

**Dialectics of Existence: The Quest for Authenticity and Meaning in
Fosse's *Septology***



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DEDICATION

I
Dedicate
this thesis
to
My Whole Family
in general
&
My Younger Sister
in particular!

DECLARATION

I, **Peer Jan s/o Muhammad Umar**, Registration No# **675-FLL/MSENG/F21**, candidate of **MS English (Literature)**, department of English, International Islamic University, Islamabad do hereby declare that this thesis, titled “**Dialectics of Existence: The Quest for Authenticity and Meaning in Fosse’s *Septology***” submitted by me in partial fulfillment for my MS Degree is my original work and has not been published or submitted anywhere. I further declare that it will not be submitted or published for the purpose of earning any other degree at any university or institution in the future.

I also acknowledge that if evidence of plagiarism is found in this thesis, the work may be canceled or revoked even after the degree is awarded.

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The Self – a moment of immense intellectual and existential fulfillment. To undertake a philosophical journey is to embrace solitude, wrestle with ideas in the quiet chambers of thought, and endure the weight of unanswered questions. I have found a strange companionship in this solitude: the silent voices of my soul, the echo of my existence, and the unrelenting pursuit of meaning.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation, “*Dialectics of Existence: The Quest for Authenticity and Meaning in Fosse’s Septology*,” addresses the ontological crises in contemporary human thought. The study constructs a rigorous philosophical framework that triangulates Kierkegaard’s concept of ‘subjective truth’ (thesis), Heidegger’s analytics of ‘authenticity’ (antithesis), and Sartre’s vision of ‘radical freedom’ (synthesis) through an existential and dialectical analysis of Fosse’s monumental *Septology* as a contemporary existential text. It employs a qualitative and interpretative approach to conduct a close existentialist-dialectical reading of *Septology*, identifying how its meditative, recursive narrative form enacts the existential quest to become, a never-ending dialectic between silence and expression, faith and nihilism, and self and other, societal norms and self-creation. The study also argues that *Septology* is not just a work of literature but a metaphysical phenomenon: a textual location where existential longing, phenomenological reflection, and theological residue meet. Through his fluid monologue, unresolved temporality, and sacred repetition, Fosse’s ontological minimalism demonstrates the existential conflict between the need for transcendence and the impossibility of complete meaning. In the era of postmodern dislocation, the study uncovers the hidden architecture of existential becoming by navigating the protagonist’s struggle with finitude, guilt, and divine absence. This thesis ultimately offers a radical rethinking of what it means to live authentically in the face of absurdity, contributing to the newly emerging field of literary existentialism. By presenting *Septology* as a dialectical continuum, an open philosophical space where the protagonist is called to make decisions, challenge beliefs, and eventually create meaning, it subverts dominant critical paradigms. By situating Fosse within the philosophical tradition, the study resurrects existential inquiry as a pressing critical necessity for the contemporary fractured cultural fluctuation.

Keywords: Fosse, *Septology*, Existentialism, Dialectics, Ontological Crisis, Phenomenology, Kierkegaardian Faith, Heideggerian Being, Sartrean Freedom, Subjective Truth, Authentic Self, Radical Freedom, Meaning-Making, Self-Creation

CHAPTER 01

INTRODUCTION

1.1 A Critical and Historical Background of Existentialism in Literature

For decades, literature has served as a medium for existential inquiry, wrestling with the most basic questions of human existence, identity, freedom, and the meaning of life. From Dostoevsky's moral and psychological agony in *Notes from Underground* (1864) to Camus's absurdist showdown in *The Stranger* (1942), literature has been a philosophical battleground where the individual's strife against existence is played out in narrative form. In this tradition, Fosse's *Septology* is a contemporary masterpiece that extends and deepens existential concerns through its meditative, poetic, existentialist, and dialectical fabric.

Existentialism in the 19th century was primarily concerned with the internal struggle that every individual had with faith, doubt, and self. Subjective truth and the leap of faith demonstrated that, rather than in objective systems, meaning could be found in an individual's passionate devotion to a personal ideal, which was frequently religious. The moral crisis pitted the individual against the institution and truth against dogma. The 20th century saw a shift in existentialism toward atheistic freedom, with a focus on alienation in modern, secular societies, especially following World War II. Sartre, Camus, and other philosophers depicted it as both a boon and a burden. In a universe devoid of meaning, the self was left to find meaning. The existential crisis was fueled by moral responsibility and the irresponsibility of freedom. Contrastingly, the crisis confronting 21st-century existentialism is the breakdown of the self in an era of algorithmic living, consumer identity, hyperconnectedness, and spiritual apathy. The crisis lies not only in the absence of meaning but in the proliferation of meaningless identities, roles, memes, and desires

that are promoted by neoliberal norms, media, and technology. Alienation is now referred to as existential numbing. In a post-authentic world, people no longer struggle for freedom or belief, but rather to feel real.

