

## PORTRAIT OF NOTHINGNESS THROUGH THE CHARACTERIZATION OF GREGOR IN KAFKA'S *THE METAMORPHOSIS*

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### ABSTRACT

The researcher used Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* because the story in that novel contained the concept of existentialism, namely nothingness which was experienced by the main character, Gregor. The objectives of this research were for describing the characterization of Gregor in that novel, and analyzing Gregor's representation of nothingness in that novel. In this research, the researcher used the descriptive qualitative to analyze the data which was depend on the statements of the problem. On the other hands, the researcher also used two data resources; they were library and internet resources. From this research, the researcher found Gregor's characterization which told about the way of understanding about his characteristics. Those were negative characteristics which were represented through direct and indirect method. Moreover, the researcher found Gregor's nothingness or non-being because he had negative characteristics in himself. As long as he experienced that position, he was incapable to conduct the job. Instead, he refused his existence, and he preferred to live by locking himself in his room, exactly under the mattress. Thus, his parents and his sister could not meet and find him anytime to make him free as human being.

**Keywords:** Existentialism, Nothingness, *The Metamorphosis*, Characteristic, Characterization.

In nineteenth century, World War II had been executed by some countries in Europe and Africa while Germany acquired a victory in various domain as those continents. At that time, people who were not from Germany prayed and made group in order to bore down Germany, but that objective was failed. Despite those people made a group, Germany still got a victory so people broke from a group and did not believe that a man existed in a group but concentrated as individual man. At that time, the German job of France reinforced the existential that impinges on liberty, responsibility and demise (Reynolds, 2006: 1). That belief about human existence had become a philosophy that was carried by some philosophers, it called as Existentialism.

Sartre was the main philosopher or thinker who carries a doctrine of existentialism that deal with human existence, namely being and non-being or nothingness. they are the concepts of existence to explain the basis tendency of human existence. Sartre in Barnes' book (1953: xiv) said that being is the appearance indicates to the total sequence of appearances and not to a concealed reality which would drain to itself. It means that human presents by making him

visible just like conscious subject, be active, and can be processed without concealing a reality. Meanwhile, Sartre in Barnes' book states, "For negation is a refusal of existence" (1953: 11). It means, in nothingness, human conducts a negation on his existence and cannot be processed.

The researcher prefers to choose *The Metamorphosis* because is one of the most interesting and memorable novel which has been written by Franz Kafka in 1912, and published in 1915 by European Graduate School (Stephens, 2010). Franz kafka is the German language author of novels and short stories whose stories are related with his experience. Moreover, there has not been a previous researcher who took this novel as an object of research that analyzes about "nothingness".

This research has some purposes which depend to the research questions. The first purpose is to describe the characterization of Gregor in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, and the second purpose is to analyze Gregor's representation of nothingness in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*.

## 1. Review of Related Literature

**Character** is the fictional representation of a person, which is likely to change, both as a presence in literature and as an object of critical attention, and much as it changes in society (Childs, 2006: 36). Then, according to Baldick's statement that character is a sort of prose sketch concisely depicting some recognizable type of person in tale and dramatic opus (2001: 37). From those statements, the researcher concludes about character that the type person (people, animals, or objects) who is represented in a play of tale and the act can be change depend on the story.

**Characterization** is the way of author to make vivid, believable characters in an art (Bonn, 2010: 27). Besides that, House (1990:166) says, "characterization is the manner in which an author presents purposeful, realistic, appropriate and consistent characters". Thus, Characterization is the method of a writer in a literary element and can be applied in dramatic of art or everyday conversation which shows purposeful, obvious, suitable character, and also can be depicted by some ways, they are direct and indirect methods. According to Abram's statement that telling or direct method means, the author interference authoritatively to illuminate, to assess, the reason and quality of the character (1999: 33). Meanwhile In showing (dramatic or indirect method), There are some methods to make easy the reader for

inferring the character, such as from the character's speech, from character's thoughts, from the effect on others toward the character, from character's action, from character's look (International Reading Association, 2004: 1).

