responsibility and ultimately to religious faith (Pattison, 2005; Westphal, 1996).

Messages of hope, spiritual awakening and human despair can be overcome through personal choice and faith, which are offered in Kierkegaard's philosophy. Through strong faith and when one is in harmony with God, true healing can occur (Cypriani, 2023). This view is in line with the symbolism of Nuh's poem, which beyond its narrative and religious aspects, presents the reader with the psychological and existential transformation of its main character. Not only does this poem display prophetic episodes, but it also poetically represents the struggle to find meaning in the face of suffering, uncertainty, and divine silence, which shows Kierkegaard's belief that faith arises precisely when reason and certainty fail (Kierkegaard, 1987, 2019; Webb, Jr., 2008).

Stylistics is the methodological basis used to examine the philosophical dimensions in this study. Leech & Short (2007) explain that the linguistic approach in literary analysis which focuses on how language choices shape literary meaning is the definition of stylistics. Existential themes expressed through poetic discourse will be revealed in this study by focusing on the physical structure of poetry such as word choice, figurative language, and imagery. The study focuses on these three elements because they are typically the media that bring out symbolic meaning. Diction, figurative language, and imagery are seen as elements that are capable of conveying existential experiences powerfully. Analysis through these elements reveals layers of meaning in detail thereby assisting in the search for Kierkegaard's existentialism. Therefore, not only the aesthetic elements, but also the

connection with the existential significance of this poem will be analyzed by integrating stylistic and philosophical analysis (Leech & Short, 2007; Simpson, 2004).

Although several previous studies have discussed the poem *Nuh*, most of them have not applied a Kierkegaardian framework nor combined it with a stylistic approach. Jannah & Fathurrosyid (2024) and Mustaqim (2015) did not explore the existential aspects in researching the metaphor of the flood and the symbolic meaning of Noah's story in Indonesian poetry. Septiani (2018) focused on theological and spiritual aspects rather than existential stages in researching the religiosity of three poems about the Prophet Noah including the poem *Nuh*. Hidayanti & Ahmadi (2022) did not use linguistic or stylistic analysis in examining Kierkegaard's existentialism in a novel, not poetry.

The research presented above has clear exploratory gaps, no study has yet combined Kierkegaard's existential theory with a stylistic analysis of *Nuh*, even though the poetry has linguistic richness and complexity. An interdisciplinary approach between literature, philosophy, and linguistics could be valuable in filling this gap. How existential meaning can be constructed through language could enable a stronger reading and a more comprehensive understanding through the unification of these perspectives.

This void is the focus of this study, which makes a new contribution by applying Kierkegaard's three levels of human existence, aesthetic, ethical, and religious, through a stylistic reading of Sutardji's poem *Nuh*. The conceptual framework and methodological approach are unique to this study. Conceptually, this study introduces existential stages that are rarely used in the analysis of modern Indonesian poetry. Methodologically, this study interprets philosophical meanings using stylistic tools that play a role in literary studies based on linguistics with a philosophical orientation.

The stories in the Qur'an and the Bible are adapted in the modern literary work "Nuh" (Noah) by Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, so this study not only broadens the meaning of the literary work being studied, but also explores the depth and complexity of the work itself (Sulthan & Wiajayatiningsih, 2024). Based on this description, the study uses stylistic analysis to describe the physical structure of Sutardji Calzoum Bachri's poem "Nuh" and uses Kierkegaard's philosophical perspective to interpret the representation of the three stages of human existence. The existence of these two approaches shows that language and literature not only function as tools of expression, but also as spaces for existential inquiry and philosophical reflection.

2. Methodology

This study uses qualitative descriptive methods to analyze and interpret the existential dimensions found in Sutardji Calzoum Bachri's poem *Nuh* through critical text analysis. Descriptive data produced in qualitative research consists of spoken words, written words, or observable behavior (Sugiyono, 2009; Suyanto, 2005). Meaning, context, and human experience are emphasized in this method. The explanation of the essence of qualitative research is reinforced by (Moleong, 2022) that the meaning of events experienced by research subjects is sought to be understood and presented in narrative form based on data obtained in a specific context. This research uses literary works as its object of analysis, requiring an interpretive method rather than quantification, making a qualitative approach appropriate for this research.

The right approach is very important to choose in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the text in literary research. An objective approach was chosen in this study because it views literary works as independent entities. This is as stated by Pradopo (2014) that independent text analysis without considering external influences such as the author's biography, reader reception, or socio-political background is the focus of the objective approach. The main analytical framework used in the

objective approach is structural theory. Structural theory is applied through stylistic analysis focusing on diction, figurative language, and imagery as elements that reveals symbolic meaning, which is then linked to Kierkegaard's existentialism to answer this research question: how does despair envelop belief in Nuh's poetry?

