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The Portrayal and The Consequence of Tracy Whitney's Absurdity in "If Tomorrow Comes" by Sidney Sheldon

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe about the portrayal and the consequence of the absurdity in Tracy Whitney's life in If Tomorrow Comes novel written by Sidney Sheldon. Tracy Whitney is described as a free and an independent woman who had a perfect life. However, the perfect life is suddenly changed into miserable life. She is being trapped by the gang of mafia in her town and nobody cares for her. This study used descriptive qualitative as the methodology with library research as the approach of the study. Albert Camus' absurdism theory is also used as the main theory in analyzing the literary work. The result shows that the life of the main character that suddenly changes from harmonious life into miserable life is found as an absurd situation. The feeling of hopelessness and alienated makes the life of the main character becomes absurd. Moreover, in the consequence from the absurd situation the main character chooses to revolt and and accepting her condition.

Keywords: Absurd, Change, Life

INTRODUCTION

Every human being desires freedom in their life. It is a fundamental right that everyone possesses and fights for. Freedom allows individuals to maintain their existence, including their way of thinking, choosing, and making decisions. Through freedom, people can determine what they want to become or do in life without any predetermined fate. They are free to shape their identity, build their own values, and make choices that define their lives (Maureen, 1997). However, with freedom comes responsibility—every decision made, whether it leads to success or failure, must be accounted for. Unfortunately, not everyone can attain true freedom. Those who feel restricted in reality often seek freedom by creating an alternate world where they can freely express their thoughts, creativity, opinions, and critiques.

This study analyzes a novel by Sidney Sheldon, an author known for his crime fiction works. Born in Chicago during the Great Depression on February 11, 1917, Sheldon frequently featured women as his main characters. In an interview, he explained that he wanted to challenge the stereotype of the “dumb blonde.” He believed that women were not only beautiful in appearance but also intelligent. His inspiration came from the strong and charismatic women in his life, including his mother, his late wife Jorja, and his current wife Alexandra. One of his novels that portrays a beautiful and intelligent woman is *If Tomorrow Comes*.

If Tomorrow Comes tells the story of a woman named Tracy Whitney, who fights for her freedom after experiencing injustice. Tracy once lived a harmonious life until she was framed by a mafia syndicate. Wrongly accused of theft and premeditated murder, she was sentenced to fifteen years in prison. Abandoned by everyone, including her fiancé Charles, Tracy felt hopeless and alienated. However, she refused to surrender. Instead, she chose to embrace her downfall by becoming a thief—ironically, the very crime she had been falsely accused of. Tracy's situation can be seen as a form of rebellion against human oppression in the pursuit of existence. As conscious beings, humans are thrown into a world full of absurdity, where they exist without any clear purpose or meaning (Cendana, 2005). In such an absurd world, many people succumb to despair, even choosing to end their lives. However, as Camus argued, suicide does not resolve the absurdity—it only deepens it (Lewis, 2009). Camus identified three responses to absurdity: revolt, freedom, and passion, which together represent true human liberation.

To strengthen this research, previous studies related to *If Tomorrow Comes* were reviewed. Windi Astuti analyzed the novel from a feminist perspective, highlighting Tracy Whitney as an educated, independent, determined, heroic, courageous, and resilient woman. Meanwhile, Erni Nurhayati Soraya examined the theme of female rebellion, showing that women can endure oppression and

fight for their rights, proving they are just as capable as men. Soraya concluded that rebellion is a reflection of feminism. Similar to these studies, this research also focuses on *If Tomorrow Comes* and Tracy Whitney's character. However, unlike the previous studies, which emphasized feminism, this study explores Tracy Whitney's personal journey—from a life of harmony to one filled with misery.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Absurdism

Absurdism was first coined by Albert Camus, with its concept rooted in existentialist philosophy. Developed after World War II, absurdism emerged when people deeply felt the absurdity of life in the post-war era. They began questioning the purpose of their existence, especially as they witnessed the widespread violation of human rights. The mass suffering—innocent people being tortured, raped, and killed—led to a sense that long-standing human values had become meaningless. This resulted in the feeling that life was purposeless, meaningless, and senseless, or in other words, absurd (Kurniawan, 1994).

The word "absurd" refers to something without purpose, goal, or objective, describing a situation that is incomprehensible, uncertain, senseless, and chaotic (Kurniawan, 1994). It also signifies a condition in which humans emerge from nothingness, define their own essence, and ultimately return to nothingness—death (Abrams, 1999). Absurdity is understood as the state in which a person desperately seeks meaning and clarity in the world, only to be confronted with an irrational and meaningless universe (Raskin, 2001). This reflects the human condition, where one faces the void—the clash between human desire for meaning and the silence of the world (Davachi, 2009).

