

Representing Angst and Authenticity: A Sartrean Study of Existential Crisis in Lala Bohang's Trilogy

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of existential crisis in Lala Bohang's trilogy The Book of Forbidden Feelings (2016), The Book of Invisible Questions (2017), and The Book of Imaginary Beliefs (2019). Bohang's trilogy presents fragmented reflections that portray an individual's confrontation with freedom, uncertainty, and the burden of personal choice. This research aims to analyze how Sartrean concepts of angst and authenticity are represented in Bohang's works. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the study applies Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist framework, focusing on the concepts of angst, authenticity, and bad faith. The analysis is conducted on selected textual excerpts that depict the subject's responses to existential pressure and social expectations. The findings reveal that existential angst emerges from the subject's awareness of radical freedom and the inevitability of choice. Authenticity is reflected when the subject acknowledges this freedom and accepts responsibility for their decisions without seeking external justification. However, certain moments also suggest the possibility of bad faith when responsibility is displaced onto circumstances or external forces. In conclusion, Bohang's trilogy illustrates the dynamic tension between angst and authenticity, showing how individuals negotiate freedom and responsibility in their search for meaning.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary literature has increasingly functioned not merely as a medium for storytelling, but as a space for existential reflection that represents the inner experiences of modern individuals. Modern literary texts often highlight subjective experiences and psychological instability, reflecting individuals' struggle to find meaning in an uncertain and fragmented world. Such tendencies strongly align with existentialist thought, particularly with Jean-Paul Sartre's assertion that human beings are not born with a predetermined essence but must define themselves through conscious choices and responsible actions (Saputra, 2025). Existentialists emphasize that any human action serves as the foundation for human commitment (Karima, 2024).

One contemporary Indonesian writer whose works embody these characteristics is Lala Bohang. Although she is an Indonesian author, her trilogy, *The Book of Forbidden Feelings* (2016), *The Book of Invisible Questions* (2017), and *The Book of Imaginary Beliefs* (2019), is written in English, positioning the works within the sphere of Anglophone literature while simultaneously reflecting transnational and Indonesian sensibilities. The trilogy, which she referred to in one of her interviews with Kompas in 2021 as "*The Book of Siblings*", Bohang presents an existential crisis that manifested through two Sartrean dimensions: angst and authenticity. Rather than offering clear solutions, the texts portray the tension between the subject's awareness of radical freedom and the temptation to retreat into self-deception. The absence of definitive answers highlights the conflict between human freedom and the desire for certainty, which is an essential concern in existentialist thought.

The existentialist philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre provides a relevant framework for analyzing these themes. Sartre argues that existence precedes essence, meaning that individuals are not born with predetermined identities, but must define themselves through conscious choices and actions (Sartre, as discussed in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). Consequently, the individual is "condemned to be free," meaning they are entirely responsible for creating their own values through a continuous process of self-definition (Sartre & Maitre, 1965). This radical freedom places full responsibility on the individual and often results in existential anxiety or what Sartre calls "angst" or "anguish". Sartre posits that angst (anxiety) is the ontological "vertigo" experienced by individuals when they confront the sheer magnitude of their freedom. Angst is distinct from fear, while fear is an emotional response to an external threat, angst is the reflective apprehension of the self as the sole author of its own choices (Webber, 2018). It is the realization that "nothingness" lies between the person and their future, providing no guarantees or excuses for their actions. Authenticity, in turn, is described as the acknowledgement of human existence along with the responsibilities that accompany it. He emphasizes that awareness of absolute freedom and personal responsibility guides individuals toward an authentic way of being. A person must accept and recognize full accountability for who they are and acknowledge the capacity to shape, transform, and redefine themselves to live authentically (Mozaffaripour & Hamrah, 2015). By focusing on angst as the awareness of freedom and authenticity as the ethical response to it, this research examines how the modern subject confronts the absence of predetermined meaning.