This study uses Sutardji Calzoum Bachri's poem *Nuh*, published in the poetry collection *O Amuk Kapak: Tiga Kumpulan Sajak*, published by Sinar Harapan in 1981, as the main source of data for the study. The poem was then analyzed as a complete text unit. Descriptive analysis was chosen as the data analysis technique in this study because it allows for detailed examination of the text. According to Sugiyono (2009) descriptive analysis is a method that involves the systematic interpretation of qualitative data to present a coherent understanding of a phenomenon. In the implementation of this research the researcher analyzed the data by categorizing stylistic elements and relating them to Kierkegaard's theory of existentialism namely the stages of aesthetics, ethics, and religion in human life. How the poem constructs meaning through language and philosophy is revealed through each element of the text that is identified and interpreted within the existential framework.

The disclosure of philosophical discourse contained in stylistic constructions means that this methodological approach is designed not only to describe the formal features of poetry. A layered reading of the text is offered in this study because the application of stylistic analysis with existential philosophy allows for this. This also plays a role in language and meaning in contemporary Indonesian literature with more nuanced interpretations.

Furthermore, the data collection technique in this study used the observation and note-taking technique. In this study, the poem that was the object of study was read carefully, then the poem was noted and read repeatedly. This reading technique carried out repeatedly, carefully, thoroughly, and with full understanding to understand the poetry that is the object of this study. After understanding the poem that is the object of the study, data related to the structure of the poem is classified according to the research objective to identify the structure of the poem that focuses on diction, style of language or figurative language, and imagery.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Result

At the initial stage, the stylistic analysis of the poem “Nuh” will focus on the physical structure in the form of aspects of diction, majas, and imagery that stand out in expressing the idea of existentialism in the poem “Nuh” by Sutardji Calzoum Bachri. The following is the poem “Nuh” by Sutardji Calzoum Bachri.

3.1.1. Physical Structure of Sutardji Calzoum Bachri's Poem “Nuh”

a. Diction

Diction is the poet's most basic and powerful tool for shaping meanings and tones. According to Pradopo (2014) diction refers to the deliberate selection of words that reflect the poet's thoughts and feelings. The diction in poetry is never accidental because words can form images, evoke emotions, and have symbolic meanings. The gloomy, chaotic, and spiritually empty atmosphere that resonates with existential anxiety is evoked by the diction that plays a central role in Sutardji Calzoum Bachri's poem *Nuh*. Natural symbols are frequently used in the diction of this poem not only descriptively but also through their connotative power to depict stages of despair. This is in line with Leech & Short (2007) statement that diction in poetry also functions as a means of thematic and emotional resonance conveying more than just literal meaning.

The first line begins with a contrasting description, */di tengah luka paya-paya/*. The phrase */paya-paya/* (swamp) refers to stagnant muddy water and serves as a symbol of nature that relates to both the physical world and internal psychological conditions. In the context of nature *paya-paya* indicates dampness, decay, and a situation of being trapped in an ecosystem where movement is difficult and appears limited. The word */luka/* (wound) combined with it gives the swamp metaphor an existential meaning. Luka is no longer interpreted literally but as a psychological condition of emotional wounds and sluggishness. Luka is not only related to the physical but also to unresolved trauma that festers in the swamp of consciousness. This shows an aesthetic stage based on Kierkegaard's perspective where individuals are trapped in feelings and momentary pleasures but cannot escape suffering. Individuals seem to be experiencing emotional suffering without moral and spiritual direction.

In the next line */lintah hitam makan bulan/* (black leeches eat the moon) the words used are even more contrasting and terrifying. The words */lintah/* (leech) and */bulan/* (moon) have strong symbolic meanings and are taken from nature. Leeches are parasitic creatures that generally feed on the blood of others without giving anything in return as if symbolizing corruption, dependence, and invisible violence. The moon traditionally symbolizes enlightenment, guidance, or presence (Jung, 1964). The action of */lintah hitam makan bulan/* shows a situation where light is eaten by darkness and meaning is eaten by nihilism resulting in a scene of cosmic desecration. Existential despair through this confrontation emerges and becomes the main theme in Kierkegaard's view namely the collapse of aesthetics in the form of beauty or pleasure that does not bring satisfaction but empty meaning (Kierkegaard, 1980, 1985; Westphal, 1996). The symbolic meaning of this light indicates a loss of faith and connection with God resulting in more than just a loss of orientation for the speaker.

The phrase */taklagi matari/* shows a mood of rejection with the elimination of the natural rhythm of day and night. The word */matari/* is the formal form of *matahari* (sun) which shows that life, continuity, and divine constancy. The absence of the sun shows the total darkness of hope. Clarity, warmth, and the promise of a new beginning have disappeared from the speaker. According to Kierkegaard shows that an individual's existential shift to the ethical stage namely awareness of despair and the search for moral responsibility. This line ultimately shows a longing to move beyond passive suffering and move towards an active search even though the darkness continues shows that the ethical transition is not yet complete.

The plea is further strengthened in the second stanza of this poem with the repetition of */tanah tanah / beri aku puncak/*. The repetition of the word */tanah/* (land) shows a heavy symbolism. Earth in this poem shows the material world and the lowliness of humanity namely the humiliating and oppressive suffering of the poet. The repetition shows despair and attachment to death. The poet continues with */beri aku puncak/* (give me the peak) a marker that is not only related to the physical contrast between earth and mountain but also to the spiritual. This displays a vertical voice for transcendence and redemption. There is a significant existential shift in this diction. The narrator is not falling into darkness but longing for an elevation similar to Kierkegaard's religious stage. The individual surrenders to a higher power by seeking meaning beyond the ethical limits of human will.