**Existentialism** is a philosophy or doctrine that teaches a man existence. Based on Bonn's statement (2010: 58), existentialism constitutes a most twentieth-century philosophy related with the nature and idea of human presence. Then, As Sartre says (2007: 22), "*existence precedes essence*". The meaning from that statement is an existence of being (human) comes before the essence, human first exists, find himself, emerges in the world, and then he defines himself who he is. In existentialism, there are two concepts of human existence, they are being and non-being or nothingness. **Being** is a format of human existence which refers to a human subjectness. Sartre in Barnes' book (1953: xiv) said that being is the appearance indicates to the total sequence of appearances and not to a concealed reality which would drain to itself. It means that human presents by making him visible just like conscious subject, be active, and can be processed without concealing a reality because he experiences a sense of being or comprehends fully about existence.

**Non-being or nothingness** is a format of human existence which refers to a human objectness. The sorts of human objectness are death, the necessity to make a choice and bear a responsibility, isolated, and so on. Sartre in Barnes' book states, "For negation is a refusal of existence" (1953: 11). It means, in nothingness, human conducts a negation on his existence and cannot be processed because he lacks of his existence up to fell separated with essence. Furthermore, Sartre in Spade's book states, "nothingness or non-being is to be viewed as something outside being, something separated from being" (1996:124).

Sartre in Barner's book defines that nothingness constitutes the conceptual totality of negative opinion, cannot possess the slightest trace of fact (1953: 6-7). On the other hand, "the concept of nothingness will be understood as merely the 'unity' of all negative judgment" Sartre (Gardner, 2009: 63). Apparently nothingness has the concept that can be mentioned based on Sartre in Barnes (1953: xxv) as; (1) applying the concept in the type of negative interpretation to the last fact. (2) Presenting the loss of personality or characteristics. (3) Giving an illogical copy to the entire experience.

## 2. Method

3. This research uses descriptive qualitative method because the contain of this research is only expalanation form, there is not related with number and statistical approach. Moreover, the data of this research is taken from some sentences and dialogue from the character in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* that has been translated by Ian Johnston in English. It was published in 1999 by Malaspina University College Nanaimo through Planet PDF (2015). On the other hands, the data is also collected from library and internet resources. **Analysis**

In this topic, the researcher describes the analysis of the research to answer the problems in previous chapter. Firstly, the researcher describes the analysis of characterization that is shown from Gregor in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. Secondly, the researcher describes the analysis of Gregor's characterization that represents nothingness in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*.

#### 4.1 The Depiction of Gregor's Characterization

##### 4.1.1 Gregor Has Less Intelligence

The first characterization of Gregor, he has less intelligent. It can be seen from two quotations below.

He was the boss' minion, without backbone or intelligence. Well then, what if he reported in sick? But that would be extremely embarrassing and suspicious, because during his five years' service Gregor hadn't been sick even once. (Kafka, 1915: 6)

She was clever. She had already cried while Gregor was still lying quietly on his back. And the manager, this friend of the ladies, would certainly let himself be guided by her. (*Ibid*, 27)

Both quotations have similar method of understanding the character that is direct method. It is like House's statement that characterization constitutes the way of an author to point out purposeful, evident, suitable and constant character (1990: 166).

From those quotations, the author gives evident description about the characteristic of Gregor, so the reader knows about him. At the first quotation, Gregor's characteristic is found with the word "backbone or intelligence". Those words mean, Gregor has a good position as the boss' minion in his workplace but he has less intelligence to occupy that position until he feels incapable with the job. Then, at the second quotation, Gregor is also depicted as a man who has less intelligence. Yet, the author explains it by showing his sister's characteristic

which has been proved with the words “she was clever” and “let himself be guided by her”. That quite refers if Gregor has less intelligence than his sister. Therefore, the manager suggested him to be guided by his sister. So, from the quotations above, Gregor can be called as a man who has less intelligence.

### 3.1.2 Gregor is Depicted as a Lazy Man

The second characterization of Gregor is as a lazy man which can be shown by the author clearly just like the excerpt below.

