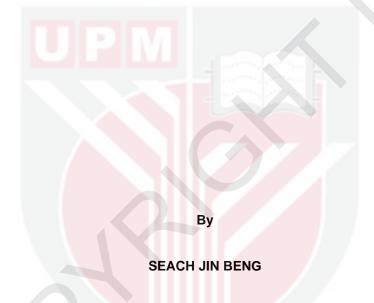**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

NEGOTIATING IRVIN YALOM'S EXISTENTIAL CONCERNS THROUGH THE GROTESQUE IN SELECTED WORKS OF OSCAR WILDE AND YUKIO MISHIMA

SEACH JIN BENG

FBMK 2022 31

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By

SEACH JIN BENG

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia in Fulfilment of the Requirements of the Degree of Doctor Philosophy

January 2022

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January 2022

Chair : Arbaayah Termizi, PhD
Faculty : Modern Languages and Communication

The grotesque and existential concerns are rarely studied alongside each other in the field of literature. History has it that the grotesque has always been associated with aspects which denote negative connotations such as deformity, death, violence or monstrosity. Meanwhile, existentialists struggle to seek the meaning of life in a world filled with pessimism. The present study concentrates on the grotesque as a mode of representation and a literary tool for fictional characters to react to existential concerns. The grotesque will be analysed alongside four ultimate existential concerns of life, as pointed out by Irvin Yalom: death, freedom, isolation and meaninglessness. Textual analysis of four selected texts by Victorian author, Oscar Wilde and Post-war Japanese author Yukio Mishima namely *The Canterville Ghost* (1891), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1892), *Confessions of a Mask* (1949) and *Forbidden Colours* (1951) will be conducted to portray the flexibility of the grotesque as an alternative for the characters in reacting to existential concerns. Grotesque elements including misogyny, pederasty, excess and extravagance, carnivalesque, the grotesque body and narcissism will be studied alongside Yalom's existential concerns. This will then show how the male protagonists are able to justify their sense of existence by reacting to existential concerns through grotesque-inclined reactions. The findings of this study reveal that the male protagonists from the selected texts have all undergone changes in reacting to existential concerns through their grotesque-inclined reactions. Finally, it also suggests that the grotesque can go beyond its general derogatory meaning and conventional function as a literary tool. It is because it has the ability to serve as an alternative reaction for certain individuals in confronting their existential concerns.

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Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

MENANGANI MASALAH EKSISTENSIAL IRVIN YALOM MELALUI ASPEK "GROTESQUE" DALAM KARYA-KARYA TERPILIH OSCAR WILDE DAN YUKIO MISHIMA

Oleh

SEACH JIN BENG

Januari 2022

Pengerusi : Arbaayah Termizi, PhD
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Aspek "grotesque" dan eksistensial jarang sekali dikaji bersama dalam bidang
sastera. Sejarah menunjukkan bahawa aspek "grotesque" senantiasa dikaitkan
dengan aspek-aspek yang membawa konotasi negatif seperti kepelikan,
kematian, keganasan atau ketakutan. Sementara itu, para eksistensialis
berjuang untuk mencari erti kehidupan dan mereka sentiasa prihatin dengan
kepentingan mencari hala tuju kehidupan di dunia yang dipenuhi dengan
pesimisme. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji gambaran bagaimana
protagonis lelaki daripada empat teks terpilih oleh Oscar Wilde dan Yukio
Mishima telah dipengaruhi oleh masalah eksistensial dan reaksi mereka yang
bersifat "grotesque" terhadap masalah eksistensial yang dihadapi. Kajian ini
juga bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana watak-watak ini ditunjukkan telah
berubah setelah berinteraksi dengan masalah eksistensial melalui reaksi
"grotesque". Secara umumnya, Wilde dan Mishima tidak dianggap sebagai
pengarang yang karyanya sinonim dengan aspek "grotesque" atau
eksistensialisme. Walaupun eksistensialisme and aspek "grotesque" jarang
dikaji secara bersama, penyelidikan sebegini semestinya dapat menyumbang
kepada ilmu baru dalam bidang akademik. Kajian ini menumpukan kepada
elemen "grotesque" sebagai representasi yang membolehkan watak-watak
fiksyen untuk bereaksi dengan masalah eksistensial. Aspek "grotesque" akan
dianalisis bersama dengan empat masalah eksistensial seperti yang
ditunjukkan oleh Irvin Yalom, iaitu kematian, kebebasan, pengasingan dan
ketiadaan makna. Analisis wacana terhadap empat karya terpilih oleh
pengarang Victoria, Oscar Wilde dan pengarang Jepun pascaperang Yukio
Mishima, iaitu *The Canterville Ghost* (1891), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1892),
Confessions of a Mask (1949) dan *Forbidden Colors* (1951) akan dijalankan
untuk menggambarkan fleksibiliti aspek "grotesque" sebagai reaksi alternatif
untuk watak-watak dalam karya yang terpilih. Elemen "grotesque" termasuk
kebencian terhadap perempuan, pederasti, keterlaluan dan kemewahan,

karnivalesque, badan "grotesque" dan narsisisme akan dikaji bersama-sama masalah eksistensial yang ditunjukkan oleh Yalom. Keadaan ini kemudiannya akan menunjukkan bagaimana protagonis lelaki dapat mencari makna kehidupan mereka dengan menggunakan elemen "grotesque" sebagai reaksi alternatif dalam menghadapi masalah eksistensial. Penemuan kajian ini mendedahkan bahawa protagonis lelaki daripada teks yang dipilih semuanya telah mengalami pelbagai perubahan. Akhirnya, kajian ini juga mencadangkan bahawa aspek "grotesque" berpotensi untuk dikaji selain perspektif umum yang sedia ada. Hal ini dikatakan demikian kerana selain fungsi umumnya sebagai peranti sastera, konsep "grotesque" turut boleh dikaji dari segi fungsinya sebagai reaksi alternatif untuk individu tertentu dalam menghadapi masalah eksistensial.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Life is a long voyage made up of many meaningful chapters and the completion of this research is certainly a memorable chapter in its own right. Without a doubt, it is a chapter that captures my personal maturation and growth that would not have transpired if I had not chosen to start this journey.

My five-year journey started with lots of self-doubt but it eventually led a path where clearer answers and numerous light-bulb moments were found. It would not have been possible for me to complete this research without the help of Associate Prof. Dr. Arbaayah Ali Termizi, whose acute supervision and invaluable insight were indeed beyond what any supervisees could ever ask for.I am also incredibly thankful to Associate Prof. Dr Rosli Talif and Dr Zainor Izat Zainal for their helpful co-supervision of this dissertation. My journey would surely have been a lot more challenging and complicated without the much-needed assistance from this amazing supervisory league. Moreover, I would like to thank the staff at Faculty of Modern Languages and School of Graduate Studies for assisting me throughout my journey in the institution.

It is truly important that I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to my parents and sister for believing in me even when I stopped believing in myself numerous times along this soul-wrenching journey. I owe a great deal to many of my friends, colleagues and a few PhD course mates whose encouragement, inspiring stories and timely reminders have helped me immensely in making it to the end of this nearly-impossible journey. Among my friends, I would especially like to thank Daniel, Carol, Santini, Thina and of course not forgetting Dr. Nahid for offering me help and inspiration at different stages of my research.

I know I am truly blessed to have all of you in my life and I am delighted that whenever I revisit this chapter of mine, your presence will be warmly felt.

iv

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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Date: 8 September 2022

Declaration by Graduate Student

I hereby confirm that:
- this thesis is my original work;
- quotations, illustrations and citations have been duly referenced;
- this thesis has not been submitted previously or concurrently for any other degree at any institutions;
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

History has shown us that the grotesque can be interpreted, discussed and understood in various manners due to its wide-ranging manifestations as both an artistic and a literary concept. The grotesque is also known for its ability to contribute to a diverse understanding amongst scholars and artists alike because it can be associated with appalling and appealing elements.