Camus argues that absurdity arises because the world fails to meet human expectations of meaning (Nagel, 1971). It occurs when one's hopes do not align with reality. According to Camus, humans confront this obscurity, and since they cannot change it, they rebel against it. Thus, absurdity can be seen as the confrontation between man and an irrational world (Davachi, 2009).

In *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, Camus illustrates the concept of absurdity through the life of Sisyphus, a figure from Greek mythology condemned by the gods to roll a rock up a mountain, only for it to roll back down:

“The gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of the mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor” (75).

Sisyphus represents the human condition—struggling endlessly in a seemingly futile existence. His punishment is an example of hopeless and

meaningless labor, yet he does not surrender. Instead, he repeatedly rolls the rock despite knowing it will always fall. Through this, Sisyphus finds true freedom; the gods cannot control his thoughts. He defies their punishment by embracing his fate, remaining true to himself, and choosing happiness. Rather than escaping his absurd task through suicide, he resists it.

The story of Sisyphus offers a lesson: despite facing despair, disappointment, stress, and alienation, one must continue living. Avoiding suicide means respecting one's own existence. According to Camus, life's existential struggles—such as suffering, disease, anxiety, and death—render existence seemingly meaningless. Living the absurd means accepting a lack of hope, embracing rejection, and consciously acknowledging dissatisfaction (Lewis, 2009). Many people plan their futures, even their families' futures, only to find that things do not go as expected. This often leads to hopelessness, disappointment, frustration, and alienation.

Hopelessness

Hopelessness is the feeling of despair that arises when a person sees no hope in life and believes that life is no longer worth living (www.differencebetween.net). It is defined as a state in which a person lacks confidence and hope in their life. As Camus expressed in his essay:

“If I were a tree among trees, a cat among animals, this life would have meaning, or rather this problem would not arise, for I should belong to this world. I should be this world to which I am now opposed by my whole consciousness and my whole insistence upon familiarity. This ridiculous reason is what sets me in opposition to all creation” (Camus, 1955).

This implies that hopelessness is the feeling of failure in achieving one's hopes. A hopeless person perceives themselves as a failure because they cannot overcome the obstacles and difficulties in life. Hopelessness occurs when a person feels that their life is not going as expected or desired.

Alienation refers to the process or result of someone becoming estranged from their surroundings or other people. According to Keniston,

“Most usages of alienation share the assumption that some relationship or connection that once existed—something 'natural,' desirable, or good—has been lost” (Saleem, 2014).

Camus also describes alienation in his essay:

“In a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and

his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity” (Camus, 1955).

This means that alienation occurs when a person can no longer return to a previous state in which they felt accepted by society. They feel estranged from their surroundings and isolated by those around them. Alienation leads to a sense of absurdity. When someone feels alienated, they may seek a different life. In many cases, those living in absurdity may choose to end their own lives, believing that doing so will free them from prolonged suffering.

However, suicide is not a solution to absurdity. For Camus, suicide is an admission that a person finds life meaningless. He rejects suicide as an option, viewing it as an act of cowardice (Lewis, 2009). He describes it as a form of repudiation (Camus, 1955). Another alternative is turning to religion, which Camus calls "philosophical suicide." In this case, a person seeks to escape reality and find peace in faith, choosing to reject the world rather than themselves. However, Camus argues that adopting a religious or supernatural solution destroys the reason for living, making it just as fatal as physical suicide. Whether physical or philosophical, suicide is not an authentic or valid response to absurdity because it denies the human ability to resist and protest against injustice and meaninglessness (Lewis, 2009).

The final response to absurdity is to accept and embrace it. Since absurdity is unavoidable, the proper response is to face it with courage (Lewis, 2009). Camus states that the best way to deal with absurdity is through revolt. He argues that existential authenticity requires people to acknowledge that their plans and projects are, for the most part, hopeless and futile. This is the existential revolt—affirming the absurdity of life and choosing to continue living (Timrayner, 2016). Revolt is an act of heroic defiance against anything that oppresses humanity. It is a refusal to accept the loss of human life and a rejection of death as an acceptable fate (Raskin, 2001). It is a constant confrontation between a person and their own obscurity (Camus, 1955).

Through revolt, humans challenge the world, regardless of whether the outcome is favorable. What matters most is the process of revolt itself, which gives life meaning. As Camus states:

“It may be thought that suicide follows revolt—but wrongly. For it does not represent the logical outcome of revolt... Revolt gives life its value. Spread out over the whole length of life, it restores its majesty to that life. To a man devoid of blinders, there is no finer sight than that of the intelligence at grips with a reality that transcends it.”