These Sartrean concepts are relevant to Lala Bohang's trilogy, where subjects often suppress their emotions, accept beliefs without reflection, and hesitate to confront their own freedom. The portrayal of existential crisis reflects the tension between authentic existence and self-deception or "bad faith," which is "an attempt to escape anguish by pretending to ourselves that we are not free" (Sartre, 1969, as cited in Odesanmi, 2008). Through Sartre's framework, such experiences can be understood as manifestations of

existential crisis rooted in the denial or avoidance of human freedom. Lala Bohang does not explicitly construct its narrative subject through specific social identities such as gender, class, or cultural identity. Instead, the subject appears as an unnamed and unspecified figure and is presented as a universal human figure. For Sartre, while individuals are situated in various "facticities" (e.g., birth, social class, gender), the fundamental struggle with freedom remains a common denominator of human life (Plesa, 2021). As a result, the trilogy may be read as a representation of the human condition rather than representing a particular identity group. This universality allows the work to be studied through a philosophical lens that emphasizes shared human condition.

Lala Bohang's trilogy displays a consistent aesthetic and thematic pattern throughout its three works: fragmented reflective narration, minimalist language, and the presence of visual illustration accompanying the text. Rather than presenting linear plots or characters rooted in social context, the trilogy focuses on inner struggles, emotional contradictions, and existential questions. This continuity forms an integrated reflective mode that highlights ontological uncertainty. However, the trilogy's brevity may also function as its limitation. The compressed fragments and lack of explicit contextual grounding (such as social, historical, or political specificity) create interpretive openness that can lead to multiple or even unstable readings. Meaning is deliberately left unresolved and places interpretive responsibility on the reader. Within this context, the present study does not aim to critique the trilogy's aesthetic choices but to apply Sartrean existential philosophy as a focused analytical lens. The research positions itself as an ontological inquiry, examining how angst, bad faith, and authenticity are represented within the reflective narration, thereby situating the trilogy within existential discourse rather than evaluating its stylistic form.

The minimalist narration in the trilogy is characterized by verbal economy to trim unnecessary descriptions, as William Strunk Jr. quoted: "*Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences...*" (Strunk and White, 2000) and lyrical compression, which is the process of condensing a very broad emotion or concept into a short form. Poetry works through "concentration" and "compression", where fewer words intensify the "explosion" of meaning (Hirshfield, 1997). This intensifies the existential condition by condensing philosophical weight into reflective fragments and silence. This research employs metaphorical structures that shape human cognition. For Kövecses, metaphors are not merely linguistic embellishments, but cognitive tools that shape the way we think, act, and understand reality (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010). In analyzing Bohang's works, these metaphors function as an interpretive instrument that helps translate some texts representing abstract existential tensions embedded within the narrative.

Several previous studies have applied Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism to various forms of literary and philosophical studies. However, most existing studies concentrate on conventional narrative forms such as novels and dramatic texts that present linear plots and fully developed characters. Far fewer studies explore how existential crisis is represented through fragmented reflection narration, particularly in contemporary English and Indonesian works written and published in English. Yulianita, Yuwana, & Rengganis (2023), in their research entitled "*Interaksi Teori Eksistensialisme Jean Paul Sartre dan Kritik Sastra dalam Karya Nana Sastrawan*," examined the interaction of Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist theory and literary criticism in Nana Sastrawan's novel. This study demonstrates how the characters and plot reflect free choice, existential responsibility, and criticism of social norms from Sartre's perspective. Similarly, "*Eksistensialisme Tokoh Utama dalam Novel Malioboro at Midnight Karya Skysphire*" (Arifiyanto, 2024) analyzes the form of existentialism in Skysphire's novel Malioboro at Midnight through Sartre's ontological

concepts of être-pour-soi and être-en-soi (being for itself vs. being as something). Afiriyanto's research applies Sartre's core concepts to interpret the existential experiences of literary characters, which focuses on character development within a linear narrative plot.