It can be safely assumed that the grotesque is omnipresent in our world, whether one chooses to acknowledge its presence or completely disregard it. Although the term grotesque is used colloquially today to primarily describe objects or elements which bring negative connotations such as ugly, bizarre, strange, scary or even abnormal, the epistemology of the grotesque is undoubtedly more far-reaching than its literal form. Grotesque began to be taken seriously during the Renaissance period in Italy. However, the grotesque continued to be seen in a negative light because most ancient scholars likened it to the unappealing and impalpable. Literary scholars and philosophers began to consider it more critically until the dawn of the nineteenth century. Although Wolfgang Kayser and Mikhail Bakhtin were regarded as the two most instrumental scholars in putting the grotesque on the map of the literary sphere, it was, in fact, John Ruskin who first paid attention to the grotesque as a literary and artistic concept. In *The Grotesque Renaissance,* he asserts that the grotesque can evoke fear and laughter concomitantly in a conflicting manner (126). Due to their profound contributions to the grotesque sphere, their works are still widely referred to by modern scholars who wish to attempt critical studies dealing with the grotesque.

Meanwhile, although relatively newer in comparison to the grotesque, the whole notion of existentialism is certainly not new, as its origins can be traced back to as early as the 19th century. Soren Kierkegaard is largely acknowledged as the forefather of existentialist philosophy. The popularity of existentialism as a field soared in the wake of World War II. Since then, existentialism has spread its influence to various disciplines, including art, psychology, drama and literature. Existential psychotherapy is also heavily influenced by existentialism. It came into the picture due to the philosophical ideas posited by Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and most importantly, Heidegger, whose ideas gave birth to the field of phenomenology. At the dawn of the 20th century, psychologists started to pay more attention to how certain mental issues should be dealt with by helping the patients get in touch with their inner selves emotionally and spiritually rather than using medication. Viktor Frankl was largely considered to play an imperative role in bringing existentialism to

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greater heights as a philosophical concept in the early twentieth century. In 1980, renowned American existential psychiatrist Irvin Yalom published one of his most influential and ground-breaking books, *Existential Psychotherapy.* In it, he presents his four ultimate life concerns: death, freedom, isolation and meaninglessness. According to Yalom, these four ultimate concerns are deep-rooted in the existence of any individual regardless of their background, gender or age. Yalom posits that anyone who wishes to overcome their existential concerns should learn to take control of their own lives by creating meaning and values to justify their existence in this world.

Considering this study primarily focuses on literary works written in the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, it will draw heavily on the ideas and theories presented by the theorists mentioned above and philosophers when discussing notions concerning the grotesque and existentialism. This thesis aims to explore a new perspective and potential of the grotesque as a reaction to existential concerns by examining the works of Victorian writer Oscar Wilde: *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), *The Canterville Ghost* (1887) alongside the works of Post-war Japanese writer Yukio Mishima: *Forbidden Colors* (1951) and *Confessions of a Mask* (1949). The research intends to examine how the lives of these characters have been affected by existential concerns. Consequently, it has necessitated them to react to their existential concerns. This is done through grotesque-inclined reactions associated with elements such as carnivalesque, pederasty, misogyny, excess and extravagance and the grotesque body to validate their existence. To further elaborate, this thesis explores how these grotesque elements have been utilized by the authors to portray their characters' reactions to the four main concerns of life faced as identified by Irvin Yalom, namely death, freedom, isolation and meaninglessness. By reacting to these existential concerns through grotesque-inclined reactions, it is found that the examined characters have been able to experience life changes.

1.1.1 Background of Victorian and Post-war Japan Fiction

The Victorian era and post-war Japan were significant times in Britain and Japan in their rights, respectively. Both eras were marked by rapid changes in numerous aspects ranging from technological advancement to social sentiments. By dint of these rapid changes, there were drastic shifts in peoples' ways of life and worldviews. Historically speaking, there seemed to be very few similarities between these two eras that took place approximately one century apart. When studied closely, these two eras do share several commonalities. To start with, it is safe to claim that both the Victorian and post-war Japan eras were times associated with rapid social changes. During the rapid developments that moved families apart, people felt a strong sense of displacement due to the massive political and social changes. The Victorians, for instance, responded to these rapid changes by embracing a strict moral code as a form of national identity that kept everyone in place. Adams notes

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that self-discipline was an important catalyst for social progress and individual stature (18).

Similarly, in post-war Japan, where certainties were scarce, the whole of Japan was struggling to rebuild their national identity after their defeat in the war. Slaymaker asserts that the post-war period was the starting point in Japan where the regular daily life could no longer be lived and built as it used to be in the past (6). As a result of these changes, people became more adaptable as moving forward seemed to be the only option available. This has also led to many new movements and social revolutions. By the end of the Victorian era, Moran explains that Aestheticism and *Fin de siècle* became culturally influential among many aristocrats and artists, including Oscar Wilde himself. These movements closely linked to the notion of the Decadence championed cultivation of sensations emanating from extreme and bizarre experiences to sexual perversity (144). Meanwhile, as noted by Tsurumi, products of exoticism in association with the samurai culture, Buddhism and ritualistic suicides started to gain attention from Europe and North America in post-war Japan (100). In short, the Victorian and post-war Japan eras were characterised by rapid changes that positively and negatively impacted the people. Consequently, literary works written during and about these eras are worth examining together as they serve as the platform for readers to delve deeper into the eras that many still find both baffling and astonishing today.

History has clearly shown us that the Victorian period was a significant age in literature. Some notable writers whose works are still widely read today include Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Charlotte Bronte and, of course, Oscar Wilde. Paterson states that the Victorian era is undoubtedly an age of staggering literary achievement (292). Some of the hallmarks of Victorian literature include the strong emphasis on religion, gender, and social class. Agimoni postulates that 'Evangelical Revival' and melodrama dealing with gender and social issues were persistently dealt with in many Victorian fictions (14). Meanwhile, as Moran also observes, violence and sexuality were discreetly portrayed to suit the audience's taste and novel reading was treated as a process of decoding (80). However, the very essence of Victorian literature can be best summed up by Adams, who stresses that Victorian literature captures "the textures of social interaction, aspiration, and anxiety, within which social hierarchy could seem both a stimulus and a barrier to personal achievement" (18).

Literature in post-war Japan resonated well with the national sentiment that emphasised the importance of searching for an identity. After all, the post-war era was when the Japanese had to come to terms with their mortifying defeat. In the words of Noma Hiroshi, "Postwar literature is a literature that asks, through [the filter of] the war, what is humankind, what are the things that envelop us?" (21). This clearly shows how losing identity as an imperial power was troubling Japan at that time. Christian Galan in *Japan's Postwar* explains that literature was employed to respond to the need for cultural affirmation in a period when Japan was undergoing turmoil and dealing with the loss of

national identity (45). Meanwhile, as suggested by Slaymaker, existential themes such as loneliness, angst, and purposelessness resonated well with the national sentiment during the post-war period in Japan (26). Mishima, a post-war writer himself and whose works have greatly captured the keen interests of Western readers, was thus highly regarded as a significant figure that bridged the gap between Japan and the West during the period marked by turbulence and crisis.

1.1.2 The Rationale for Author Selection

The decision to study two authors from two different periods and cultural backgrounds alongside each other was driven by a few factors. Firstly, although this study is not comparative in essence, studying how the grotesque can serve as a form of reaction to existential concerns in the works of two prolific authors from two cultural backgrounds will demonstrate the expandability and universality of the grotesque and existential concerns in transcending time and cultures. Apart from that, the works and philosophies of Wilde and Mishima have been examined together by past scholars. However, they were not examined from the standpoints of existentialism or the grotesque. Hence, the findings of this study will form a more tangible connection between the two authors in the spheres of existentialism and the grotesque.