This poem has a style with dense semantics and a strong existentialism that is minimalist in nature using images of nature. Each word is poetically and philosophically intertwined with the other words. Despair, moral awareness, and spiritual longing are shown through metaphors of the journey of the soul depicted through */rawa/*, */lintah/*, */taklagi matari/*, and */beri aku puncak/*. This shows that the poem has entered a dense symbolic layer with detailed language that Sutardji deliberately uses to showcase the poetic side of human existence.

Through this perspective it is clear that the diction of the poem “Nuh” is not ordinary diction but shows a strong architectural in the form of existentialism. This indicates the poet's psychological decline, moral recognition, and hopes for salvation. Kierkegaard's existential framework when analyzed stylistically reveals that the diction contains a narrative about human suffering and spiritual struggle. This shows that Sutardji's poetry becomes a medium for modern existential consciousness using significant literary expressions.

b. Figurative Language (*Majas*)

The stylistic devices used by poets to convey ideas, emotions, and views in an imaginative and memorable way are figurative language or figures of speech. Pradopo (2014) explains that language used in a way that deviates from its original meaning in order to achieve a rhetorical or aesthetic effect is the definition of a figure of speech. The dominant figurative language in Sutardji Calzoum Bachri's poem Nuh such as metaphors and repetitions has created a strong existentialism and psychological atmosphere because it has a crucial function in the poem (Nurhayati, 2008; Simpson, 2004)

One of the primary devices suturing together the meaning of this material is metaphor a correspondence between two far-flung entities on the basis of apparent similarity in which no comparative words such as “like” or “as” are used. Different from simile that only states the comparison metaphor blends two concepts to produce a richer symbolic meaning (Nurhayati, 2008). There is a vivid metaphor in the first stanza of the poem, */di tengah luka paya-paya/*. The words */luka paya-paya/* do not mean an actual wound but refer to emotional damage. The word */paya-paya/* referring to a swamp or wetland is a murky, stagnant, and wet conditions. In combination with */luka/* the metaphor conjures up an idea of unhealed emotional wound which is still open undischarged and buried in pain (Lakoff, 1980; Pradopo, 2014).

This trope is a metaphor for the existential imprisonment of the speaker in Kierkegaard's aesthetic stage. During this phase people stew in a bath of self pity and aesthetic fluff without any real focus or ethical backbone. The swamp (*paya-paya*) is a spatial emblem of emotional stasis and psychic ambivalence as the bereaved never seems to rise out of grief.

The fourth and fifth lines of the first stanza contain the second metaphor, */jam ngucurkan / detak nanah/*. These lines create an uncomfortable metaphor by combining two things a concrete image and a frightening one. The word */jam/* (clock) traditionally indicates time and rhythm that has passed. The phrase */detak nanah/* (pus-like beat) creates discomfort in normative understanding. The poet combines the abstract measure of time */detak/* with */nanah/* which refers to infection, decay, and disease. Ultimately this metaphor implies that time has decayed, become corrupted, and contaminated.

This metaphor philosophically illustrates the decline of morals and spirituality. Generally time is a sign of progress but here it is a source of disease. According to Kierkegaard's terminology the pleasures and illusions of life eventually collapse into despair signaling a crisis at the end of the aesthetic stage. */Detak nanah/* is not only a disgusting image but also a symbol that the narrator wants to convey namely the reality of the present in the form of time that no longer heals but worsens and is full of decay and despair.

Repetition is the second main figurative device that serves to reinforce meaning or emotion either in the form of deliberate repetition of words or phrases. Nurhayati (2008) explains that a rhetorical strategy that shows the importance of a particular emotion or theme in a term by repeating it in a line or stanza is the definition of repetition. Repetition in the poem “Nuh” is found in the third line of the second stanza, */tanah tanah tanah/*. The three repetitions of the word */tanah/* (land) have several purposes.

Linguistically this repetition creates rhythm and emphasis. Semantically the word */tanah/* refers to the earth representing the material world and a place of surrender. The word */tanah/* also symbolizes humility and a connection with the Divine because it is the medium through which humans prostrate themselves in prayer when viewed spiritually. This sense of urgency, dedication, and surrender is reinforced by the three repetitions of the word */tanah/*. This piece talks about how much the need some kind of Divine help something that grows inside individuals.

Looking at it from a big picture view this moment is like moving into a more ethical and religious way of being. The way certain words are repeated shows a change happening inside not just someone talking tough. The writer goes through feeling really down looking for a way out and being open to grace. The word */tanah/* (land) isn't just poetry but it has a real meaning here. It shows a switch from just suffering to actually doing something about it as thinkers like Kierkegaard have talked about (Kierkegaard, 1985; Pradopo, 2014).

Sutardji's poem "Nuh" uses metaphors and repetition for a reason. Every part of it builds a complex picture of what it means to exist. The soul's fight against sadness, wrongdoing, and the search for meaning is shown through scary images of nature. The poet uses figurative language to dramatize and communicate this existential situation which is in line with Kierkegaard's three stages of human existence.