The boss would certainly come with the doctor from the health insurance company and would reproach his parents for *their lazy son* and cut short all objections with the insurance doctor’s comments; for him everyone was completely healthy *but really lazy about work*. (Kafka, 1915: 6, my italic)

That excerpt is connected with Abram’s statement that telling or direct method means, the author interference authoritatively to illuminate, to assess, the reason and quality of the character (1999: 33).

From researcher’s italic words, the author describes authoritatively if Gregor is depicted as lazy man about work. His characteristic is indicated from the boss when he will go to Gregor’s home and he intends to call down his parents for Gregor’s laziness in his work. With the result that his parents know about their son’s bad characteristic that is appraised in good value by their view. Therefore, Gregor in this case has been named by lazy man.

### 4.1.3 Gregor is a Nonchalant Man

Moreover, the researcher has found in the third characterization of Gregor in the story. It can be will be appeared in the following excerpt.

“So can Mr.Manager come in to see you now” asked his father impatiently and knocked once again on the door. “No,” said Gregor. (Kafka, 1915: 16)

That excerpt above is related with the theory from Bonn. According to Bonn’s statement said that indirect or dramatic method is applied in the direct presentation of speech, thoughts, or character’s actions, and other characters’ responses to the character (2010: 27).

Gregor’s characterization tells about his characteristic through indirect method. Since, his characteristic is described from other character’s response, namely his father. From his father’s response makes the reader know how Gregor is. Gregor here is depicted as

nonchalant man with the situation around him which is belonging to his father's talk. Whereas, his father only wants to ask permission that the manager would come in to his room, but he does not pay attention with it. That is the reason why Gregor is indicated in nonchalant man.

#### **4.1.4 Gregor does not Have Self-Confidence**

The fourth Gregor's characterization may be appeared in direct way. It will be seen in the following data.

Gregor wanted to answer in detail and explain everything, but in these circumstances he confined himself to saying, 'Yes, yes thank you mother. I'm getting up right away.' (Kafka, 1915: 7)

The data above is strengthened by Baldick's theory. Baldick says, "Characterization may belong to direct method like the attribution of qualities in description or commentary (2001: 37).

The characterization of Gregor here is carried out by the statement of the author. Based on the statement above, Gregor is depicted as a man who has not self-confident. When his mother called him to go to the workplace, he confines himself to reply his mother's voice. For the reason, he has queer voice that can hamper his self-confident to talk with his mother. Therefore, he does not want to make her suspicious with him, because his queer voice is caused with an irrepressibly painful. Therefore, Gregor has been named as a man who has not self-confident.

#### **4.1.5 Gregor is a Pessimist**

The first characterization of Gregor emerges in the following datum through direct method.

Now, quite apart from the fact that the doors were locked, should he really call out for help? In spite of all his distress, he was unable to suppress a smile at this idea. (Kafka, 1915: 12)

The quotation above is encouraged with a theory which has compatibility each other. According to Abrams' statement that telling or direct method, the reason and placement quality of the character is explained and appraised by the writer's interference (1999: 33-34). That quotation gives verification about the similar Gregor's characterization with the previous characterization that is pessimist man. That characterization has been seen from direct method, because it has emerged by author statement explicitly. Gregor can be called as pessimist man when he isolates himself from the fact that the door is locked but he is instead confused to face that fact. Then he thinks if he wants to ask the aid but he is afraid to do it.

That description proves that Gregor can be named with pessimist man. **4.1.6 Gregor Always Hides Himself from Others**

The sixth characterization of Gregor will appear in dramatic method. It can be seen from the following data.

“Gregor,” a voice called (it was his mother!) “it’s quarter to seven. Don’t you want to be in your way?” the soft voice! Gregor was startled when he heard his voice answering. (Kafka, 1915: 7)

At the other side door, however, his sister knocked lightly. “Gregor? Are you alright? Do you need anything?” Gregor directed answer in both directions, “I’ll be ready right away.” (*Ibid*, 8)

“Gregor,” his father now said from the neighbouring room on the left, “Mr. Manager has come and is asking why you have not left on the early train. (*Ibid*, 14)

Three data above has been given countenance with characterization theory. Abrams said that:

In showing (dramatic or indirect method), the author easily represents the characters saying and measuring and allows the reader to infer the reason and placement that fib backside what they talk and do. The author may point out not only external utterances and actions, but also a character’s inner thoughts, feelings, and responsiveness to phenomena that is for a highly evolved style such as inner showing (1999: 33-34).