Furthermore, despite the distinct differences between Victorian and Japanese cultures, it is crucial to note that these two cultures had a few common aspects that are worth inspecting. Many Victorian writers, including Wilde himself, had admitted to being influenced or inspired by Japanese culture. Beaujot asserts that Japan was seen as an ancient culture more sophisticated and developed than any other colonial nations by the Victorians. This has led to their admiration for that country (86). Meanwhile, in Japan, ideas and philosophies from the Western culture did play a significant role in forming their national identity since the late 19th century. This view is supported by Yamamoto, who explains that many intellectuals in Japan drew inspiration from Western ideas due to a lack of religious and liberal traditions in Japan itself (10). Concerning how Western philosophies were, in fact, influential in Japan, Piovesana observes that Western philosophy has had an impact on a lot of Japanese scholars today, where it is often taught as a compulsory subject in many colleges and universities today. Consequently, many Japanese students are rather acquainted with Western philosophies ranging from Marx's theses to Satre's existentialism (2). The rise of existentialist ideas was closely associated with the Victorian and post-war Japan eras. Logarta points out that Kierkegaard, who lived in the Victorian felt the urge to question the authenticity of societal values during his time. His existential philosophical views came into existence because he evaluated his inward values against the rapid changes in Victorian society (32). Coincidentally a few decades later, Kierkegaard's existential views began to flourish during the post-war Japan era. Giles notes that Kierkegaard's existential framework that emphasized subjectivity, death,

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freedom, despair, and anxiety was humanistic in essence, and because of this, these ideas resonated with the Japanese people. He added that Japanese translations of Kierkegaard's works actually existed a few years before the English version did (1-3). Hence, the rapid changes in both the Victorian and post-war Japan eras led to the birth and flourishing of existentialist ideas. Hence, examining existentialist ideas in works written in these two periods is completely warranted.

Furthermore, both Wilde and Mishima were known to have been heavily influenced by ancient Greek culture and the fin de siècle movement. Wilde was instrumental in championing the fin de siècle movement during his time. As stated by Napier, Yukio Mishima's writings were heavily influenced by western philosophies, including works of literature about ancient Greek and fin de siècle French (26). According to Ramday, the fin de siècle was a time synonymous with the increase of self-consciousness among its followers with regard to core societal values related to gender issues, marriage and sex (2). Meanwhile, as Matich rightly observes, some of the more radical members of the fin de siècle movement were vehemently questioning the meaning of life and sex by rejecting traditional ideas with regard to gender (4). With Wilde and Mishima being influenced by such radical ideas, it will be feasible to examine how these two authors, who were largely acknowledged as mavericks during their times, expressed their ideas through their works.

To conclude, the rationale for examining the works of Wilde and Mishima was not purely arbitrary, but instead, it was justified by these factors as explained above.

1.1.3 Brief Introduction on the Selected Authors and Texts

Oscar Wilde and Yukio Mishima were two writers who lived in different centuries, eras and places. The Greek cultures heavily influenced both Oscar Wilde and Yukio Mishima, and their love for aesthetics could be clearly seen through their works of fiction. Another significant similarity between Wilde and Mishima is the existential tone in their works. Apart from that, both Wilde and Mishima were also well-known for their abilities to weave their ideologies and doctrines into their works of fiction, thus, blurring the lines between facts and fiction. Additionally, both of them lived not being able to show their true selves since they had to conform to strict societal standards and restrictions.

Consequently, Wilde and Mishima desperately sought an outlet to express their true feelings and thoughts. It seemed that the best channel that allowed them to experience the complete freedom of self-expression was through their writing. Oscar Wilde was one of the most iconic Victorian writers of the late 19th century. His critically-acclaimed works have been translated into different languages and are still read widely by scholars of all ages and backgrounds in

this day and age. Known for his wits and his unsurpassed linguistics abilities, Wilde's works have been able to fascinate and shock readers for more than one century.

Meanwhile, Yukio Mishima was one of Japan's most celebrated post-war modern writers whose works had significantly impacted Japan's modern literature. Mishima's works dealt with some contemporary issues as the themes of his works to revive the world of Japanese classics. Wilde was a source of inspiration for Mishima when he was young. In fact, as a young writer, Mishima admitted to being fascinated by many of Wilde's works. One of his biggest tributes to Wilde was shown when he directed Wilde's play, Salome, in Tokyo in 1960 and even called it '*the opera which I love'*.

When dealing with 19th-century Victorian literary texts, few would exclude Wilde's impressive list of works, including his highly-acclaimed plays, short stories, critical essays and novels. Meanwhile, Yukio Mishima's works which have been translated into English by established scholars, had won him immense popularity in the west since the post-war period in Japan. These English translated works remain largely unexplored in the field of English literature. Mishima's *Forbidden Colors* (1953) was translated by Alfred H. Marks, a professor of early American literature at the State University of New York. He served in Japan during World War II as part of the military intelligence and was a visiting Fulbright scholar in Kanazawa in 1965. Meanwhile, Mishima's acclaimed novella *Confessions of a Mask* (1949) was translated by Meredith Weatherby, who was a Texas-born American publisher and the founder of Weatherhill Publications. He spent a large part of his life in Japan and was handpicked by Mishima to translate his novella. On the surface, it seems rather difficult to form a connection between the two writers. However, when studied more closely, Wilde and Mishima indeed shared many similarities in their style and purpose of writing. In order to make the thesis more focused, this study will specifically look at their use of grotesque elements as an alternative way to react to existential concerns. This thesis argues that both the writers found no intrinsic meaning in the universe and had to create their meaning in life through the use of grotesque in their writing. Although Wilde's and Mishima's works dealt with different issues, subjects and themes, the existential tone and consistent use of the grotesque in their works are worth examining.

1.1.4 Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was born on October 16 1854. Highly regarded as one of the most influential English writers of the 19th century, Wilde was among the writers identified with the late 1890s and is one of the few everyone still widely read and studied. His works won him admiration and denigration. Legends sprang up about him and unsavoury rumours too. He was accused of sins, from effeminacy to plagiarism. He was sentenced at the end of

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two years of hard labour for the lesser charge of indecent behaviour with men. Ellmann notes that seeing so much glory and humiliation through one person was a rarity (105). Wilde was a controversial figure, and much of it could be attributed to his worldview clashing with Victorian standards. Bristow notes that Wilde's oppositional qualities made him a prominent figure adored by many during his time. He was an Irish man who was at odds with his English literary culture. At the same time, he was also a sexual maverick whose intelligence was unsurpassed by many around him (12). Wilde was no stranger when it came to challenging the social norms during his time. His flamboyant appearance, ostentatious speeches and contentious writings often got him the bad books of his contemporaries and critics alike. Despite that, many still admired him for his unorthodox worldview and lifestyle. Hofer notes that during his lecture tours, Wilde repeatedly challenged the gender norms of middle-class America (5).

Wilde's life would have been very different if he had lived in a different era, not the conservative Victorian era in 19th century England. Michael Wheeler notes that the Victorian age was not only the longest but also the greatest in the history of English fiction. Many of the burning issues in Victorian Britain were religious controversies. The keynote of 19th-century homosexuality was struck by Oscar Wilde in 1895 when he was put on trial in the witness box for his homosexual practices. It received much attention from the public owing to the publicity generated by popular journalism during the 1890s. Neil McKenna is his biography, *The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde,* theorises that even at the tender age of 16, Wilde was already aware of his homosexuality. According to McKenna, upon his arrival at Oxford in 1874, Wilde went on to explore his sexuality, discovering that he could feel "passionate romantic love for "fair, slim" choirboys, but was more sexually drawn towards the swarthy young rough trade". By the late 1870s, Wilde was already obsessed with the philosophy of same-sex love and had become close toa group of Uranian (pederastic) poets and homosexual law reformers, becoming acquainted with the work of gay-rights pioneer Karl- Heinrich Ulrichs. However, McKenna believes that Wilde was not feeling pleased with his sexual and romantic desires, and, hoping that marriage would cure him, he married Constance Lloyd in 1884. Some reviewers criticised McKenna's account, who find it too speculative, although not necessarily implausible. Wilde's sexual orientation has variously been considered bisexual, homosexual, and pederastic. Wilde felt he belonged to a culture of male love inspired by the Greek pederastic tradition. In describing his own sexual identity, Wilde used the term *Socratic*. His most significant sexual relationships appear to have been (in chronological order) with (perhaps) Frank Miles, Constance Lloyd (Wilde's wife), Robert Baldwin Ross, and Lord Alfred Douglas. Wilde also had numerous sexual encounters with working-class male youths, often rent boys. When asked in the court whether he considered the descriptions of the feelings of one man towards another youth was appropriate, Wilde said, "I think this is the most perfect description possible of what an artist would feel on meeting a beautiful personality that he felt some way was necessary to his art and life". Thus, it can be said that Wilde's perception of the subject of homosexuality or aestheticism per se was greatly influenced by his love for art and literature and vice versa.