Readers not only imagine the narrator's world but also feel the spiritual burden through the combination of metaphors and repetitions. This stylistic analysis shows that poetry is more than just a narrative, it is capable of conveying a person's struggle to rise from the swamp of despair to the peak of faith thus becoming a kind of psychological theological testimony.

c. Imagery

Imagery is found in imagination and imagery in poetic verses. Imagery is divided into 8 forms, namely Imagery is found in imagination and imagery in poetic verses. Imagery is divided into 8 forms, namely vision, hearing, touch, smell, taste, motion, feeling, and intellectual imagery. There are three images found in the poem "Nuh" namely visual imagery, auditory imagery, and motion imagery.

First, visual imagery arises from a sense of sight or the eyes. The visual imagery in the poem "Nuh" is found in the first to third lines of the stanza, that is */di tengah luka paya-paya/ /lintah hitam makan bulan/ /taklagi matari/*. This quote describes a wound that is still suffering and darkness seems to eliminate light. The quote is a visual image because the light of the sun and moon that is replaced by black darkness can only be seen by the eyes and not by other senses.

Second, auditory imagery arises because it describes or mentions a sound. Auditory imagery in the poem "Nuh" is found in the fourth and fifth lines of stanza one, namely */jam ngucurkan/detak nanah/*. The quote is an auditory image because the phrase */ngucurkan detak/* shows the disclosure of sounds that can only be known with a sense of hearing

The third image is a motion imagery. This imagery appears in the phrase */jam ngucurkan/* (the clock drips) which is a form of kinesthetic imagery. This is evident in the phrase */ngucurkan/* which can be described as dripping an action of pouring. In this case the phrase */jam ngucurkan/* can be interpreted as time that continues to move and run out. This is followed by the term */detak nanah/* which is a form of auditory imagery expressing that a foul smelling fluidlike pus continues to drip in tandem with the decreasing ticking of the clock.

Imagery allows readers to have sensory experiences such as imagining scenes, sensations, and emotions through the use of descriptive, symbolic, and poetic language. Forms such as visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, kinesthetic, affective, and intellectual can be taken as imagery in poetry.

Imagery plays an important role in creating a sense of existential crisis and spiritual longing in the poem “Nuh” by Sutardji Calzoum Bachri. Visual and auditory imagery are the two most prominent of the eight types of imagery in this poem.

The first and most dominant image is the visual image related to the sense of sight. This image is found in the first three lines of the poem,

*/di tengah luka paya-paya/
/lintah hitam makan bulan/
/taklagi matari/*

These lines depict a visual image that is both frightening and dystopian. The phrase */di tengah luka paya-paya/* refers to a swamp that is damaged, murky, damp, overgrown with bushes, and stagnant giving rise to these mental images. This depiction not only creates a gloomy scene but also symbolizes the narrator's inner world which is emotionally and spiritually wounded. The use of */lintah hitam makan bulan/* combines the light of the moon and the presence of leeches eating it creating a terrifying contrast. This line visually dramatizes the loss of guidance, purity, or divine presence which is depicted as a celestial object being eaten by a parasitic creature. The last line */taklagi matari/* (no more sun) means the poetry world has gone dark and hopeless (Kierkegaard, 2019; Pradopo, 2014).

Through these symbolically depicted visual elements Kierkegaard illustrates the aesthetic stage of existentialism. At this stage a person is immersed in superficial situations such as beauty or sadness thus distancing themselves from ethics and spirituality. The dominance of depictions of darkness indicates a moment of existential collapse and a soul groping in darkness without light or direction.

The second image in this poem is an auditory image related to the sense of sight. This is evident in the fourth and fifth lines.

*/jam ngucurkan/
/detak nanah/*

The phrase */jam ngucurkan/* (clock dripping) refers to a strange and terrifying auditory effect namely the sound of a clock dripping or leaking. The phrase contains a deviation from the sound that is commonly found in clocks namely “tick-tock” thus presenting a slow, continuous, and painful flow of time. Time is described as something that bleeds and drips thus contributing to the tone of the poem. The line */detak nanah/* (pus beating) contains a combination of the words */detak/* (beat or tick) and */nanah/* (pus) which is associated with infection or decay. These two words together create a creepy sound picture of time ticking away but rotting from the inside.

This auditory image not only makes things feel more uneasy and anxious but also makes the inner conflict clearer. Time which we usually think of as neutral is given sounds, textures, and a sense of decay. This shows the poet sees time as something messed up and heavy not just a straight line. This shift from sadness to disgust fits with the ethical stage where a person gets real about their situation and the weight of living.

The poem “Nuh” uses visual and additive imagery to really draw you into this breakdown of existence. Readers can almost hear the collapse and the spiritual decay so it's not just about a dark world. These sensory details really back up what the writer is going through both mentally and philosophically. They make the deep personal struggle something you can almost see and hear just like Kierkegaard described when individuals move from just suffering to actually understanding themselves.