Another study, "*An Exploration of Existentialism in The Short Story 'Al-Jahim Laisa Fihi Mir'ah' and The Dramatic Text 'No Exit'*" (Kumalasari, Tasnimah, & Alfain, 2025), compares existential themes across different literary genres. This study finds themes such as alienation, freedom, responsibility, and the impact of human existence on others, demonstrating that literary works of different forms can represent Sartre's philosophical thought. However, research specifically addressing Lala Bohang's works remains limited. Existing studies tend to focus primarily on the visual or artistic aspects of her work rather than its philosophical dimensions. For example, "*Kualitas Artistik Seni Ilustrasi Karya Lala Bohang pada Buku Puisi 'The Book Of Forbidden Feelings'*" (Amir, 2020) analyzes the artistic quality of the illustrations in Bohang's *The Book of Forbidden Feelings*, emphasizing the aesthetic and visual characteristics of the artwork. While this research contributes to understanding the visual elements of Bohang's work, it does not explore existential meanings embedded in the text. Therefore, the existential dimensions of Lala Bohang's trilogy remain largely unexplored in academic scholarship. Moreover, no previous study has analyzed the trilogy as a corpus of reflective texts representing the human existential crisis through Sartrean concepts such as angst and authenticity. Within this context, the present study positions itself as an ontological inquiry that applies Sartre's existential philosophy to interpret Bohang's trilogy as a representation of modern human existential struggle.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach focusing on the manifestations of angst and authenticity in Lala Bohang's trilogy (*The Book of Forbidden Feelings*, *The Book of Invisible Questions*, and *The Book of Imaginary Beliefs*). A qualitative approach is most appropriate for this study as it aims to interpret abstract philosophical meanings, subjective reflections, and the nuances of existential crisis embedded within the multimodal fragments, which cannot be captured through quantitative measurement. Qualitative research is designed to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social issue or human problem (Akyıldız, 2021), making it suitable for examining the existential dimensions represented in Bohang's trilogy.

The data in this research consists of selected textual excerpts from the trilogy, *The Book of Forbidden Feelings* (2016), *The Book of Invisible Questions* (2017), and *The Book of Imaginary Beliefs* (2019), written by Lala Bohang and published by Gramedia Pustaka Utama. The analysis begins with a close reading of the texts to identify existential motifs, reflective narration, and symbolic expressions related to Sartre's concepts. The identified excerpts are then categorized through a coding process based on Sartrean existential categories, with particular attention to the themes of angst and authenticity. Following the coding process, the data are organized thematically using the qualitative textual analysis approach outlined by Bogdan and Biklen (1997), which emphasizes identifying meaningful textual units for interpretation. The final stage involves philosophical analysis grounded in Sartre's existential framework, through which the reflective fragments are examined to reveal how they articulate the tension between existential anxiety (angst) and authenticity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research finds that Lala Bohang's trilogy, *The Book of Forbidden Feelings*, *The Book of Invisible Questions*, and *The Book of Imaginary Beliefs*, represents existential crisis primarily through two dominant Sartrean concepts: angst and authenticity, with occasional indications of bad faith where relevant. The concepts do not function as stages of psychological development or as elements of a linear progression; instead, they emerge as recurring existential conditions that surface within Bohang's fragmented and reflective textual expressions.

Across the trilogy, existential crisis is represented through moments of awareness of freedom, uncertainty, and inner tension, all of which resonate with the notion of existential angst. Certain excerpts further reveal tendencies toward self-deception or avoidance of responsibility, which may be read as expressions of bad faith. Other passages present reflections on self-recognition and acceptance that correspond to the idea of authenticity. However, these representations do not form a chronological or developmental trajectory.