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1.1.5   Yukio Mishima (1925-1970)

Mishima Yukio was born in the Yotsuka district of Tokyo, Japan, on January 14, 1925. Mihisma was a prolific writer whom many literary critics still regard as one of the most significant and influential Japanese novelists of the 20thcentury. Kenne notes that Mishima was probably the most famous Japanese who ever lived in Japan. Europeans and Americans may not be able even to name one Japanese emperor, politician, general, scientist, or poet, but they are familiar with Mishima's name, if not his works. In large part, of course, this is the result of his high-profile suicide. However, even before that, he was the only Japanese acknowledged by Esquire magazine in its selection of one hundred influential people worldwide and the only Japanese who appeared on television programs aired worldwide (45).

Mishima wore many hats during his lifetime because aside from being a writer, he was also a poet, playwright, actor, model and film director. Although he lost the Nobel Prize in Literature to Yasunari Kawabata in 1968, he is still considered one of the most important Japanese authors of the 20th century as most of his works were translated into English by western scholars who specialised in Japanese literature. Mishima's works exude a fusion of Japanese and modern western literary styles. He was often credited for his ability to write with decadent metaphors and a rich range of vocabulary.

Mishima's father was a high civil servant; thus, he had the privilege to attend the aristocratic Peers School in Tokyo. Mishima did not have a good relationship with his father; consequently, his grandmother Natsuko played a dominant role in his childhood. Because his grandmother was overly protective of him, most of his childhood was spent being alone or playing dolls with his female cousins. Ever since Mishima was a young boy, he displayed amazing talents for writing, and even his teachers were impressed by his story-telling skills that they recommended some of his stories to local magazines to be published. When World War II ended, he went to study law at the University of Tokyo. Mishima published his first novel entitled *Tozuko* (Thieves) in 1948, and at that time, his talent as a writer began to attract more people's attention. However, it was not until his second novel, Kamen no kokuhaku (1949; Confessions of a Mask), a partly autobiographical work that describes with unsurpassed stylistic mastery a homosexual who must conceal his sexual desires from the society around him that catapulted him to national fame at the tender age of 24. As Flanagan observes, Mishima's upbringing was distorted. He was caught up in the middle of the fierce rivalry between his mother and grandmother and feeling strong affection for both of them. Mishima quickly learned to keep the peace by concealing his own feelings. From his first years, Mishima was forced to reside in an interior world where he would not show his face (43).

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Mishima never looked back, and for the next 21 years, he wrote numerous novels, plays and critical essays that would become Japan's most important modern literary works. Some of these works include *Ai no kawaki* (1950; Thirst for Love), *Kinjiki* (1954; Forbidden Colours), *Shiosai* (1954; The Sound of Waves) and *Kinkaku-ji* (1956; The Temple of the Golden Pavilion).

Although Japanese readers celebrated Mishima's works, he struggled with his identity and sexual orientation throughout his youth. Mishima's lifetime was surrounded by controversies, praises and hatred alike, which is why he is still one of the most prominent Japanese authors that the western world finds so appealing. Some of his works are still read by western readers, and according to Piven, Mishima had been compared to Ernest Hemingway, Marcel Proust, Honore deBalzac, Gustave Flaubert, and even James Joyce. He is said to practice the introspection of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Phillip Roth, venturing into places few have glimpsed and forcing readers to face their own darkness (2). Despite that, Mishima's works were never easyto read or digest as some readers may find them rather disturbing, violent and even morbid. As Piven rightly observes, Mishima repeats his fantasies and conflicts throughout his literature. Mishima grants us the luxury of experiencing the sheer repetition of his penchant for misogyny, betrayal, and vengeance. His writings always expressed different perspectives of this compulsive confession, never escaping a consistent imaginary scenario, although the characters may vary (8).

Mishima's life was filled with the essence of art; in fact, he was considered by many a work of art. Mishima's suicide in 1970 was the final touch on his greatest work of art, as he was obsessed with the artistic possibilities of dying young, beautiful and pure. Keene also explains that the heroes of Mishima's works are often men who die young or dream of youthful death. Death and love were intertwined in Mishima's imagination (52). On November 25 1970, accompanied by four of his followers, they entered an army headquarters in Tokyo and took the commander hostage. Mishima demanded that the garrison be assembled. Dressed in an immaculate, fitted military uniform, he attempted to start a coup to restore the emperor's power but failed. Instead, he was mocked and jeered by the soldiers. Then, Mishima stepped back inside and committed *seppuku*, thrusting a short blade and disembowelling himself. It was the suicide that Mishima had carefully planned as it would be the epic suicide that posterity will always remember and talk about for eternity.

1.2 Justification of Text Selection

1.2.1 The Picture of Dorian Gray (1892)

Oscar Wilde had many prolific works, including plays, poetry, critical essays and fairy tales. Still, Wilde only published one novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), throughout his stint as an author. It is a perennial classic that

carries all the hallmarks of aestheticism in late 19th-century English literature. In the preface of the novel, Wilde pays tribute to aestheticism. Aestheticism is one central theme that is presented in *'The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In fact, the entire novel revolves around the idea of beauty. Wilde was a writer whose characteristics could be related to aestheticism. As Mckenna observes, in Victorian Britain, "aestheticism seemed to bring into life, fully formed, towards to the end of the 1870s and was a heady mix of art, idealism and politics which sought to propagate a new gospel of beauty" (18).

The Picture of Dorian Gray follows the life of a young and handsome man whose wealthy friend Lord Henry takes him to an art-loving painter, Basil Hallward. Basil paints a picture of Dorian Gray, a mesmerising artwork that makes Dorian wish he would stop ageing. The devil answers his wish, and Dorian stops ageing ever since while the picture takes all the ravages of time. The consequence is a disaster; in the end, Dorian has to pay with his life to reclaim what he lost. Wilde tries to conjure up the notion of the supremacy of youth and beauty in this novel. The notion of beauty has such a significant influence in the entire novel that all the major characters are fully absorbed in the elements of beauty. The idea of beauty first makes its entry in the novel's preface when Wilde wrote, 'Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault. Those who find beautiful meanings in beautiful things are the cultivated. For these there is hope. They are the elect to whom beautiful things mean only Beauty (5).

The Picture of Dorian Gray has always provoked contradictory interpretations, but underlying the disagreements about the work's meaning there has persisted a more fundamental debate about what kind of novel it should be read as. Modern critics are as divided about the novel's meaning as the original reviewers were obsessed with its morality. McKenna asserts that Oscar Wilde wanted those who read *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to understand the true nature of his sexuality. McKenna further claims that the novel celebrates the triumphs of sex over love, of sensation over spirit, the body and the soul, between the moral of the morally reprehensible is fought on several fronts. Much of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* mirrors and anticipates Oscar's exploration of his sexuality. It was a journey which began in doubt, denial and despair and ended with him being the martyr of his sexuality.

According to Ellmann, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published as a book in April 1891. Thereafter, W.H. Smith refused to carry it, as it was deemed too 'filthy'. Even Walter Pater had refused to write an appreciation for the novel on the ground that it was 'too dangerous. Ellmann further claims that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was a prodigious novel. For a novel to command such attention for so many years and how it has been able to evoke contradictory views in readers was unheard of. If Wilde attempted to break away from the traditional values of Victorian society in the fairy tales, in The Picture of Dorian Gray Wilde indeed went ahead with breaking even more rules. McKenna explains that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was written to be understood by its readers as a book

about sodomy and those men who practiced such a lifestyle. It served as the perfect summation of Oscar's intentions in producing *The Picture of Dorian Gray.*

1.2.2   The Canterville Ghost (1891)

The Canterville Ghost (1891) is a novella by Oscar Wilde that contains horror, comic and grotesque elements. The story was initially published in the popular magazine *The Court and Society Review* in 1887. It was eventually republished under Wilde's anthology *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories* in 1891. Malcolm notes that the story material draws heavily on a tradition of ghost stories but simultaneously breaks many traditions related to the genre per se (183).