The imagery in Sutardji's poem "Nuh" is not merely descriptive but also experiential. Through carefully selected visual and auditory symbols the poem immerses the reader in a world that is spiritually wounded, morally ambiguous, and desperately searching for light. The use of imagery enhances the poem's existential message that in the absence of divine clarity (*matari*) and with the erosion of time's integrity (*detak nanah*), human beings are left in a symbolic */paya-paya/* a swamp where despair and hope meet in confrontation.

3.1.2. Kierkegaard's Existentialism in Sutardji Calzoum Bachri's "Nuh"

This part contains the results of three levels of human existence that found in the Sutardji Calzoum Bachri's poem, "Nuh". Three levels of human existence are aesthetic, ethical, and religion.

a. Aesthetic existence

Aesthetic existence is characterized by the absence of generally accepted moral standards, awareness, and beliefs in religious values. The pattern of aesthetic existence in the poem "Nuh" can be found throughout stanza one. The first and second lines, namely */ di tengah luka paya-paya/ /lintah hitam makan bulan/* show the situation at one of the worst times faced by humans, which is marked by wet wounds still suffering. The situation is reinforced by the third line, */taklagi matari/*, which shows when light appears to be sucked by black darkness. The third to fifth lines, */taklagi matari/*, */jam ngucurkan/*, */detak nanah/*, show the conditions of total darkness that occurred at that time so that the clock as a symbol of time released something disgusting.

Based on the above explanation the situation is in line with the first level of human existence namely aesthetic existence. The situation when humans are in darkness, hurt, and despair is caused by the absence of morals. Under this condition humans cannot find a way to eliminate despair, except to step into the next level of existence. Sutardji tries to illustrate the complicated conditions that humans often face by presenting a parable story of Noah and his people conquering a flash flood. A disaster brought about by God warns people who neglect Him.

The first stage is characterized by a lack of moral responsibility, spiritual awareness, and ethical involvement which is referred to as aesthetic existence. Kierkegaard explains that at this stage a person does not think about the meaning or consequences of their actions so they pursue instant gratification or fall into emotions and despair. They live in denial or aesthetic illusion avoiding commitment and responsibility.

This stage is clearly illustrated in the first stanza of the poem "Nuh" which describes a world submerged in chaos, darkness, and inner suffering. This creates a world in existential crisis with a powerful image. The phrase */luka paya-paya/* depicts the rottenness of emotional wounds in a stagnant and muddy space and hints at psychological paralysis and emotional stagnation. This shows the state of the human soul that cannot be healed because it is trapped in unresolved pain just like a swamp.

The second line reads */lintah hitam makan bulan/* depicting a black leech eating the moon which is a representation of the loss of light whether dramatic, literal, or symbolic. The moon which is usually associated with divine beauty is then destroyed by parasitic forces showing how aesthetic existence consumes its own meaning. Darkness envelops an individual after the light that once served as a guide has been swallowed up.

The third line reads */taklagi matari/* further reinforcing the visual darkness created by the statement that there is no more sun. The collapse of hope, clarity, and transcendence implied by this total darkness reinforces the idea that the speaker is trapped in a world without direction. This point in Kierkegaardian terms is a condition where despair is inevitable and aesthetic existence begins to crumble.

The following lines:

/jam ngucurkan/, /detak nanah/

Time that has been contaminated is described using the metaphor of a */jam/* that releases */detak nanah/* (the sound of pus-filled ticking). Time is no longer seen as progress or healing but as something that causes damage. This shows temporal corruption which is the idea that life lived without an ethical foundation makes time meaningless and rebellious.

The poem produces a tone of aesthetic despair through these lines. The individual is trapped in suffering surrounded by fear and unable to escape the darkness that afflicts them. According to Kierkegaard individuals in this stage often display beauty or illusion as a distraction to hide their despair. Ultimately after facing inner collapse the individual must make a decision to remain in despair or to begin the journey towards ethical existence.

Based on this context, it can be seen that Sutardji's poem "Nuh" shows collective spiritual failure so it doesn't just show personal suffering. The story of Noah and his people ignoring God's warnings is told in this poem just like in the Quran and the Bible. Their spiritual blindness in rejecting guidance is symbolized by darkness and flooding in line with the aesthetic suffering found in this poem. Divine retribution for a society immersed in moral apathy is depicted by the flood itself which can be interpreted as the result of aesthetic ignorance.

Thus, it can be understood that the aesthetic presence in "Nuh" is not only about despair but also a theological critique of human negligence and a warning about the consequences that can occur in life when one strays from ethical and spiritual truth. This poem also provides a place for transition to the next existential level which is when individuals must face the need for responsibility, repentance, and moral adjustment.

b. Ethical existence

The second stage of human existence according to Kierkegaard is ethical existence by a shift from a life of despair and irresponsibility to a life of moral awareness, responsibility for oneself, and deliberate choices. Individuals at this stage begin to accept the consequences of their actions and make decisions based on ethical reflection. Individuals have to start living their lives based on their own beliefs and duties not just reacting with emotions.

Here's how Sutardji Calzoum Bachri's poem "Nuh" changes in the second stanza.

/tanah tanah tanah/

The word */tanah/* (land) is repeated for a reason. It literally means the physical ground or the earth but in this poem it means more. The earth becomes a symbol of bowing down, giving up, being humble, and finding spiritual understanding. This repetition shows a shift from chaos to deep thought from emotional sadness to thinking about right and wrong or emotional despair to ethical consideration.