Based on those data, the characterization of Gregor is obtained from other characters saying just like; his mother, father, and sister. They try to speak with him in turn. Afterwards, their speaking have backside meaning to uncover Gregor’s behavior (confining himself in the room) by asking him to open the door and come out of the room. But all their demands have not anything because he prefers to engage himself from other people. Thus, Gregor in this case has a characteristic that he always hides himself from others.

**4.1.7 Gregor is an Irresponsible Man**

The last Gregor’s characterization can be appeared in showing method. It will be seen in the following data.

“Otherwise how would Gregor miss a train! The young man has nothing in his head except business. I’m almost angry that he never goes out at night.” (Kafka, 1915: 15)

Based on quotation above, Bonn (2010: 27) stated that there is a variety of ways to recognize the character’s characteristic; it includes the direct presentation of the speech, thoughts, or actions of the character, and the responses of other characters to the character.

Gregor's characterization in this point can be identified from the direct presentation of the speech which is uttered by his mother. She talks about Gregor's responsibility of work that has been ignored by him. Because of his characteristic, his mother is surprised with the motive why he conducts a bad thing. So, that is the description of Gregor's characterization as irresponsible man.

#### **4.2 Gregor's Characterization that Represents Nothingness**

The next problem in this research is the representation of Gregor's nothingness. This problem will be answered in this point in a series which is based on the answer of the previous problem. Anyway, the representation of Gregor's nothingness is caused by his characteristics that he has. Therefore, his nothingness is an effect from his characteristics. This point gives many examples of Gregor's nothingness by emerging some data to support the problem.

Here is the first example of Gregor's nothingness which is caused with his less intelligence. It can be seen in the first quotation below.

It would not have come as a surprise to Gregor if she had not come in, since his position was preventing her from opening the window immediately. But she not only did not step inside; she even retreated and shut the door. A stranger really could have concluded from this that Gregor had been lying in wait for her and wanted to bite her. (Kafka, 1915: 49)

That quotation is strengthened with another data, such as the data below.

He remembered his family with deep feeling and love. In this business, his own thought that he had to disappear was, if possible, even more decisive than his sister's. He remained in this state of empty and peaceful reflection until the tower clock struck three o'clock in the morning. (*Ibid*, 89)

Both quotations are suitable with the theory of nothingness and that is carried out by the theorist. Sartre in Barnes' book stated that a refusal of existence is called for negation (1953: 11).

Those quotations prove how Gregor represents nothingness in the world. He conducts a negation on his existence and cannot be processed because he lacks his existence such as an intelligent man, thus he feels separated with the essence of his life. In this case, he cannot be processed because he has less intelligence in his life. It is like at the quotation above, his sister who has more intelligent than Gregor does not want to come in to his room. It is caused that he is ashamed to his sister's intelligence, so he prefers to choose nothingness for himself.

Meanwhile, he is also in nothingness position as a reason that he remains in the state of empty to stay away from his sister who is more intelligence than him.

The second Gregor's nothingness appears in different situation and cause. It is like in the following data.

In the first two weeks his parents could not could not bring themselves to visit him, and he often heard how they fully acknowledged his sister's present work; whereas earlier they had often got annoyed at his sister because she had seem to them a somewhat useless young woman. (Kafka, 1915: 50)

In this overworked and exhausted family who had time to worry any longer about Gregor more than was absolutely necessary? The household was constantly getting smaller. (*Ibid*, 69)

Those data above are supported by the statement of Sartre in Spade's book that something is considered as beyond being and dissociated from being, it is called as nothingness or non-being (1996: 124). Meanwhile, Gardner (2009: 42) stated that being is directly ready and capable to point out itself, not something to the probability of manifestation need to be added.