This means that revolt is a better response than suicide. Even though the outcome of revolt is uncertain, through it, people can discover meaning and value in life. They do not focus on whether their revolt will lead to good or bad results.

Thus, Camus identifies three consequences of absurdity: revolt, freedom, and passion (Camus, 1955). When a person revolts against absurdity, they gain freedom, which then becomes their passion. Revolting against absurdity does not mean escaping from it but rather accepting it. Humans continue to live in absurdity because they cannot return to their previous state. In doing so, they attain true freedom and find fulfillment in their condition.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study applies a qualitative methodology and uses a library research approach. The primary source for the analysis is Sidney Sheldon's novel *If Tomorrow Comes*, published in 1985 (Sheldon, 1985), while secondary sources are taken from books and journals. The data analysis is conducted through several steps. First, the novel is carefully read to gain a comprehensive understanding. Next, relevant data related to Tracy Whitney's characterization and life are selected and collected. The collected data are then analyzed in three sections: the first focuses on character analysis, the second examines the absurdity in the character's life, and the third explores the consequences of that absurdity. Finally, conclusions are drawn based on the analysis results.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Absurdity of Tracy Whitney's Life

Tracy Whitney once had a harmonious life before a mafia gang destroyed it, turning her world into misery. Her life changed drastically when she sought justice for her mother but ended up being trapped instead. This sudden shift in her life led to feelings of hopelessness and alienation. In *If Tomorrow Comes*, Tracy Whitney is portrayed as a smart and beautiful twenty-five-year-old woman. She believed her life was perfect despite losing her father years ago. To her, a perfect life meant having a loving mother, a promising job, and a man who loved her back. Tracy felt like the luckiest and happiest person, with all her dreams seemingly within reach, including her marriage to Charles. However, her happiness was shattered when her mother died by suicide on the night Tracy discussed her marriage with Charles' family. Otto Schmidt, a loyal employee of her mother's company, revealed that Joe Romano was behind it all. While Romano did not physically kill Doris Whitney, he mentally and financially ruined her, leaving her with insurmountable debts and fraud accusations. Fueled by grief and anger, Tracy confronted Romano, demanding that he clear her mother's name. She brought a gun, planning only to intimidate him, but in a struggle, she accidentally shot him. Despite calling an ambulance, Tracy was arrested at the

airport while trying to return to Philadelphia. In court, she attempted to explain her innocence, but the prosecutor painted her as a criminal who committed armed robbery and attempted murder. Unable to afford a lawyer, Tracy accepted a court-appointed attorney, Perry Pope, unaware that he was part of the mafia. Pope deceived her into pleading guilty, promising a reduced sentence, but instead, she was sentenced to fifteen years in the Southern Louisiana Penitentiary for Women. Feeling betrayed and devastated, Tracy realized that her once-pristine life had turned into a nightmare.

In prison, Tracy experienced intense hopelessness. She had never committed a crime before but was now labeled a criminal with no one to support her, not even Charles, who abandoned her. The prison environment was harsh—overcrowded cells, unsanitary conditions, and violence among inmates. The realization that the mafia had destroyed all chances of reclaiming her former life deepened her despair. She had lost her mother, her fiancé, and her unborn child. The hopelessness was compounded by alienation. Tracy, who once enjoyed freedom, was now reduced to a mere prisoner number. She felt like an outcast, stripped of her identity and forced into a life she never imagined. Even after being released, society continued to reject her. Her former employer, Clarence Desmond, who once valued her skills, refused to rehire her because of her criminal record. Other job opportunities also vanished, and she was frequently suspected of crimes simply because she was an ex-prisoner. The mafia had not only sent her to prison but also ensured she could never reintegrate into normal life. Tracy's story reflects the concept of absurdity, as described by Camus, where a person's desires clash with the harsh realities of the world. She sought justice but was instead ensnared in the mafia's web, leading her into a life of despair and isolation.

The Consequence from the Absurdity in Tracy Whitney's Life

This section discusses the consequences of absurdity in Tracy Whitney's life. According to Camus, there are three consequences of the absurd: revolt, freedom, and passion (Camus, 1955). Revolt is the act of acknowledging the absurdity of life and choosing to continue living (Timrayner, 2016). Through revolt, a person challenges the world in search of something new. They do not concern themselves with whether their actions are right or wrong or whether the outcome is satisfactory. What truly matters is the act of revolt itself, as it gives life meaning.