The word */tanah/* being repeated three times isn't an accident but it's a statement. This is a big moment in the poem because it marks a change in how a person sees their existence. The plea made stronger by the repetition isn't just about passively acknowledging suffering but actively responding to it. The individual in the poem has chosen a path by grounding himself in the earth which represents prayer, ethics, and self control. He is no longer stuck in sadness or the messed up flow of time.

Kierkegaard would say these lines show a move from aimless sadness to taking responsibility. Suffering doesn't just disappear when someone reaches this ethical stage but they actively try to deal with it by thinking about morals and having spiritual determination. The narrator of "Nuh" realizes they can't stay in the dark and has to make choices based on their own moral compass not just instincts or feelings.

This ethical existence of living also has a wider meaning. The triple repetition of */tanah/* creates a rhythm, a feeling of importance, and seriousness much like the ritual of prayer in many religions. The humility to admit weaknesses and the honesty to ask for guidance are part of spiritual ethics.

So these short lines in the poem show a move from just reacting to suffering to actively committing to moral action which is what the ethical existence. The poetic figure no longer runs away from pain but kneels before it and faces it with respect and determination. He has become an agent of spiritual responsibility no longer just a victim of chaos. Ultimately this shows a transition towards the highest form of existence namely the religious stage.

c. Religious existence

Religious existence according to Kierkegaard is the final and highest stage of human existence. Total surrender to God and recognition of human limitations through a leap of faith that can only be felt personally or spiritually are the hallmarks of this stage. The individual is no longer dependent on ethical or moral reasoning but has entered into a personal relationship with the Divine an existence that has found fulfillment through faith, repentance, and hope.

The religious stage in Sutardji Calzoum Bacjri's poem "Nuh" is found in the last two lines of the second stanza.

*/beri aku puncak/
/untuk mulai lagi berpijak!/*

After stylistic analysis these lines show the peak of an existential journey after passing through despair and ethical awareness. The phrase */beri aku puncak/* (give me the peak) contains a strong metaphor. The word */puncak/* (peak) does not only mean the literal peak but also indicates a spiritual harbor namely a moment of transcendence and the end of struggle. These lines show the poet's deep wish for Divine freedom after a long time in darkness and facing moral challenges. */Puncak/* (peak) symbolizes finding peace after a messy time leading to spiritual clarity.

The next line */untuk mulai lagi berpijak/* (to start standing again) talks about a fresh start a new life. This line shows a spiritual rebirth but it's not just about getting better physically. It means a person gives themselves over completely, accepting the strength to rise again, and becoming whole before God. This is Kierkegaard's idea of religious existence where suffering turns into meaning through a connection with the Divine.

These lines have a tone that quietly shifts from asking for help to feeling close. The narrator humbly asks for things and has a private talk with God just as Kierkegaard described. The essence of religious existence is the existence of existential solitude where the individual faces God as a unique individual. The individual has entered into an infinite relationship between humans and the Divine so that they no longer depend on social norms (aesthetic level) or ethical norms (ethical level).

The command */beri aku/* (give to me) used by Sutardji reinforces how fragile this existence is. The speaker has openly depended on divine grace so that he is no longer independent. On the other hand the phrase */untuk mulai lagi berpijak/* (to start standing again) indicates a new beginning of

religious existence. This shows active renewal based on faith according to Kierkegaard's stages of religious development. The individual has accepted the paradox of complete surrender to God and found meaning after taking a leap of faith.

In this context the poem "Nuh" can be understood as existential development seen as a compressed allegory. This poem maps the stages of human transformation according to Kierkegaard through symbols such as swamps, darkness, earth, and culminating in a spiritual ascension. Religious existence is presented poetically, personally, and linguistically so that it no longer appears abstract or dogmatic. This shows that the stylistic resources in poetry are capable of representing philosophical power and spiritual truth.

3.3. Discussion

"Nuh" is one of Sutardji Calzoum Bachri's poems in the poetry O Amuk Kapak: Tiga Kumpulan Sajak. The poems that gives the unique language and also stirring the soul. In that poems Sutardji presents a structure that does not conform to normative linguistic analysis but rather to words that function as mantras, sounds, and rhythms. The stylistic freedom is woven into a symbolic content that produces an aesthetic effect containing existential aspects by that poems. Based on Kierkegaard's existentialism this poem contains a representation of humans trapped in absurdity and anxiety striving to find their existence through faith.

This study is related to previous research written by Septiani in her thesis entitled "Tiga Puisi Tentang Kisah Nabi Nuh: Kajian Religiositas dalam Puisi". In that article, Sutardji's poem "Nuh" gives readers the freedom to interpret the imagery and language in the poem as a reflection of the journey of life in the search for God filled with mystery and struggle. Additionally, Hidayanti & Ahmadi (2022) analyzed the novel *Hingga Pantai Seberang* by Aquaria Kharisma Putri using Kierkegaard's existentialist philosophy. The study revealed that humans are beings who need and are always accompanied by God in every step of their lives. This is evident in the main character of the study who seeks certainty in life through marriage. This reflects the aesthetic stage in Kierkegaard's existential philosophy. When the main character begins to believe in and to praise God, it is the religious stage, and the main character's despair over his unhappy life is a form of the ethical stage.