The Canterville Ghost was a work written in response to the conflict in Anglo-American relations. At a time when America and Britain were resisting mutual influence on each other, America, with its modern spirit, regarded the British values as backward. The British, however, regarded the negative doctrines of the New World as a hazard to the tradition that made up their cultural identity. The bulk of the story follows the primary subject matter by exploring the conflict between the ghost and the Otis family from America. It further explores how the ghost, Sir Simon de Canterville, a man of evil life, welcomes the new owners of the mansion where he is trapped after he died, with his evil plans to scare them. It was later made known that his wife was murdered in the library in 1575. He was tortured to death by her brothers, and he has never been able to leave the mansion since. Malcolm asserts that the ghost's hauntings are defused, defeated, and dispelled by the materialism and enterprise of the American family (182). In the end, Sir Simon's ghost is liberated by the courage and pity of Virginia, the Otis daughter. As her reward, she is given fabulous old jewels by the ghost, and the story ends happily with her marrying an English aristocrat. Despite their professed austere republican principles, the U.S. family is integrated into English society.

The Canterville Ghost made its first appearance in the 1887 issues of Court and Society Review, a time when ghost stories were highly popular due to the influence of Gothic novels and the resurgence of interest in occurrences dealing with the paranormal. In actuality, Wilde wrote the story to respond to the cultural clashes between America and Britain. Malcolm notes that *The Canterville Ghost* was a work written in response to the conflict in Anglo-American relations. When America and Britain resisted mutual influence on each other, America, with its modern spirit, regarded the British values as backward. The British, however, regarded the negative doctrines of the New World as detrimental to the tradition that made up their cultural identity. Balakrishnan notes that in *The Canterville Ghost*, Wilde creates stereotypical characters that represent both England and the United States, satirising both the unrefined tastes of Americans and the determination of the British to

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preserve their traditions. Consequently, it is a story mainly based on the idea of contrasts which contributes to the story being both terrifying and comic. Concerning this, it is thus feasible to study the text through the grotesque lens because, according to Edward and Graulund, one of the grotesque characteristics appears when characters possess both terrifying and comic traits leading to physical disharmony (89-90). Such a view was supported by Harpham, who says, "real and apparent contradictions abound in discussions of the grotesque; it is an extremely flexible category." Although *The Canterville Ghost* was generally regarded as a reflection of Wilde's negative impression of American life, the novella has been studied through various lenses by literary scholars concerning the ideas of performativity, duality and supernaturalism.

1.2.3   Forbidden Colours (1951)

Mishima's *Forbidden Colours* was published in 1951, and the novel centres around the themes of homosexuality, betrayal, beauty and ageing. The Japanese title *kenjiki* is a euphemism for homosexuality in Japan which can also be understood as erotic love. Piven suggests that *Forbidden Colors* (Kinjiki) refers to the ecstatic stratifications of homoeroticism. The Japanese word for colour, jiki or shiki, connotes sexuality, and the word kin denotes precisely forbidden sexuality in this work. The novel expresses Mishima's repetitive and compulsive fantasies, but in this work, he amplifies the dimensions of these fantasies with intense, graphic, and prolix detail (135).

The novel is a timeless classic in Japan and many western regions because it openly discusses homosexuality in post-war Japan. *Forbidden Colors* bears all the hallmarks of Mishima's signature elements, including beauty and the power it holds, the misery one feels from such beauty, and the pain of ageing and being ugly. Flanagan notes that *Forbidden Colours* had seen the ultimate defeat of the misanthropic old novelist and the triumph of the beautiful young man, whom Mishima was both enthralled by and desirous of turning himself into (122). Like Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the novel is highly patriarchal, where men are the primary focus, and the women are primarily one-dimensional and insignificant. Women are portrayed as weak and superficial and serve as men's victims. As Piven sees it, women are perceived as insidious and repugnant, prone to sexual betrayal and abject stupidity. The protagonist's malicious obsession in *Forbidden Colors* is revenge against women through seduction, rejection, and humiliation (25).

The story focuses on the main character Yuichi, a charming man. From the start, it is revealed that Yuichi cannot love women as he only has sexual feelings toward men. Yet, under the influence of the ageing, cynical Shunsuke, he is persuaded to marry a young girl so that the girl will suffer from a loveless marriage. Shunsuke wants the loveless marriage to serve as a form of revenge to fulfil his misogynistic tendencies. Duality is also emphasised in the novel whereby during the day, Yuichi lives up to the expectations of the others, while

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at night, he enjoys his outings in various gay bars and indulges in promiscuity. Flanagan further notes that in *Forbidden Colours,* duality is created between the controlling novelist and the beautiful, young gay man. At first, it seems as though the novelist can control and manipulate the sexuality of the young man. Still eventually, Shunsuke himself, who has not previously been homosexual, starts to fall in love with Yuichi (113). As Yuichi is exceptionally beautiful, no one can resist him, whether men or women. They are all lured by his beauty, including the great writer Shunsuke who is described as old and ugly. Yuichi follows his advice by indulging in the pleasure of debauchery while breaking the hearts of both women and men.

Beauty is also the mainspring of the novel. It deals with the idea of how beauty always brings sensuality, temptation and deadly seduction. Piven theorises that Mishima sought to evoke in life and art an image of the aesthetic lyricism and eroticism of beauty, ecstasy and death (9). Keene also notices that beauty is an essential element in Mishima's work when he suggests that Mishima the writer, was the believer in the beauty of early death (49). Much like Oscar Wilde, Mishima was said to be a homosexual even though he was married and had two children. Throughout the novel, Yuichi and Shunsuke struggle to find the reasons for their existence. While both resorts to different ways to justify their existence, their internal struggles to fit into a world that they feel alien is what makes this novel worth examining concerning the notion of existentialism.

1.2.4   Confessions of a Mask (1949)

Yukio Mishima's second novel *Confessions of a Mask* (1949), catapulted him to superstardom, although the novel sent shockwaves all over Japan when it was first published. The novel is regarded as an autobiographical account of Mishima's life and struggles. As Flanagan sees it, the circumstances of Mishima's early life can be reasonably ascertained by comparing the early sections of *Confessions of a Mask* with, for example, the recollections of Mishima's father and mother (53). He further notes that it is tempting to take Mishima's famous account in *Confessions of a Mask* at face value of his first orgasm. Still, as we shall see, that seemingly autobiographical novel was, in fact, a carefully researched fiction that never even purported to be anything more than aspects of truth (53).

The novel deals with the painful struggle between the main character Kochan's inner conflicts that clash with the realities and expectations of the real world during World War II. Kochan is presented as a multi-faceted character in his quest to mask his true self as a homosexual during a time in Japan that expected a man to behave in a certain way. Much like Mishima in his early life, Kochan lives his life masking his true identity to conform to societal standards. He fantasises about brave warriors and heroic; bloody deaths yet lives in fear that his mask will slip one day. Nathan notes that in the novel, the protagonist narrates the gestation of his pleasure in violent fairy tales, his arousal by

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murder, and fantasies of killing beautiful boys. The book not only confesses to sexual perversion but verifies it (99). The protagonist, Kochan, lives in fear and trembling that one day, people will discover who he is. In many ways, *Confessions of a Mask* is the primary text that readers will need to revert to for the sake of better understanding Mishima's later novels. It is also a novel that embodies perfectly all the grotesque and morbid elements that Mishima was notorious for. According to Piven, the novel as be read as the psychological dissection of the author, his erotic and violent fantasies, his struggle with roles and appearances, and his final realisation of his sexual identity (23).