1. Identification of Angst

We (men) are beings who are thrown into the world with no inherent essence or purpose (Sartre, 1969). As stated by Sartre, men's freedom to choose, act, and determine the meaning of their own lives makes them the center of existence. This freedom is not without burden, as it generates angst or anxiety stemming from the individual's full responsibility for the consequences of their choices (Siregar, Nasution, & Syukri, 2025). In Bohang's trilogy, this condition is represented through her reflective narration:

I want to grow up but my soul doesn't seem to be very excited about it. Maybe she's lying. She's just a soul. One day she says, "Get up, lazy cat! You have to live your day proud and loud!" but another day she whispers, "So tired, can we just stay at home all day, call in sick, write an ugly poem, and be busy being invisible?" I can't control her. I'm just a body. She's the thinker. She's so inconsistent and always has this thirst for attention and celebration for herself. She makes me busy seeking for distractions. She never counts me in her future plans, she's too busy shouting meaningless motivational sentences or killing my confidence in a very low whisper, like wind in December, "You're not good enough." (Bohang, 2016: 35).

This text represents angst and an internal conflict leading to bad faith. The subject's claim "*I can't control her*" and "*I'm just a body. She's the thinker*," represent a dualism where the subject attempts to detach themselves from their own actions. According to the Sartrean perspective, this is a form of escaping responsibility by treating the self as an object (*en-soi*) rather than a free consciousness (*pour-soi*) (Grimm, Sahhar, Moss, & Henseler, 2025). For metaphorical mapping, the phrase "*busy being invisible*" symbolizes the subject's attempt to withdraw from social presence and avoid the responsibility that comes with being seen.

Being "invisible" represents an attempt to avoid the "look of the other" and the necessity of making concrete choices. Likewise, "*meaningless motivational sentences*" represent external voices attempting to dictate the subject's essence, which the subject ultimately perceives as nothingness. The whisper "*You're not good enough*" represents profound existential anxiety. The subject is split between the desire to transcend (to "grow up") and the fear of the freedom that growth requires. The attempt to blame an "inconsistent soul" is the subject's way of avoiding the realization that they are the sole author of their life. This captures the existential crisis where freedom is experienced as a painful burden or anguish.

*Hair grows, heart pounds, mind wanders, hands reach, feet jump, body tires.
Suffocated by all the set ups, destiny, and whatnot. And all the systems.* (Bohang, 2016:52-53)

The sentence “*Hair grows, heart pounds, mind wanders, hands reach, feet jump, body tires*” presents a sequence of bodily actions that emphasizes the subject’s restless awareness of their own existence. The accumulation of verbs creates a sense of continuous movement, suggesting that the body is constantly reacting to the world. This reflects an inner tension that can be interpreted as existential unease. The following line, “*Suffocated by all the set ups, destiny, and whatnot. And all the systems,*” further reveals the source of this tension. The word “suffocated” represents the subject’s feelings of being overwhelmed by external structures such as destiny and social systems that appear to predetermine human life. From Sartrean perspective, this moment reflects existential angst: the subject becomes aware of the pressures of the world while simultaneously confronting the possibility of radical freedom (Zhou, 2021).

The tension between the perceived determinism of “destiny” and “system” and the existential condition of freedom produces a sense of anxiety and disorientation. At this stage, the subject experiences the burden of existence, but has not yet resolved whether to accept responsibility for their freedom (authenticity) or to attribute their condition to external forces (bad faith). This moment of suffocation therefore represents the emergence of existential angst, where the subject becomes conscious of the tension between personal freedom and the structures that appear to determine life. How the subject responds to this realization, either by accepting responsibility for their choices or by attributing them to external forces, ultimately determines whether the subject moves toward authenticity or falls into bad faith.

In the afternoon you think, “Oh, this is too bright for me. I can’t work.”

In the evening you think, “Oh, this is too dark for me. I can’t work.”

Oh, stop being so hard on yourself

I can’t stop being so hard on myself.