From the data above, Gregor depicts nothingness by his laziness. Properly, as a human being who exists in the world, he can create something in his life as an active human. But he prefers to keep at a distance from being or he is lazy to evolve the ability with the result that his parents forget about his being. They do not have a plan to visit and worry to him. Instead, they pay attention to his sister who does not become a useless young woman previously.

The third Gregor's nothingness will be appeared from the different cause, namely nonchalant characteristic. It is shown in the data below.

At first, she also called him to her with words which she presumably thought were friendly, like "Come here for a bit, old dung beetle!" or "Hey, look at the old dung beetle!" Addressed in such a manner, Gregor answered nothing, but remained motionless in his place, as if the door had not been opened at all. (Kafka, 1915: 74)

"My dear parents," said the sister banging her hand on the table by way of an introduction, "things cannot go on any longer in this way. Maybe if you don't understand that, well, I do. I will not utter my brother's name in front of this monster, and thus I say only that we must try to get rid of it. (*Ibid*, 84)

The data above are suitable with the theory from Sartre about nothingness. According to Sartre in Gardner's book that nothingness has concept which will be understood as the 'unity' of all negative judgment (2009: 63).

That data indicates a nothingness which is experienced by Gregor. His nothingness emerges from the nonchalant characteristic which he has. He does not care about his sister who is very close with him. But in this condition, he conducts a nonchalant behavior to her until his sister appraises him in the totality of all negative judgment. His judgment is indicated with how she calls her brother in bad named such as 'the old dung beetle' which signifies his sister to be resentful because of his nonchalance. In such a way, she gives up for calling that name again; it cannot change his characteristic as a nonchalant man. On that account, she has not regarded Gregor's being in her family. That description has proved that Gregor is in nothingness position.

The fourth representation of Gregor's nothingness exists in another cause, that is losing his self-confidence. It can be shown in the following citations.

But how would things go if now all tranquility, all prosperity, all contentment should come to a horrible end? In order not to lose himself in such thoughts, Gregor preferred to set himself moving and crawled up and down in his room. (Kafka, 1915: 35)

She did not find him immediately, but when she noticed him under the couch (God, he had to be somewhere or other; for he could hardly fly away) she got such a shock that (*Ibid*, 36-37)

Those quotations have connection with the theory of nothingness. Sartre in Barnes (1953: xxv) said that nothingness has the concepts which may be related with presenting the loss of personality or characteristic.

Both quotations can be analyzed that Gregor feels in non-being condition. It is caused by a loss of his self-confidence which is similar with the loss of personality or characteristic. It has been happened when he feels strange with his family. Previously, he feels peacefulness, prosperity, and pleasure with the situation of his family, but all his thoughts become a horrible situation such as quiet and sometime, it is full with weeping and disturbance among his sister and parents. So that, he decides to hide him from them with the result that they cannot find him at his room, as a reason he is not self-confident to show himself for his family. For example, his sister enters his room in order to meet him, but she does not find him. Thus, she tries to check under the couch with the result that he flies away from that place, and that behavior makes his sister shock because she sees Gregor in transforming his body as an insect. As a consequence, she does not trust with it and still consider if he is not being in that family. From that explanation, he is portrayed as non-being or nothingness.

The fifth portrait of Gregor's nothingness exists in unequal cause, namely pessimist. It can be seen in some data below.

But now the door was not opened any more, and Gregor waited in vain. Earlier, when the door had been barred, they had all wanted to come in to him; now, when he had opened one door and when the others had obviously been opened during the day, no one came any more, and the keys were stuck in the locks on the outside. (Kafka, 1915: 35)

But at the same time with a quick and complete forgetting of his human past as well? Was he then at this point already on the verge of forgetting and was it only the voice of his mother, which he had not heard for along time, that had aroused him? (*Ibid*, 54)

Those data is suitable with the theory of nothingness. Sartre in Barnes said that that nothingness has the concepts which may be related with applying the concept in the type of negative interpretation to the last fact (1953: xxv).