Although the novel is often regarded as an autographical account of Mishima himself, Mishima was more dauntless and fearless than the novel's protagonist Kochan in leading a life he had always wanted. To Mishima, the mask, as Keene suggests, served him quite differently. His efforts were always directed not at concealing his authentic expression from other people's gaze but at making his face into the mask he had chosen. He used the mask to subdue the sensitivity, timidity, and self-pity (49-50).

These four selected texts share some stark similarities, particularly concerning their characters, motifs, tones and subject matters. Hence, it is academically viable to study these four texts concerning how the male protagonists in these four texts react to their existential concerns through the grotesque.

1.3   General Statement of the Problem

Although the grotesque concept can be traced back to the Renaissance period in Italy, its presence in the works of literature remained largely uninvestigated until the late eighteenth century. Even then, the grotesque was solely examined for its meaning and structure as presented in the works of literature. Over time, more studies on the grotesque came to light as we began to see how the grotesque was studied alongside the fields of psychology, religion and philosophy. Some studies focused on how the grotesque was employed as a tool to create the shock effect, disgust, a sense of alienation and horror. This has generally set the scene of the grotesque for a long time until recently. More scholars started to study the grotesque concerning new literary theories such as feminism, post-colonialism and queer theories. By virtue of these new and purposeful attempts, the sphere of the grotesque has expanded significantly. Despite all these feasible attempts to expand the grotesque sphere, it is still perceived negatively today.

History has indicated to us that the grotesque has always had a derogatory meaning since the term has always been associated with notions that challenge the norms and conventions. Edwards and Graulund posit that laws of nature are violated by grotesque fiction that breaks clear-cut taxonomies, definitions, and classifications. Consequently, there is a "built-in narrative

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tension between the ludicrous and the fearful, the absurd and the terrifying" (4). The consensus is that anything violating the norms should be viewed as unfavourable and invalidating. This obviously applies to the grotesque as well. As far as existentialism is concerned, it is noteworthy that philosophies combining grotesque and existentialism are hardly examined. Hence, how the grotesque can serve as a form of reaction to confront existentialism should be seriously reckoned with. Frequently, these two concepts are hardly studied simultaneously because the grotesque is generally viewed as pejorative. The field of existentialism usually entails meanings of life, including but not limited to readings concerning what is normal and positive. For instance, it is more common to examine how our sense of existence is bolstered through reactions connected with love, friendship, communal relationships, and collective, national allegiance. The idea of how the grotesque can function as a form of reaction to existentialism is hardly being emphasised. In the grand scheme of things, an effort to study the grotesque and existential concerns together will shed new light on the field of knowledge relevant to these two concepts.

Apart from that, it is also crucial to consider that the grotesque is often seen as a concept that is exclusively linked to Western literary traditions. In *Modern Art and the Grotesque, Frances Connelly* boldly posits that grotesque manifestations found in non-western domains should not be categorised as grotesque because their "cultural association" with Western thought is completely absent (6). However, this study aims to contest such claim as the grotesque is a form of artistic and literary representation deeply rooted in the history of civilisation and certainly can transcend the boundaries of culture, place and time. Considering all these factors, this research explores how the grotesque could go beyond its traditionally perceived function as merely an artistic expression. The research will further demonstrate how the grotesque is not only meant to blur the lines between the normal and abnormal that lead to a chaotic and liminal state, but it can also serve as a form of reaction to existential concerns. The works of late Victorian writer Oscar Wilde will be studied alongside the works of post-war Japanese writer Yukio Mishima to demonstrate the grotesque's flexibility and expandability in transcending two different cultures. This is done in line with Yalom's ultimate concerns that are universally present. The universality of Yalom's existential concerns sets them apart from the ideas posited by other existentialists. It is because the rest emphasised how existential issues are meant to be dealt with individually. In other words, Yalom asserts that his four ultimate concerns transcend all cultures and geographical boundaries by affecting all individuals universally. In contrast, other existentialists perceive that all individuals react to existential concerns in an individualistic manner.

Although Wilde's and Mishima's works dealt with different issues, subjects and themes, the strong presence of existential ideas and consistent use of the grotesque in their works are worth examining. Most research in existentialism has been limited to Western literary texts, focusing primarily on the ideas of despair and pessimism. Not many researches focus on how existential concerns can be confronted through grotesque-inclined reactions. This

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research focuses on how the male protagonists in the selected texts of Wilde and Mishima are portrayed to have reacted to existential concerns through their grotesque-inclined reactions. By examining the works of two culturally-diverse authors whose works are hardly examined from the standpoints of existentialism and the grotesque, this study forms a more tangible connection in the works of the two selected authors.

Finally, existential concerns examined by other existential philosophers such as Heidegger and Sartre are often regarded as struggles that need to deal with on a more personal level. This means that existential concerns are regarded as problems that individuals will need to deal with themselves and often, without the knowledge and acknowledgement of others. Comparatively, Yalom's framework concerning existential concerns was structured in a manner where these concerns are viewed as universally present. To further explain, Yalom believes that all individuals are bound to suffer due to any of the four concerns listed. This also means that these existential concerns transcend all cultures and geographical limitations. In light of this, examining characters in the selected texts from two cultural backgrounds and historical periods, namely the late Victorian and post-war Japan, will demonstrate how these existential concerns are experienced universally.

1.4   Research Question and Objectives

The following research questions and objectives were formed in response to the discussion made in the statement of the problem:

Research Questions

- How are the male characters in the selected texts portrayed to have been affected by Yalom's four existential concerns, namely death, freedom, existential isolation and meaninglessness?

- How are these characters portrayed in reacting to existential concerns through grotesque-inclined reactions?

- How do these characters change in reacting to their existential concerns through the grotesque?

Research Objectives

1. To study how the lives of characters in the selected texts are portrayed to have been affected by existential concerns, which are in line with Irvin Yalom's framework of four ultimate concerns, namely, death, freedom, existential isolation and meaninglessness.

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2. To analyse how the characters are portrayed in reacting toYalom's four ultimate concerns through their grotesque-inclined reactions.

3. To examine how the characters are portrayed to have changed in reacting to existential concerns that are in line with Yalom's framework. This will then show that every reaction to existential concerns leads to changes in an individual, even through grotesque- inclined reactions.

1.5   Conceptual Framework

This study is conducted based on a framework that deals with the grotesque and existential concerns in line with scholarly discussions. Chapter two will specifically discuss a long list of relevant studies concerning the grotesque and existentialism. The recurring grotesque elements will be further expanded in chapter two, where Irvin Yalom's existential concerns will be discussed. Studies conducted by previous scholars are credited accordingly, and they will then be further discussed in line with how the framework adopted in this study can be academically feasible.

Although the study of Irvin Yalom's existential concerns was initially conducted as a clinical study on patients who suffered from what Yalom terms as an existential crisis, for this study alone, existential concerns are solely discussed as a literary and philosophical concept. This is because Yalom's four ultimate existential concerns were formed based on ideas borrowed from previous existential scholars such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre and et cetera, whose ideas have been examined extensively in the field of literature. Hence, this study will primarily be examining existential concerns alongside the grotesque from the literary point of view, and it is not meant to be taken as a study dealing with the sphere of psychology or the clinical field.

Accordingly, as far as the grotesque is concerned, it is imperative to mention that it is only to be examined as a concept that enables the characters to react to their existential concerns solely from a literary standpoint. It is not meant to be discussed from the perspective of existential psychotherapy. It is because the attempt to do so might lead to the digression of this study from its literary path. Finally, and just as importantly, this study aims to demonstrate how the grotesque can serve as a form of reaction for the characters in the selected texts to their existential concerns to form points of convergence between the grotesque and existential concerns. Thus, it solely aims to show that there are similarities in the ways the two selected authors deal with the grotesque in their works per se, especially concerning the portrayal of their fictional characters.

Consequently, the authors' mental psyche, worldviews and intentions will not be treated as primary concerns when analysing the selected works. However, the authors' backgrounds and the sentiments surrounding the periods they

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lived in ought to be examined as these can lend credence to the accuracy and validity of the analysis conducted. This research will fill the gap by exploring how the grotesque could actually be presented in a positive light and eventually offers alternative insights into the field of the grotesque that is frequently misconstrued.