Oh, stop being so hard on yourself

(Bohang, 2019: 47)

This fragment represents a state of bad faith (*mauvaise foi*), where the subject attempts to escape the burden of radical freedom by blaming external circumstances. The subject creates external excuses (“too bright” in the afternoon, “too dark” in the evening) to justify their procrastination. In Sartrean terms, the subject is “lying to themselves,” pretending to be an object (an *en-soi*) controlled by environmental lighting rather than a free agent (*pour-soi*) capable of transcending those conditions (Brown, 2023).

“Too bright/too dark” functions as a metaphor for external facticity used as an excuse. “Stop being so hard on yourself.” This internal dialogue represents the tension between the “self as object” (the one making excuses) and the “self as witness” (the one aware of the self-deception). Although the statement appears to offer reassurance, the reply “I can’t stop being so hard on myself” reveals the persistence of the self-deceptive dynamic. Instead of resolving the underlying tension, the repeated exchange exposes how the subject remains trapped in a circular process of justification, one that ultimately reinforces the very condition of bad faith it attempts to alleviate.

Everyone has a different coping mechanism regarding being brought to this universe without consent. Some people speak of nihilism to inject more sense into their heads. Some people grow more muscles and eat high protein food only. Some people go to school reunions to silently judge and compare their lives with their old friends, hopefully to feel better about themselves in the end. Some people create the perfect imaginary lover to manipulate their late night loneliness. Some people

decide to be gluten-free religiously. Some people produce more aesthetic selfies. Some people become Marie Kondo followers and throw away all of their stuff out of the house. Some people join self-help groups that serve free coffee and peanut biscuits. Some people do stretching every morning while listening to How to Achieve a Low Maintenance Wellness podcast. Some people become parents to feel like they achieve something in life. Some people aim for more and more achievements to fill their inner void with temporary validations. Some people watch them all from phone screens and decide to never leave home, ever. (Bohang, 2019:76-77)

The passage begins with the statement that “everyone has a different coping mechanism regarding being brought to this universe without consent,” which directly reflects the existential awareness of human existence as something that is not chosen. This idea resonates with the existential condition in which individuals find themselves “thrown” into the world without prior justification. The recognition that existence begins without consent generates a sense of existential discomfort that aligns with Sartre’s concept of angst: the anxiety that arises when individuals become aware of the contingency and groundlessness of their existence (Koole, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2006). The subsequent list of behaviours, ranging from nihilism, physical self-improvement, self-help groups, and aesthetic self-presentation to obsessive routines, illustrates various attempts to cope with this existential condition. These activities function as strategies to manage or escape the awareness of existential emptiness, as described in the text as an “inner void”.

From Sartrean perspective, such coping mechanisms can be interpreted as attempts to stabilize one’s identity or create meaning within a fundamentally uncertain world. Several coping mechanisms in this text can also be interpreted as potential bad faith, for example, pursuing achievements for validation, creating imaginary lovers, and following self-help trends, because they can be ways to avoid direct confrontation with existential freedom. The repetitive structure of “some people” emphasizes the universality of this condition, suggesting that individuals respond to existential anxiety in different ways. This passage, therefore, reveals a fundamental existential condition: the awareness that human existence begins without inherent meaning or prior consent. The various “coping mechanisms” described in the text can be interpreted as attempts to manage or obscure this anxiety, illustrating how individuals respond differently to the burden of freedom and the absence of predetermined purpose. In Sartrean terms, these strategies reflect the human tendency to seek external structures, routine, or identities to mitigate the unsettling realization that existence precedes essence. Individuals often construct identities and social roles as a way to cope with existential freedom and responsibility (Sun, 2025).

What is the world?

It’s a dot.

A tiny little dot, a part of this giant universe.

If the world is a tiny dot, then human beings are super tiny particles.

With that fact in mind, isn’t it frightening that humans feel superior, are always in a hurry for something, live for nonstop deadlines, torture themselves by meeting with awful people, try to achieve this and that.