Fosse has built a dense, multi-vocal existential inquiry into selfhood, faith, authenticity, and freedom in a stream-of-consciousness mode that conflates temporal boundaries, collapsing past, present, and future possibilities. In so doing, *Septology* aligns itself with the philosophical concepts of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre, the existential dialectics of which provide the impetus for this particular study. This study positions *Septology* as part of the historical and philosophical landscape of existentialist literature as well as emphasizing the dialectical standing of its engagement with the existential categories of: ‘subjective truth’, ‘authenticity’, and ‘radical freedom’ in the core of this project. As such, it sets forth the justification for the research by locating its importance to literary studies, existential philosophy, and current dialectical thought.

Existentialist thought, though most often linked to philosophy, has historically had its strongest vehicle through literature. The themes of alienation, absurdity, anxiety, authenticity, and the search for meaning, which would characterize the philosophical movement known as existentialism in the 20th century, can be seen throughout the works of many authors, both preceding and following the formalization of the movement. Although authors like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Dostoevsky had set down the intellectual foundation in the 19th century, the high point of existentialist literature came in the 20th century.

In this tradition, *Septology* offers a 21st-century take on existentialism, mixing the introspective heft of modernist literature with the minimalist poeticism of his predecessors. The style of Fosse’s writing, characterized by repetition, rhythmic fluidity, and a meditative stance toward temporality, is in some ways an extension of existentialist literature, while at the same time

offering a balance and a new light. If Sartre's existentialism is highly political, Camus's metaphysically anti-transcendent, Fosse's attends to those theological aspects in his deliberations on existentialism, giving us a narrative where the absence of the Divine is, behind the scenes, as significant to the attempt to comprehend and to imbue meaning in the individual's experience as the presence of God.

In *The Future of Existentialism*, Jonathan Webber reinterprets existential thinking as a living moral philosophy that addresses contemporary issues regarding identity, autonomy, and meaning-making. In contrast to merely abstract theories, he argues that existentialist philosophers, such as Sartre and Beauvoir, offer a significant moral psychology that views human existence as an ongoing endeavor of self-creation in a contingent and often oppressive world. At the core of his vision is the claim that authenticity and bad faith are moral requirements that force people to confront the internalization of social norms and live deliberately rather than passively. By redefining existentialism to address current ethical and psychological concerns, Webber offers a powerful framework for understanding the struggle to define oneself against the backdrop of an indifferent world. His works revitalize existentialism as a philosophical school vital for addressing contemporary issues of freedom, identity, and meaning-making.

Contemporary men must thus acknowledge that their conception of life has been founded on delusions and face the more profound, frequently unsettling truth of their situation. The issues with 21st-century existentialism are revealed in this study that the existential crisis is exacerbated by the transition from certainty to doubt, which exposes the fragility of knowledge, subjectivity, hollowness, dread and existential angst.

1.2 A Brief Critical Introduction to Jon Fosse and His Literary Style

Among the contemporary Norwegian writers, Jon Fosse (b. 1959) has perhaps the highest profile, hailed as much for his distinctive minimalist language and style as for his deeply existential themes. Fosse's body of literature, across novels, short stories, poetry, and drama, interrogates some of the most somber tenets of being human: loneliness, alienation, being the authentic self, and the never-ending quest for significance and meaning in a universe that ultimately could not give a rat's ass. His austere, minimal, fragmented narrative structures reflect the dislocation and dissimulation of human experience and consciousness itself. Driven by a perspective that views Fosse's talent at framing the "unspeakable" dimensions of life, the unpleasant transformative feelings and thoughts we don't have words for but can attach ourselves to human living through prompting some to envy him as an artist whose art creates the "unsayable". His myriad other works include the *Septology* series, which has earned him accolades, culminating in his receipt of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2023. At the intersection of philosophy and literature, he creates contemplative stories that examine identity, belief, silence, and the existential state of contemporary life.