Based on these two articles we know that "Nuh" is one of the poems written by Sutardji Calzoum Bachri and is a unique object of study. This poem contains elements of freedom and reflects human life in the search for God or divinity to achieve happiness. Based on the two previous studies and this article, Kierkegaard's existentialism can be used to find answers about existence in the object of study. This is based on the three levels of human existence categorized by Kierkegaard namely aesthetic, ethical, and religious. In addition, Kierkegaard's existentialism can also reveal the transformation of self-identity to reflect individual existence.

The poem "Nuh" by Sutardji Calzoum Bachri has an intriguing combination of form namely the words and style used with the meaning in a literary work. Stylistic devices are not only used as aesthetic appeal but also to understand how existentialism works. Through the repetition of diction that appears like a mantra and the freedom of the poem's rhythm, the narrator shows that he is experiencing internal confusion and despair. This also draws the reader into Kierkegaard's psychological anxiety of aesthetic existence.

Existentialism in "Nuh" is contained in language that functions on various symbolic levels which shows that language operates in a complex manner. The language in "Nuh" contains diction that seems to harshly question human existence. For example the swamp is symbolized as a symbol of despair that traps individuals in a state of emotional paralysis so that the swamp is not just a geographical

element. The use of imagery such as black leeches eating the moon shows light and meaning interpreted paradoxically in the midst of the impossibility of the situation. This presents a metaphor that unfavorable or parasitic realities often eat away at hope. This situation not only creates visualization in the sense of sight but also a space in the heart that can feel it. Then awareness is able to rise to understand the existential meaninglessness and crisis of faith that can frighten humans.

Metaphors and repetition as figurative language in this poem serve as instruments that indicate a movement from passive suffering in the form of futility towards active action in facing reality. The word *land* which is repeated three times emphasizes the transition from the ethical stage according to Soren Kierkegaard so that it is not merely a matter of rhythm. This repetition shows a strong foundation of humility and commitment to moral obligations in human existence. The ethical stage is emphasized by the repetition which then creates an atmosphere like a ritual prayer thus serving not only as a personal inner foundation for an individual but also as a reinforcement of a community's religious relationship when going through suffering together.

The poem when it reaches its final section contains a plea to the summit thus presenting a point of transcendence and complete religious surrender. This indicates a significant moment of spiritual elevation namely when the individual understands that faith as described by Kierkegaard is the only option for escaping existential despair. Through the command *give me the peak* and the call to stand up again it is the perfect ending to a leap of faith. It describes a firm decision to create a new self as a whole existence by choosing to rise from a bad condition and embrace something absolute or infinite in the midst of a worldly life full of uncertainty.

A new contribution of this analysis in the context of Indonesian literary studies is the application of Kierkegaard's existential framework to poetry with stylistic analysis as a bridge between literary aesthetics and philosophical hermeneutics. Previous studies have discussed religiosity and Kierkegaardian themes in prose while this study highlights how existential transformation is represented by the language of poetry thereby enriching both fields. The poem's power to make spiritual journeys feel real through language is why it resonates with everyone. Its symbolic language makes readers think about their own struggles. This symbolic language also shows how great poetry is at explaining complicated human experiences beyond just religious rules. In the end "Nuh" shows a timeless conversation between literature and philosophy explaining how style helps us grasp faith, despair, and hope.

4. Conclusion

This study shows that looking at style especially diction, figurative language, and imagery, has revealed the existential themes in Sutardji Calzoum Bachri's poem "Nuh". The human journey in this poem which goes through Kierkegaard's three stages of existence namely aesthetic despair, ethical awareness, and having religious faith is shown through symbols and metaphors. "Nuh" describes a spiritual change from darkness and despair to moral duty ending with giving oneself or faith to God.

Diction like */paya-paya/* (swamp), */lintah/* (leeches), */bulan/* (moon), */matari/* (sun), and */tanah/* (land) represent nature and life standing for human struggling through darkness, wrongdoing, and hoping for a fresh start. Readers will be encouraged to engage in spiritual and moral reflection through the metaphors and repetitions in the poem "Nuh". The atmosphere of the poem is further enhanced by visual and auditory imagery.

Kierkegaard's existential philosophy in literary style analysis not only broadens the interpretation of the poem "Nuh" but also understands poetic language as a philosophical medium used by poets. The analysis conducted shows cultural and religious references used in the poem "Nuh" which are

related to questions about human existence, suffering, and hope. Readers are invited to reflect on their existential conditions through the symbolic language of this poem making it a significant contribution to literary research and existential thought.

Kierkegaard's existentialism which consists of three stages namely aesthetic, ethical, and religious is present in the lines of "Nuh". The aesthetic stage is present in the first stanza through the depiction of darkness or despair that traps humans and the absence of morality that destroys. The ethical stage is present in the third line of the second stanza through the depiction of human control to choose evil and good by using the symbol /*tanah*/ (land) as a place to prostrate and ask for God's help. The religious stage as the final stage is present in the fourth and fifth lines of the second stanza through the depiction of humans drawing closer to God by asking for the opportunity to start life again.