While there is this universe to explore in our short life.

While I am fighting it, I’m also doing all the ambitious part of living.

Deadline, pursuit, achieving.

Contradiction is a wild thing.

You always hate something and love it at the same time.

Because love and hate are never a choice.

They come in hand and hand.

As a giant package. (Bohang, 2017:14)

This fragment represents the ontological angst that arises from confronting the vastness of the universe and the meaninglessness of human life. Bohang compresses the vast scale of the universe into a “tiny little dot” and humans as “super tiny particles.” The anxiety (angst) is explicitly expressed through the word “frightening,” which describes how humans ignore their own “nothingness” by being “always in a hurry” and living for “nonstop deadlines.” This narration highlights the tension between the subject’s awareness of eternity and the mundane absurdity of social obligations. The imagery of a “tiny little dot” and “super tiny particles” metaphorically maps human existence onto spatial nothingness. By reducing the world and humanity to a “dot” or “particle,” this shows that the subject experiences what Sartre calls the vertigo of freedom: the frightening realization that existence has no inherent foundation (Sartre & Mariet, 1965).

The word “frightening” explicitly marks this ontological anxiety. Rather than being fear of an object, this anxiety reflects awareness of infinite possibility without guarantee. The subject’s contradiction, simultaneously loving and hating ambition, reveals the tension between transcendence (*pour-soi*) and facticity (Yolton & Shalom, 1967). “Torture themselves by meeting with awful people,” maps onto the Sartrean concept of bad faith and “the look of the other” (*Le Regard*) (Ding, 2025). Humans often choose to suffer in social structures rather than face the terrifying freedom of the “universe to explore” (Song, 2024).

2. Identification of Authenticity

According to Sartre, humans are “condemned to be free,” we constantly choose who we are and cannot evade responsibility for these choices. Bad faith is self-deception, treating oneself as fixed (just a role, nature, or label) or as pure freedom without limits (Jiang, 2024). Authenticity, in turn, is lucidly acknowledging both freedom and facticity (the given facts of one’s situation) and taking responsibility for one’s projects and their consequences. Authenticity functions as a moral virtue or ethical ideal, namely the right “exercise of freedom toward oneself and others” and a corrective against bad faith life patterns (Russo, 2020). Several fragments from the trilogy represent moments of authenticity, defined as the acceptance of freedom and responsibility.

Tiny small people in your tiny universe.

You know exactly what you love in life.

You like hot tea without sugar before real breakfast. You like white blank T-shirt and a pair of old blue jeans.

You like it when night finally comes because people stop making contact with other human beings.

You like being able to speak with yourself when you wake up alone on your bed.

You like the taste of maple syrup on fried mantau.

You like seeing piles of books.

You like watching the rain falling through leaves and making the earth smell like old wood.

You like watching movies with pessimism in them.

You like tiny small people you carefully choose to coexist with in your tiny uninteresting universe.

(Bohang, 2016: 37)

This text serves as a powerful representation of authenticity. The subject demonstrates a clear awareness of their own choices, independent of external standards or social pressures. The sentence "*You carefully choose to coexist with in your tiny uninteresting universe*" illustrates that the subject acknowledges their own agency, which is the ability to construct their own world, even if that world is perceived as "small" or "uninteresting" by the outside world. The metaphor "tiny universe" maps onto the Sartrean concept of facticity managed through freedom. The subject does not attempt to become "large" for the sake of others but defines the boundaries of their own world with honesty. "Carefully choose" is the linguistic marker for radical responsibility. There is no external coercion, which means everything within the subject's life is presented as the result of a conscious, deliberate choice. Sartre posits that individuals must define their own essence (Çelebi, 2014). The concluding phrase "*And that's enough*" signifies a complete self-acceptance. The subject is no longer seeking validation from the "greater universe" of others but finds sufficiency in the small, authentic choices they have made.