1.3 Significance of the Study: The Existentialist Discourse

Remarkably, *Septology* has so far not been discussed from a wide-ranging existential-dialectical point of view, though it does not lack critical attention. Its meditative qualities and existential themes have not escaped the attention of some scholars, but a full theoretical engagement with its dialectical structure is yet to be worked on. This study bridges this gap by showing how *Septology* presents a form of existentialist narrative that is more accurately described as a dialectical process in which the protagonist undergoes an existential transformation.

This study contributes to both existential philosophy and literary criticism with its rigorous and multifaceted reading of Fosse's *Septology*. Through the lens of existential philosophies of Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre, it critically interrogates Fosse's narratives and, in turn, how they activate, reflect, and interrogate existential tensions that hold in draft lines between authenticity, freedom, and the possibility of meaning in a universe where uncertainty, fragmentation, and alienation loom large. It sheds light on broader social problems of identity, existence, and humanity, providing a vital lens through which the study can examine the intricate association between literature and philosophy. The dialectical need of how societal expectations push the 21st century man toward greater self-assertion as he battles between the need to pursue personal freedom and societal roles. The thrown-ness of the postmodern ambiguity has created a sense of hollowness in the society even everything has the needed appetites.

Framing *Septology* in the existentialist philosophies of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre, this study speaks to existential literary criticism. It indicates a provisional framework that incorporates 'subjective truth', 'authenticity', and 'radical freedom' into a dialectical movement, serving as a new interpretative matrix. This research situates Fosse's work in a wider literary tradition while also demonstrating the unique contributions of that work by examining it through an existential-dialectical lens.

This study ultimately presents a fresh existential critique that dramatizes the self's invisibility, the breakdown of universal truths, and the silent persistence of meaning-making in a world that no longer recognizes or even demands it. In an age where authenticity is a vanishing point and freedom has become exhausting, this research, viewed through the lens of existential dialectics, does more than simply revisit earlier philosophies; it highlights the need to reconsider existence itself.

1.4 Problem Statement: The Existential-Dialectical Challenge in Septology

“Dialectics” is a method of reasoning that examines contradictions and how thesis, antithesis, and synthesis are dynamically resolved. In dialectics, reality is interpreted as a process of opposition, conflict, and change that questions ideas being isolated or fixed.

As Hegel states that “the truth is the whole” and characterizes “dialectics” as the process by which a concept moves through contradictions, this indicates that ideas develop through contradictions and resolution, leading to the emergence of truth (Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1807). Unlikely, Marx claimed historical change is fueled by contradictions in social and economic structures, adapting “dialectics” to the material world (Marx & Engels, *The German Ideology*, 1846). Sartre further defined “dialectics” as the conflict between human freedom and reality in which contradictions are purposefully used to generate meaning (Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, 1960). Therefore, the dialectical-existential approach was theorized in this study to refute the contradictions of truth, authenticity, and freedom found in *Septology*. The study unpacks how *Septology* possesses an existential-dialectical force field where ‘subjective truth’, ‘authenticity’, and ‘radical freedom’ conjoin.

In the contemporary time where existential concerns are entwined with neoliberal identity formation, technological mediation, and post-religious longing, Asle’s quiet rebellion through introspection challenges the dominant modes of self-construction. The novel(s’) “simplistic complexity” and meditative elements have been lauded by some critics, but they usually neglect to situate it within the contemporary crisis of selfhood, where existential alienation and cultural overload make meaning-making even more difficult. This study incorporates it into the existential critique of the 21st century framework.

1.5 Research Objectives

This study has analyzed how *Septology* embodies tenets of existentialism, including:

1. To critically examine how Jon Fosse's *Septology* dramatizes the existential tension between the individual's search for authenticity and the constraints imposed by societal norms, religious traditions, and cultural expectations.
2. To analyze how the fragmented narrative structure of *Septology*, particularly through the divided consciousness of the protagonist(s), contributes to an experiential and phenomenological understanding of key existential themes, especially alienation, inner dissonance, and the human quest for meaning.
3. To explore how the existential concepts of Kierkegaard's subjective truth, Heidegger's authenticity, and Sartre's radical freedom are embodied and problematized in the psychological, spiritual, and relational struggles of the characters in *Septology*.

1.6 Research Questions

Addressing these questions, this study extended the parameters of existentialist literary criticism, showing how *Septology* operates as a dialectical existentialist novel that both receives and transforms existentialist thought.