Those data indicate the portrait of Gregor's nothingness which is caused by his pessimist. His characteristic (pessimist) is built from the negative interpretation to the last fact in his life until he feels in position of nothingness. He actually wants to open the door and meet his family, but his waiting is in vain. Since, no one comes to his room so that he is on the verge of forgetting everything in his family. If he chooses being for himself, he is afraid that his family ignore him. So, that is the last fact which is faced by him indicates the negative interpretation. It causes Gregor that become pessimist until he chooses to be non-being in the world exactly to his family.

The sixth depiction of Gregor's nothingness emerges in another cause which always hides from others. It can be shown in the following citation.

"I really do have an appetite," Gregor said to himself sorrowfully, "but not for these things. How these lodgers stuff themselves, and I am dying." (Kafka, 1915: 78)

The citation above is supported with the compatible theory. According to Sartre in Barnes' book states, "For negation is a refusal of existence" (1953: 11) That citation can be analyzed if Gregor here obtains nothingness position because he always hides himself from other people around him. In this point, human experiences nothingness position because he refuses his existence and separates the essence from his life. In this case, Gregor does not accept his existence as human being and he chooses to separates from his essence, which is related with the ability that actually every human possess it. He prefers to stay away from his family. On the contrary, he shuts him until every human around him forgets his existence by

considering himself in death. That description proves if Gregor really encounters nothingness.

The last depiction of Gregor's nothingness appears in unequal cause, namely irresponsible characteristic. It can be shown in the data below.

Gregor was a member of the family, something one should not treat as an enemy, and that it was, on the contrary, a requirement of family duty to suppress one's aversion and to endure--nothing else, just endure. (Kafka, 1915: 66)

You must try to get rid of the idea that this is Gregor. The fact that we have believed for so long, that is truly our real misfortune. But how can it be Gregor? If it were Gregor. He would have long ago realized that a communal life among human beings is not possible with such an animal and would have gone away voluntarily. (*Ibid*, 86)

Those data have relation with suitable theory. Sartre in Barnes stated that nothingness has the concepts which may be related by giving an illogical copy to the entire experience (1953: xxv).

On those data, Gregor is also in nothingness position which is caused by his irresponsible characteristic. He faces nothingness by becoming an insect, so that his family can appraise that he is not being again in that family. His behavior such as his transformation signifies if he gives an illogical copy to this entire experience. It is like in the data above; Gregor still disappears from his family until his family nearly supposes him as an enemy not as a member of the family. Meanwhile, his sister tries to convince her father that Gregor is still alive with his transformation. But his father is not trust her effort because is not responsible with his duty as human being, on the contrary he go away from the fact of his being in the world. Therefore, from that explanation, Gregor is referred to nothingness.

## **5 Conclusion And Suggestion**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

Mostly, the characterization of Gregor emerges through the author description directly. And other Gregor's characteristics in this novel appear from Gregor's speech and thought, his parents and sister's utterances, the manager's response and feeling. Meanwhile, the characteristics of Gregor is bad characteristics, such as; has less intelligence, laziness, nonchalance, less self-confidence, pessimist, introvert, less-responsibility.

This novel contains non-being or nothingness as the one of the concepts of human existence that is faced by Gregor. His nothingness is built from the characteristics that he has from himself, for example, his less intelligent is difficult to accept his existence in the world.

On the other hands, Gregor's nothingness is experienced because he takes a negation just like always hide himself from others. It makes other people to consider if he does not exist again as human being. Moreover, Gregor chooses nothingness as one way to cope his reality in the life. He never thinks about the impact for himself and other people around him, they are his parents and sister who are very love him.

## 5.2 Suggestion

This research is very useful and meaningful for the researcher. After finishing this research, the researcher suggests to the next researcher or reader to choose different issue, such as psychoanalysis especially in defends mechanism if he or she will analyze the novel Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. The researcher hopes to this research that will give the profits such as the reference about the same issue or object of research for English Department students of Muhammadiyah University at Surabaya.

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