1.6   Methodology

This study explores and discusses the grotesque as an alternative way to react to existential concerns through a textual analysis conducted on the selected works. The four selected works will be paired according to the grotesque representations and elements found in them. The decision to pair up the texts, which consist of two novels and two novellas, is also attributed to the fact that these texts share many common motifs, theme and sentiments. The grotesque representations will be studied from the lens of two different cultural backgrounds, namely Western and Japanese, to show the unity associated with the grotesque as an aesthetic category or literary pattern. However, it is crucial to note that this study is not fully comparative in nature. It never seeks to critically compare how the selected texts deal with the grotesque in line with existential concerns. Instead, it aims to only show the universality and expandability of the grotesque as a reaction to existential concerns.

Although, as mentioned earlier, this study aims to solely study the grotesque and existential concerns from a literary standpoint, it is still crucial to take into account the cultural backgrounds and sentiments of the two selected authors, Oscar Wilde and Yukio Mishima. It is because these two factors greatly determine the very idea of the grotesque. This means that what is regarded as grotesque in one particular culture at a particular period may not necessarily be the same in a different time or place. Thus, for this study, the grotesque elements explored are done in line with the understanding that Clayborough asserts as "any style of art which deviates from the conventional patterns" (16). He further explains that anything that is "incongruous with the accepted norm, in life or art" can be considered grotesque (16). With this taken into consideration, the recurring grotesque elements that include excess and extravagance, pederasty, misogyny, the grotesque body and narcissism are to be selectively examined in line with the nature of their unconventionality concerning the norms adhered to in late Victorian and post-war Japan eras.

Next, a thorough textual analysis of the selected texts concerning the grotesque elements such as extravagance and excess, carnivalesque, pederasty, narcissism and misogyny will be discussed in detail. This depicts how they can be used as a reaction to existential concerns like death, meaninglessness, freedom and isolation faced by the male protagonists in the selected texts. The concern of death will be examined alongside the grotesque element of excess and extravagance concerning pederasty and misogyny. This is to show how some of the characters in the selected texts have been able to

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stave off their fear of death through pederasty and misogyny. Meanwhile, the concern of freedom will be examined together with Bakhtin's carnivalesque to demonstrate how the characters can find a more profound sense of existence by celebrating chaos and freedom. The methodological scope of the present thesis mainly focuses on existential concerns, as pointed out by Irvin Yalom, as his framework provides clear-cut definitions for existential concerns. The four main concerns of existentialism, namely death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness and how they can be overcome through the grotesque elements will be examined so that points of convergence can be formed between the two.

1.7   Scope and Limitations

The grotesque as a concept has a substantial and diverse meaning as it can be studied and applied in various contexts. In the field of literature per se, it is quite possible to trace the presence of representations of the grotesque in almost every literary genre. That being the case, examining all the representations and discussions associated with the grotesque in this study alone is almost impossible. Thus, the study will only focus on selected recurring grotesque elements, including excess and extravagance, pederasty, misogyny, narcissism and the grotesque body. fantastic and the uncanny, will not be directly discussed in this study.

Next, Wilde and Mishima produced a huge collection of fiction and non-fiction that encompass poetry, plays, short stories and critical essays. However, this research is limited as it only looks at two selected novels and novellas produced by the two writers. To further elaborate, this study only aims to examine four selected texts. Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) and *The Canterville Ghost* (1887) will be studied alongside the works of post-war Japanese writer Yukio Mishima: *Forbidden Colors* (1953) and *Confessions of a Mask* (1949). These texts were selected due to their similarities in their motifs, themes and sentiments. Although it might be a worthwhile attempt to examine all genres produced by both authors, it will surely be too ambitious a task due to the wide range of their written works produced.

Furthermore, it is crucial to mention that both the selected texts by Yukio Mishima were translated versions. Although the same English versions have been used extensively by non-Japanese scholars to examine Mishima's works, some meanings could have been lost no matter how accurately the texts could have been translated. However, seeing that this study focuses on the grotesque elements in line with existential concerns, which are generally observable, any subtlety of meaning that may be lost in the translation process may not significantly affect the understanding of these elements.

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Besides that, this study aims to explore the notion of existentialism exclusively concerning Irvin Yalom's four existential concerns. Existentialism is a field that tackles a wide range of discussions and is linked closely with the fields of philosophy, religion and politics. Also, problems discussed regarding existentialism cover terms like existential angst, absurdism and other forms of pessimism. However, all these will not be placed under this study's focus as Yalom's existential concerns framework is considered comprehensive enough.

Finally, only the male protagonists will be examined in this study. Other female characters will not be analysed within the parameter of this research, although some female characters do have significant roles in these texts. Besides the reason that most of the protagonists in these selected texts are coincidentally males, the decision to only focus on analysing the male protagonists is also motivated by the proposition that both the writers wrote in the times when gender roles were strictly formed. Danahay, in *Gender at Work in Victorian Culture: Literature, Art and Masculinity* in 2005, notes that it would be hard to deny one's gender roles in the Victorian period because the result would be "unthinkable" (6). Such rigidity in gender roles is also noticed in post- war Japan. As explained by Hidaka in *Salaryman Masculinity: The Continuity of and Change in the Hegemonic Masculinity in Japan* in 2010, the formidable patriarchal structure in Japan remained as strong as ever even after Second World War (47). Because of this, it could be safely assumed that being a man in these two periods was undeniably challenging due to the strict gender roles imposed. Thus, it will be feasible to examine male characters in line with existential concerns stemming from life's pessimism. Nonetheless, gender roles are not the main focus of this study and the discussion presented here is mainly to address the limitation of this study.

1.8   Significance of the Study

As discussed earlier, the study of the grotesque remained relatively unpopular until quite recently. It was not until the dawn of the twentieth century that the grotesque began to be taken seriously in literature. The lack of popularity as a research subject in the field of literature was also mentioned by Thomson, who claimed that literary studies that examined the grotesque as a whole were rather limited (71). With this in view, it is safe to say that literary studies that deal with the grotesque concerning existentialism is tremendously scant. Hence, this present study that aims to establish points of convergence between the grotesque and existential concerns, particularly in literary texts from two cultural backgrounds, is indeed few and far between. This study will bring fresh critical insight to the studies of existential concerns alongside the grotesque in the light of studies on Yalom, Bakhtin, Kayser, Clayborough and other philosophers. By jointly conducting a study on late Victorian and Post-war Japanese texts, this study has introduced a new approach to reading the grotesque and its role as an alternative reaction to existential concerns. The study will demonstrate how one can overcome existential concerns, which emphasises that anyone can overcome them as long as they are willing to take

the initiative to create meanings and purposes in their own lives. It focuses on the flexibility and expandability of the grotesque as a way to react to existential concerns in the selected works of Oscar Wilde and Yukio Mishima, which were largely overlooked. Apart from that, while Oscar Wilde and Yukio Mishima have been studied together in the field of literature, attempts to draw connections between the works of the two authors in association with the grotesque and existentialism are relatively scarce in the field of literature. Although there has been some research conducted on Mishima's works in Japan and Wilde's works in other parts of the world, their use of grotesque elements as a means to bring new meaning to life and overcome anxiety and agony resulting from existential concerns remain largely unexplored as almost all of the studies readily available tackle mostly discussions related to homoeroticism, aestheticism and the Absolute.

Finally, scholars who have previously studied two authors jointly were largely motivated by the fact that the two were connected through their social, historical and cultural backgrounds. For instance, the Victorian and post-war Japan periods were projected to be governed by a strong sense of pessimism where people felt a sense of displacement and disillusion. With this in view, this study aims to present a fresher perspective concerning the two authors' selected works. As a result of the pessimistic sentiments surrounding the two periods, it will not be surprising that the ideas of existentialism flourished. However, the grotesque that defies social norms was largely overlooked, particularly with regard to how it could be utilised as a form of reaction to reject conformity that leads to a more profound sense of existence. Hence, this study is significant as it sheds new light on an idea that has been given sufficient attention. By presenting the grotesque in a different perspective that differs from its extensively negative one, it gives it a chance to go beyond its literal sense and functions.