1. How does Fosse's *Septology* depict the existential struggle between the search for authenticity and the constraints of societal norms and expectations?
2. In what ways does *Septology*'s fragmented narrative structure through the protagonist contribute to an experiential understanding of existential themes, particularly alienation and the human quest for meaning?
3. How are the existential concepts of 'subjective truth,' 'authenticity,' and 'radical freedom' reflected in the internal and relational conflicts faced by the characters in *Septology*?

1.7 Research Methodology: Theoretical Framework

This dissertation presented a philosophical, qualitative, interpretative, and existential-dialectical reading of *Septology*. The methodology aimed to capture the existential tensions, narrative structures, and intellectual conflicts present in the novel, following the research's dialectical existentialist framework.

1.7.1 Research Design: A Qualitative and Interpretative Analysis

The study used a qualitative research design based on textual analysis and interpretative inquiry. Because existentialist philosophy addresses subjective experience, authenticity, and freedom, a qualitative approach to the protagonist's existential struggles was added. This study examined *Septology* employing interpretative criteria to unveil its philosophical-internal depth and existential dialectical movements.

1.7.3 Dialectical Framework: Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis

The term “dialectics” describes the process of reconciling opposing viewpoints in order to understand reality, truth, or meaning. Dialectics has its roots in classical philosophy and was developed by thinkers such as Hegel and Marx. It is a fluid stream of ideas that starts with a novel idea (the thesis), opposes it with a counterargument (the antithesis), and ends with a solution that goes beyond both (the synthesis). This triadic process improves comprehension levels and is transformative rather than static. In the context of *Septology*, “dialectics” is the existential process by which the self wrestles with the meaning, identity, and faith paradoxes in a world that is both sacred and ridiculous. It is a method of using contradiction to awaken consciousness, moving from subjective inwardness to ontological authenticity and, ultimately, to existential self-creation.

Hence, dialectics is not just a way of thinking philosophically; it is a lived, dynamic framework of becoming that is essential to the protagonist's quest for meaning in life.

Thus, this study has conceptualized Hegelian dialectics as an analytical tool to articulate the existential struggles that animate *Septology*. The dialectical existentialist method was best relevant to explore how *Septology* enacts a struggle of three basic evidence categories: The protagonist's esoteric devotional life progresses along a dialectical trajectory: Kierkegaard's 'subjective truth' informs the nature of Asle's existential journey in *Septology*.

Thesis – 'Subjective Truth' (Kierkegaard): The protagonist's existential struggle to determine meaning from within, subjectively, apart from objective, outside reality. Asle's internal monologues, meditative reflections, and artistic expressions serve as attempts to shape some sort of subjective truth in an indifferent or even hostile world. Heidegger's idea of authenticity is at the core of Asle's struggle in *Septology*. Authenticity, for Heidegger (1927), means coming to terms with the "they" (das Man) which are the inauthentic social mechanisms that shape identity. Asle's life is very much evident throughout the text(s) as he encounters with societal norms.

Antithesis – 'Authenticity' (Heidegger): The existential tension between living authentically and conforming to utilitarian, social, and religious traditions, or the inauthentic false-self constructs provided by external structures. Asle's relationship with the society into which he interacts, his introspection about faith, and his dialectical opposite, alternate Asle, the character who serves as his doppelgänger, is a tense dialectical inversion between the authentic and the inauthentic. In *Septology*, Sartre's radical freedom is the final existential breakthrough. According to Sartre, existence precedes essence, which implies that people's choices create their essence.

Synthesis – ‘Radical Freedom’ (Sartre): The solution or the recognition of human freedom in its radical, existentialist form. Sartrean freedom is not just the ability to choose but the obligation of self-making in a radically contingent reality. By the last volume of *Septology*, an existential journey culminates in Asle’s realization that he has radical freedom, a freedom that requires him to define himself. This dialectical reading of *Septology* allows for capturing the reversal experience of existence that is, the fluid and unfolding quality of existential experience. And rather than isolating one or two such themes, as many existentialist analyses do, this study insists that the true existential power of *Septology* is in its dialectical movement, from the search for subjective truth, through the struggle for authenticity, toward radical awareness of freedom.

1.7.4 Content Analysis

The close reading of *Septology* has focused on language, structure, and themes. It is subjected to a content analysis that seeks to:

- a) Investigate the existential themes like anxiety, despair, unauthenticity, faith, and absurdity.
- b) Examine the stream-of-consciousness technique that reveals its existential internal monologues.
- c) Play with the thematic circularity and fragmentation of the narrative as a metaphor for existential crisis and self-reckoning.