Tracy Whitney's transformation from a harmonious life to a miserable one nearly drives her to end her own life. Feeling alone, alienated, and hopeless, she sees no way out. However, she ultimately realizes that she must keep living. There is no point in longing for the past—when her mother was still alive, when she worked at a bank, or when she was in a relationship with Charles—because those moments are gone. Tracy understands that the only way to face misfortune is by

embracing it. She patiently endures her days in prison until she finally gains her freedom. She does not have to serve her full fifteen-year sentence because she earns early release after saving the warden's daughter. However, her newfound freedom does not truly liberate her, as she still struggles with financial instability and unemployment. Society continues to see her as a criminal, branding her as dangerous due to her past as a prisoner. People judge her based on her record rather than the truth of her situation.

This societal prejudice becomes evident when Tracy works as an assistant housekeeper at The Wellington Arms hotel and is falsely accused of stealing jewelry from a guest, Mrs. Marlowe. Although she insists on her innocence, the assistant manager refuses to believe her because of her criminal record. This pattern repeats itself in multiple jobs, reinforcing the idea that society has already decided her fate. Faced with constant accusations and rejection, Tracy starts to believe that if she is going to be labeled a criminal, she might as well become one. She decides to enter the world of crime under the guidance of Conrad Morgan, whose address she obtained from a fellow inmate. With no money and no means of survival, she turns to theft.

Despite knowing the risks—returning to prison or even worse—Tracy continues her life as a thief. She engages in dangerous heists and soon realizes that she enjoys them. Her acceptance of her new identity aligns with Camus' concept of absurdism: by embracing the absurd, one revolts, and through revolt, one finds meaning. Tracy's decision to embrace the very thing she was falsely accused of—being a thief—grants her a sense of freedom. She can go wherever she pleases and do whatever she wants. For the first time, she feels in control of her life.

Tracy's ultimate freedom emerges when she fully embraces her role as a criminal. She no longer worries about morality, consequences, or even financial gain. Her primary concern is the thrill of the job and the satisfaction of completing a heist. Passion naturally follows freedom—once she feels liberated, she finds herself drawn deeper into the world of crime. She becomes addicted to the danger, the excitement, and the challenge, as illustrated in the following quote:

“‘...At first it was because I needed the money. And then it became something else; I've given away quite a bit of money. I love matching wits against people who are successful and bright and unscrupulous. I love living on the cutting edge of danger.’ (396)”

Tracy no longer steals for financial reasons but for the thrill of outsmarting others. Crime has become her passion, and with passion comes addiction. She finds it increasingly difficult to walk away. This struggle is evident in her conversation with Jeff, a con artist with whom she has a special relationship. Jeff urges her to leave the world of crime behind and live a normal life:

'True. What do we tell Gunther?'
 'You've already told him. We're not in that line of work anymore.'
 'Shouldn't we at least find out what he's thinking?'
 'Tracy, we agreed that—'
 'We're going to Amsterdam anyway, aren't we?'
 'Yes, but—'
 'Well, while we're there, darling, why don't we just listen to what he has to say?'
 Jeff studied her suspiciously. 'You want to do it, don't you?'
 'Certainly not! But it can't hurt to hear what he has to say...' (399-400)

This exchange reveals that Tracy is not ready to give up her life of crime. It is no longer about money but about the excitement, the challenge, and the danger. Even though she does not openly admit it, her responses suggest that she still craves the thrill. Her choice to fully embrace her criminal identity—an identity imposed on her by society—becomes her form of revolt. Through this revolt, she finds freedom and passion. Instead of succumbing to despair like her mother, Tracy chooses to survive by embracing the unpredictable journey of life. She accepts her fate, serves her time in prison, and ultimately thrives as a con artist because it brings her happiness.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to explore the absurdity in Tracy Whitney's life. The results indicate that absurdity is portrayed when Tracy seeks justice for her mother but instead finds herself trapped. Her once harmonious life turns miserable as she loses everything—her mother, boyfriend, baby, and job. Additionally, she is falsely accused of being a robber and a murderer, leading to her imprisonment. These hardships make Tracy feel hopeless and alienated. No one comes to help, listen, or stand by her side in her sorrow, which deepens her despair. Her sense of alienation arises when she feels different and rejected by society.

The study concludes that the appropriate way to confront absurdity is through revolt. Tracy chooses to resist rather than succumb to suicide because she realizes there is no turning back. The only option left is to live in the present and accept the absurdity of her existence. She ultimately becomes a thief, embracing the very crime she was once accused of. For Tracy, this path offers freedom and challenges, and over time, she comes to see thievery as her true passion.

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