I like to quietly stand where I feel I'm just a tiny part of this chaotic universe and strangely feel at peace.

In the middle of a forest.

On a boat in the middle of the sea.

At the top of a mountain.

At my Grandfather's home.

Sitting alone in a packed restaurant.

Driving alone at midnight, listening to music. (Bohang, 2017:10)

This fragment represents a condition of authenticity. In this text, the subject finds "*peace*" by accepting their insignificance. This is a crucial Sartrean move: once you accept that you are "nothing" (no predetermined essence), you are finally free (Akibonde, 2023). "Chaotic universe" maps onto the concept of an "absurd world" that lacks inherent order or divine plan. In accepting contingency, the subject recognizes that nothing about human existence is fixed in advance. There is no inherent purpose, no divine plan, and no essential self-waiting to be discovered. Instead, as Sartre argues, *existence precedes essence*: we exist first, and only later define who we are through our actions. This awareness also reflects Heidegger's existential idea of being "thrown" into the world. We find ourselves in circumstances we did not choose, facing uncertainty, instability, and the anxiety that arises from recognizing our freedom (Sweep, 2016). But rather than trying to escape this condition through rigid beliefs or illusions of certainty, the existential subject confronts it directly. They accept the unpredictable nature of life as a fundamental aspect of being human.

"Sitting alone in a packed restaurant" / "Driving alone at midnight" are metaphors for existential solitude. Authenticity is often found when the subject is physically or mentally detached from the "crowd". Through verbal economy, Bohang does not explain why the subject is alone, instead, the brevity of the text leaves a "gap" that mirrors the subject's detachment from the "crowd". The peace described here is the result of shedding bad faith (Singh, 2025). By standing quietly in the middle of a forest or sea, the subject embraces their facticity (being a tiny part of the world) without letting it crush their spirit. This is a representation of the "authentic mode of being" where the individual is at home with their own nothingness. The lyrical compression in this part of the trilogy reflects this clarity; the words become fewer and calmer, representing a subject who is no longer "in a hurry" but is "at home" with their own radical freedom.

Don't force yourself into anything.

Either friendship, relationship, work, and routine. Forcing something to fit in your life is an impossible project. You have your own shape already, you breathe and live your life in your own terms as long as you remember. If these people, things, or situation belongs to you, they will fit in without having to do a lot of work. It just naturally happens. (Bohang, 2017:139)

The sentence “*Don't force yourself into anything. Either friendship, relationship, work, and routine*” reflects an attempt to resist external pressures that often shape an individual's decisions. According to Sartre's lens of existentialism, authenticity emerges when individuals acknowledge their freedom and refuse to conform blindly to social expectations (Lenton, Slabu, & Sedikides, 2013). By advising the subject not to force themselves into predetermined roles or situations, the text suggests a rejection of imposed structures that attempt to define one's identity. The sentence “*you breathe and live your life in your own terms*” further emphasizes the subject's recognition of personal agency and self-determination, which aligns with Sartre's idea that human beings must create their own meaning through their choices.

However, the line “*if these people, things, or situation belongs to you, they will fit in without having to do a lot of work*” introduces an interesting tension. While it implies a sense of natural alignment between the subject and their life circumstances, Sartre would argue that authenticity is not something that simply “happens” naturally, but rather something that must be actively chosen and continuously maintained. Human freedom becomes meaningful only when one's choices genuinely reflect one's own self rather than external expectations (Weberman, 2011). Nevertheless, the passage still reflects an aspiration toward authenticity, as it encourages the subject to live according to their own terms rather than submitting to external expectations.

Everything before us will become a forgettable nightmare.

Everything doesn't always happen for a reason but everything happens because it happens.