Such a content analysis is not simply thematic, but dialectical, demonstrating how such existential concepts oppose, resist, and come to shape and transform one another within the protagonist’s conscious awareness.

1.7.5 Primary Source(s)

The prime object of the research is *Septology* (seven novels in three volumes), which is segmented into seven parts as the primary source of study.

Volume I-III: The Other Name (2019)

The opening volume introduces Asle, a solitary painter whose existence is mirrored by a parallel version of himself, creating a dialectical tension between identity and otherness. This duality reflects Kierkegaard's subjective truth and Heidegger's idea of authenticity as well insofar as Asle's fragmented memories defy a linear teleology of oneself. Religious motifs using prayer and crucifix imagery heighten existential longing, and Fosse's meditative style captures the philosophical depth of the text.

Volume IV-V: I Is Another (2020)

Borrowing its title from Arthur Rimbaud's phrase "I Is Another", the second volume deepens the understanding of selfhood and relationality. Henri Bergson's concept of "Real Duration" reverberates in Fosse's handling of time while Sartre's radical freedom underwrites Asle's existential struggle that interrogates identity as an ongoing dialogue between self and other, exposing the fraught tension between autonomy and intersubjectivity.

Volume VI-VII: A New Name (2021)

The concluding installment peaks with themes of redemption and transcendence, consonant with Kierkegaard's leap of faith. In confronting mortality, Asle moves toward an acknowledgment of 'being-toward-death' that induces a reconciliation of fragmentation and coherence in Fosse's art. Following Asle's contemplative interiority, the lyrical prose emerges as

a double act of thought, yielding a dual act of meaning; an answer that collects *Septology's* existentialist investigations in a synthesis as a revelatory meditation on significance and being.

1.7.6 Secondary Sources

The secondary literature consisted of classic texts in existential philosophy, like Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* (1985), Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1962), and Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1992). A few critics unpacked Fosse's body of work and offered a background context that elucidates his idiosyncratic style of storytelling and the existential themes running through his work. With this contribution layering the dialectical upon the perspective already in view, rearward concerning *Septology* not the least, to refract the text of *Septology* as more than a work of philosophy, more than a work of literary theory, more than an existential psychology, as a living gift on the end of all these perspectives toward the augmentation of life in perspective, in analysis, in investigative pursuit. This research supplemented its analysis by drawing on philosophical and literary criticism and existentialist scholarship. Carrying out qualitative research methods, using dialectical existentialist theory, and employing textual analysis, this research ultimately establishes the optimal significance of *Septology* within the framework of existentialist literature in the 21st century.

This chapter has laid out the important philosophical and literary background one must have in order to start to make sense of *Septology*, offering a foundation that helps drive us towards a larger, dialectical reading of the protagonist's quest for authenticity, meaning, and identity. By focusing Fosse's craft in this wealth of existential thinking, the study establishes the groundwork for consideration of how, at its heart, the novel engages with key thematic interests in literature while also addressing how *Septology* pushes on and eventually abandon narrative circularity to examine some of the key existential problems we grapple with today as human beings. Framing

its arguments through the philosophies of Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre, this research seeks to demonstrate, through the lens of Fosse's minimalistic prose and fragmented narrative techniques, how this work animates the tension between individual liberation and cultural constraints, as well as the search for personal identity.

The first prominent theme that stands out in the narrative is the concept of Kierkegaardian 'subjective truth' with which the protagonist embarks on the journey of predestination in finding self-discovery through an individual sense of belief. In sharp contrast to Kierkegaard's inwardness, which provides the struggle that demands man's eager chase after authenticity, the true man of Heidegger – the true man who can only achieve such authenticity in light of the confrontation of death, which leads to the rejection of the values of the world, does not share such a nature. This balancing act is made even more complicated by Sartre's own synthesis of 'radical freedom' by providing a lens through which the protagonist must navigate as he battles his role in the creation of himself versus that of the world, which defies definition.

Septology embodied these existential tensions with its disjointed narrative structure, which evokes the fragmented and often temporal penetration of human consciousness and time rupture that comes with it and that forms a part of a modern existential experience. Such an indelible and recurring nature of the text forces the reader against the stark repetitions of shifting subjectivities, the same things viewed from different perspectives, repeating the existentialist argument that time, identity, and memory cannot be reduced to linear or static terms, but extended destructively through repetitively subjective experience. Therefore, Fosse's existential style with its economy of language, its minimal dialogue, and concern with internal self-examination becomes ideally suited to encapsulate the character's musing over meaning and what it means to witness, but far more heavy-laden, the burden of choice and ultimately memory and self-examination.