1.9   Definition of Terms

This section summarises the different meanings of the grotesque concerning its relevance to literature and as a mode of expression. First, the meanings of the grotesque will be discussed in their literal sense in dictionaries and encyclopedias. Although the denotative meanings of a term only serve to provide general definitions, it is still helpful in enabling us to understand the literal contexts in their most basic forms. It has been mentioned numerous times that the grotesque can be interpreted in association with different meanings owing to its fluidity and expandability across cultures and eras. Thus, the meanings of the grotesque in its connotative sense will also be briefly discussed in this section. The connotative meaning of a term or word is certainly a lot broader than its denotative sense. However, instead of providing a long list of the meanings of the grotesque in its connotative sense, only those directly relevant to this study's research framework will be discussed.

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Next, the definitions of existentialism and its various elements will also be briefly discussed in this section. First, the meaning of existentialism will be studied in line with how various existential philosophers define them.Then, the problems related to existentialism will be reviewed to connect them to existential concerns.

1.9.1   The Grotesque in its Literal Meanings

Various English dictionaries have offered different interpretations and meanings of the grotesque. Understood primarily as an adjective, the word grotesque has been given three varieties of interpretations and definitions by these three selected English Dictionaries. The *Cambridge Dictionary of English* defines grotesque as "strange and unpleasant, especially in a silly or slightly frightening way". In contrast, *Collins Dictionary* defines the word as "something is grotesque when it is so unnatural, unpleasant, and exaggerated that it upsets or shocks you". Meanwhile, according to BBC English Dictionary, something can be understood or perceived as grotesque when it "is exaggerated, and ridiculous or frightening". Although there are nuances in the meanings provided by the dictionaries mentioned above, it can be understood that these three dictionaries negatively define the grotesque.

1.9.2   The Grotesque and its Connotations

Obviously, it will be rather limiting to gauge the meaning of the grotesque solely from its literal sense, as provided by dictionaries. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the term grotesque, it is imperative to examine it connotatively too. For this purpose, the ideas of major scholars whose works have contributed significantly to the grotesque will be put forward. In *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, Kayser describes the grotesque as the occurrence of how familiar elements in a context turned unfamiliar that they become disturbing. Consequently, the grotesque world exudes a sense of alienation and fright where we come in touch with the "nocturnal and inhuman" (157). Meanwhile, Bakhtin expanded on the idea of the grotesque by positing that the grotesque came into existence much earlier than the Renaissance period. Bakhtin's framework on the grotesque was later expanded to cover carnivalesque elements, the grotesque body and grotesque laughter. Then in the 1970s, came another theorist, Geoffrey Harpham, who further developed the sphere of the grotesque by presenting the idea that the grotesque can create "images of instantaneous process," or "narrative compressed into image" (11). The ideas of these three scholars have helped stretch the meanings of the grotesque far beyond its literal forms by diversifying the grotesque as a mode of representation and literary tool.

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1.9.3　The Grotesque in Relation to Transgression and Disharmony

Although the grotesque is more commonly attached to the notions of the macabre, alienation and horror, it is equally important to examine it in relation to transgression and disharmony. Transgression and disharmony are seen as violators of the status quo that uphold conventionality. This means that with transgression and disharmony, the norm is turned upside down due to having things blown out of proportion. Edwards and Graulund explain that when transgression and disharmony occur, the limits of conventional aesthetics are then challenged (64). It is important to state that transgression and disharmony do not exist on their own, and various elements are usually employed so that they can come into existence. These elements include exaggeration, excess and extravagance. As further stated by Edwards and Graulund, exaggeration happens when something is altered "beyond its normal or due proportions and, as such, it expands upon that which is already present" (67).

Meanwhile, extravagance can be understood as "wasteful and excessive", while excess means to have more than what is deemed enough. (71-72). Although these elements can be quite easily understood from their literal sense, it is noteworthy that they are hardly regarded as grotesque because they are usually not treated as a form of violation. However, some of the recurring grotesque elements examined in this study are regarded as grotesque-inclined because they are represented through the notions of exaggeration, excess or excess, which ultimately leads them to violate the norms.

1.9.4　The Grotesque Body

The grotesque body is another mode of representation closely associated with the grotesque. Just as the term suggests, the grotesque body violates the normality of the human body. This term was coined by Bakhtin, who explained that the grotesque body is a body that keeps growing for it is continually built and expanding. Bakhtin also asserts that in the grotesque body, blood, bowel, heart and other organs are often displayed in both the outward and inward parts of the body, and the "outward and inward features are often merged into one" (317-318). Concerning this, Edwards and Graulund also put forward the idea that the grotesque body is usually presented through images of deformed bodies or a "juxtaposition of different body parts" to produce a sense of horror and alienation (57). The grotesque body will be closely examined through some of the characters in the selected texts. It will then demonstrate how their preoccupations with the grotesque body help them cope with the fear and anxieties resulting from their existential concerns.

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1.9.5   Existentialism and Its Variations

Existentialism is an umbrella term that describes how individuals react to their own existence in their own ways. Gravil notes that existentialism emphasises the individual as the actual foundation of existence, and we are responsible for our actions (10). Although this generally sums up the very foundation of existentialism, there are various ways in which existentialism can be examined. It is crucial to revisit the fundamental ideas posited by some of the earliest existentialists to understand what it truly encompasses. French philosopher Jean- Paul Sartre emphasises the three important modes of human existence: being-in- itself, being-for-itself and being-for-others. To Satre, 'existence precedes essence, and although existence is meaningless, individuals can create meanings in their lives to justify their existence. Søren Kierkegaard believes that in a world filled with despair, there is a chance for us to make important choices that allow us to change our lives for the better. Meanwhile, another philosopher, Albert Camus, explains his take on existentialism from a slightly different perspective. To Camus, life is filled with absurdity, and individuals must constantly work on their awareness and acceptance to deal with the "randomness of life". There are nuances in the meanings as explained by these major existentialists. Existentialism can be best summarised through these five key elements. Flynn asserts that existentialism primarily emphasises discussions on these ideas: "existence precedes essence", time is of the essence, humanism, freedom vs responsibility and ethical considerations (23).

1.9.6   Existentialism in Relation with Existential Concerns

Existential concerns are some of the recurring problems frequently dealt with in existentialism. Although existential concerns are sometimes referred to as existential struggles or existential nightmares, they generally discuss similar concepts ranging from anxiety to fear. This study focuses on existential concerns based on the framework by Irvin Yalom, a renowned American existential psychotherapist. Yalom posits that there are four areas of concern: death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness. To Yalom, these concerns are not experienced sequentially or developmentally because any individual can experience any of the four at any point in their lives. These four existential concerns will be discussed more comprehensively in chapter two, together with the recurring grotesque elements examined in this study.

1.10   Structure of the Thesis

The present chapter discusses the grotesque in line with existential concerns in the selected novels and novellas by Oscar Wilde and Yukio Mishima. Specifically, it explains how Irvin Yalom pointed out how the recurring grotesque elements in the selected pairs will be examined concerning their functions as alternative ways to react to existential concerns. Besides that, this

chapter will present a discussion about the selected authors, the selected texts and their literary periods. Then, chapter two discusses the theories and concepts associated with the grotesque and existentialism, where later, critical studies are reviewed. All results are evaluated and later incorporated into the discussion from chapters four to six, where recurring grotesque elements and Yalom's four existential concerns are discussed in detail.

Furthermore, Chapter Three provides theoretical and conceptual frameworks that explain how the research objectives can be met. Next, chapters four and five provide a comprehensive and critical analysis of the selected texts in line with the conceptual framework proposed that aims to match the recurring grotesque elements with existential concerns. The findings of the analysis will be presented at the end of chapter five where a comparison of how the grotesque was viewed in the post-war Japan and Victorian eras is made. Finally, in chapter six, recommendations and personal reflections will be presented accordingly.

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