Based on the analysis that has been conducted it can be concluded that this poem depicts the journey of human existence after passing through darkness towards moral awareness and sincere prayer. The process of spiritual transformation from darkness to surrender to God is contained in the poem "Nuh." This poem ultimately becomes a symbol of humanity's struggle against darkness in order to obtain the light of hope, self-surrender, and a spiritual relationship with God.

This study which focuses on the poem "Nuh" by Sutardji Calzoum Bachri and focuses on physical structures such as diction, figurative language, and imagery that lead to Kierkegaard's three stages of existence namely aesthetic, ethical, and religious has weaknesses. The researchers hope that future studies will bring in other ideas to broaden and make literary principles richer.

Future research can build on semiotics studies. Looking at things this way will help us really get the codes, hidden meanings, and symbolic connections to figure out what it all means for our existence. It will also show the complicated link between language and philosophy in poetry. Comparing this work to other poems both Indonesian and global will make this interdisciplinary approach more far reaching. Ultimately the poem "Nuh" proves how powerful poetry is at showing what it means to be human in the struggle from despair to faith and showing its ability to transform and surrender spiritually.

REFERENCES

- Abrams, M. H. (1999). *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (7th ed.). Heinle & Heinle.
- Aveling, H. (2001). *Secrets Need Words: Indonesian Poetry 1966–1998*. Ohio University Center for International Studies.
- Bahri, S. C. (1981). *O Amuk O Kapak*. Sinar Harapan.
- Cypriani, R. (2023). *Eksistensialisme Kierkegaard: Spiritualitas, Keputusan, dan Iman dalam Filsafat Kehidupan*. Penerbit Pelita Hati.
- Eagleton, T. (2008). *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Anniversary). University of Minnesota Press.
- Hidayanti, A. , & Ahmadi, A. (2022). Novel Hingga Pantai Seberang Karya Aquarina Kharisma Putri (Kajian Filsafat Eksistensialisme S. Kierkegaard) [Thesis, Universitas Negeri Surabaya]. In *Bapala* (Vol. 9, Issue 2). <https://ejournal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/bapala/article/view/45236>
- Jannah, A. F., & Fathurrosyid. (2024). Teologi Bencana dalam Perpesktif Al-Qur'an. *Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir*, 3(1), 68–88. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.59005/jsqt.v3i1.538>
- Jung, C. G. (1964). *Man and His Symbols*. Aldus Books.
- Kierkegaard, S. (1980). *The Sickness unto Death*. Princeton University Press.
- Kierkegaard, S. (1987). *Either/Or*. Princeton University Press.
- Kierkegaard, S. (2019). *Olympic Aspirations* (J. A. Mangan & M. Dyreson, Eds.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203720356>
- Lakoff, G. J. M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. University of Chicago Press.

- Leech, G. N. , & Short, M. H. (2007). *Style in Fiction* (2nd ed.). Pearson Longman.
- Moleong, L. J. (2022). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif (Edisi Revisi)*. Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Mustaqim, A. (2015). Teologi Bencana dalam Perspektif Al-Qur'an. *Nun: Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Tafsir Di Nusantara, 1*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.32495/nun.v1i1.9>
- Nurhayati, A. M. (2008). *Stilistika: Teori dan Aplikasi dalam Kajian Puisi*. UIN Maliki Press.
- Pattison, G. (2005). *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*. McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Pradopo, R. D. (2014). *Pengkajian Puisi*. Gajah Mada University Press.
- Santosa, P. (2003). *Bahtera Kandas di Bukit: Kajian Semiotika Sajak-Sajak Nuh*. PT Tiga Serangkai Pustaka Mandiri.
- Septiani, D. (2018). Tiga Puisi tentang Kisah Nabi Nuh: Kajian Religiositas dalam Puisi. *BAHA STRA: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia, 3*(1), 31–41. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30743/bahastra.v3i1.703>
- Simpson, P. (2004). *Stylistics: A resource book for students*. Routledge.
- Sugiyono. (2009). *Metode penelitian pendidikan: Pendekatan kuantitatif, kualitatif dan R&D*. Alfabeta.
- Sulthan, F., & Wijayatiningsih, T. D. (2024). *An Intertextual Analysis of "Menombak Matahari", "Sarpakuda", and Babad Mangir Suradipura* (Vol. 7) <https://doi.org/10.52429/selju.v7i1.44>
- Suyanto. (2005). *Metode penelitian kualitatif dalam pendidikan*. . LaksBang Pressindo.
- Verdonk, P. (2002). *Stylistics*. Oxford University Press.
- Webb, Jr., J. L. A. (2008). *Humanity's Burden*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511808401>
- Westphal, M. (1996). *Becoming a self: A reading of Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Purdue University Press.
- Wright, C. J. H. (2006). *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's grand narrative*. InterVarsity Press.
- Zaidan, A. R. (n.d.). *Melayu dalam Sastra Indonesia: Studi Satardji Calzoum Bachri*.