(Bohang, 2019:40)

This page is a direct representation of the core Sartrean principle that life has no predetermined meaning or “reason.” The phrase “*Everything doesn't always happen for a reason*” rejects the idea that events carry inherent purpose, moral significance, or divine intention. It pushes back against teleological thinking: the assumption that outcomes must fit into some greater plan (Ongchoco, Castiello, & Corlett, 2023). By contrast, “*Everything happens because it happens*” emphasizes contingency: events occur due to chance, randomness, or the simple unfolding of cause-and-effect without embedded meaning, which represents existential acceptance or authentic awareness. This aligns with existentialist thought, where meaning is not discovered in events but created by individuals (Verma, 2017). “*Forgettable nightmare*” is a metaphor for the nothingness of the past. The phrase “*Everything before us will become a forgettable nightmare*” emphasizes the transient and unstable nature of human experience. It suggests that events that may once appear overwhelming or meaningful can eventually lose their significance over time. Once a moment is gone, it holds no inherent essence unless the subject chooses to give it meaning. This awareness of impermanence can lead individuals to reconsider the weight they assign to past experiences (Reynolds, 2006).

The verbal economy here mirrors the subject's refusal to over-analyze or cling to past events, treating them as “nothing” unless the subject chooses to give them meaning. “*Because it happens*” is a linguistic repetition that emphasizes the brute facticity of existence. Rather than presenting suffering or uncertainty as part of a predetermined plan, the text reflects a perspective in which events are recognized as contingent

occurrences. By stating that things happen simply because they happen, the subject reaches a state of existential lucidity. This is the starting point for authenticity: acknowledging that since there is no "reason" provided by the universe, the individual is the only one who can invent and assign meaning to their experiences (Bayram & Artan, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Lala Bohang's trilogy, *The Book of Forbidden Feelings*, *The Book of Invisible Questions*, and *The Book of Imaginary Beliefs* articulates existential crisis through two central Sartrean concepts: angst and authenticity. Through its fragmented and introspective narrative structure, the trilogy portrays the modern individual confronting the awareness of radical freedom and the instability of existence, a condition that resonates with the existential philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre. Throughout the three works, existential angst manifests in multiple forms, including internal conflict, awareness of human insignificance within the universe, and the pressure created by social expectations such as productivity, ambition, and the constant demand to define oneself. These moments reveal the anxiety that emerges when the individual realizes that there is no predetermined essence or external authority that can determine their identity or choices. In Sartrean terms, this awareness produces the "vertigo of freedom," where the subject must confront the responsibility of creating meaning in an indifferent world. At the same time, the trilogy also presents different responses to this condition of angst. Certain fragments reveal tendencies toward bad faith, in which the subject attempts to escape responsibility by blaming circumstances, emotions, or external conditions. In such cases, the subject tries to deny their own freedom by presenting themselves as constrained by factors beyond their control. These moments represent the failure of authenticity, where individuals seek excuses that allow them to avoid the burden of existential responsibility.

However, other fragments portray moments of authenticity, in which the subject acknowledges their freedom, accepts the consequences of their choices, and refrains from relying on external validation or excuses. In these instances, the subject actively defines their own values, selects the relationships and experiences that shape their world, and embraces existential uncertainty without regret or the need for validation from others. Thus, the trilogy does not present a linear progression from angst to authenticity but rather a sustained existential tension between confronting freedom and attempting to escape it. Angst functions as a moment of awareness that exposes the individual's radical freedom, while authenticity depends on how the subject responds to that awareness. When the subject refuses to blame external forces and accepts responsibility for their choices, authenticity emerges. Conversely, when the subject seeks excuses or external causes for their actions, authenticity collapses into bad faith. Ultimately, Bohang's trilogy does not propose a definitive resolution to the existential dilemmas it presents. Instead, it offers fragmented portrayals of human experience that reflect the ongoing struggle among freedom, responsibility, and the search for meaning. By capturing both the anxiety of freedom and the potential for authentic self-definition, the trilogy illustrates the fundamental existential condition in which individuals must continuously negotiate their identity within an uncertain and unpredictable world.

DAFTAR PUSTAKA

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