The study examined in greater detail how Fosse's narrative strategies foreground the protagonist's psychological and existential struggles. It demonstrated how Fosse's questioning of the recirculation of identical being and his involvement with time's surrender, memory, and selfhood echo key existentialist frames articulated by Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre. This array of existentialist thinkers with their diverse yet overlapping concepts of 'freedom' and the 'self' offers us a rich but consistent lexicon to unpack the conflict that lies at the center of *Septology*. The contrasting ideologies of personal autonomy against social coercion, the nature of truth, and the role memory plays in the making of individual identity.

In doing so, this thesis provided a deep engagement with the complexities of human existence as they relate to contemporary existential thought, whilst also applying existential philosophy to the text of Fosse's work itself. Fosse's vision of a world in which the lines are drawn between self and other, memory and present, never actually held long gives that iconic, evocative resonance for the struggles of self-determination in the new millennium. So, what the present study aims at is not only to deepen our critical understanding of *Septology* as a literary text but also to engage with an already burgeoning philosophical debate concerning the extent of human freedom, subjectivity, and authenticity in the knowledge economy of the 21st century.

The ontological division within the human condition, caught between being and non-being, faith and doubt, memory and forgetting, is reflected in the protagonist's fractured self, which is split between two versions of "Asle." *Septology* defies the conventional narrative conventions and turns into a work of literature that asks existential questions about identity, freedom, guilt, and the inexpressible quest for meaning in a disillusioned, post-religious world.

1.8 Conclusion

The dialectical architecture revealed in this research indicates how Fosse's *Septology* serves as a canvas for the artistic and philosophical deconstruction of human beings. Hence, this study provides a clearer perspective of how the existential troubles of the main character on his quest for authenticity and meaning can echo broader existential questions through the lens of the ideologies of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, and the philosophy of existentialism through textual analysis. In so doing, it demonstrates *Septology* to be more than a subjective work of imagination, but a metaphysical philosophy about what it means to be, to be temporal, and to be oneself. In particular, the study focuses on how Fosse's minimalist prose and fragmented narrative form offer a fascinating meditation on the existential conundrums that plague human life in the contemporary existential literature.

As a result, *Septology* is revealed as both a literary work and a profound philosophical investigation that forces the reader to consider the nature of belief, temporality, and selfhood in a fractured, postmodern world. By doing this, the study reinterprets what existential literature in the twenty-first century can offer and positions itself as a philosophical subject matter to address issues that are usually left to wrangle. Therefore, a new study of existential issues is not only relevant but also necessary because the crisis of the postmodern era is arguably more complex, diffuse, and urgent than in any other time period. This analysis suggests that *Septology* is a literary and existential depiction of that conundrum.

CHAPTER 02

REVIEW OF THE EXISTING LITERATURE

2.1 The Existential Dialectics in *Septology* and the Theoretical Foundations

The contemporary literary-philosophical conversation has been so quick to the particularities of Fosse's *Septology* and its expanded international reception. *Septology*, a work steeped in existential meaning, memory, faith, and identity, opens itself to critical dialogue from an existentialist philosophical perspective. Nevertheless, despite studies gauging its thematic complexity, a thorough existential-dialectical reading of the text is somewhat meager. The present study seeks to address this void by examining *Septology* in light of Kierkegaard's 'subjective truth', Heidegger's 'authenticity', and Sartre's 'radical freedom', bringing the three figures together in this pursuit through the dialectical method. In doing so, this literature review critiques those studies and theoretical frames that inform our understanding of Fosse's work and highlights the gaps that this dissertation aims to fill.

The philosophical movement of existentialism centers on the entitlement to existence itself, in which freedom, authenticity, and meaning are at the forefront. In the world of *Septology*, these themes play out in the protagonist's sustained confrontation with the struggle of seeking authenticity and self. Recent scholarly discussions on existentialism have largely engaged with a handful of canonical figures, most notably Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre whose ideas provide the foundation for this study.

Søren Kierkegaard shaped subjective truth, arguably the most powerful force in existentialism and personal meaning. Instead, claiming truth is allying in an internal movement into a conviction, transcending discursive and empirical evidence (Kierkegaard 1846). His

preoccupation with the “leap of faith” matches the demeanor of *Septology*’s protagonist, Asle, whose movement toward something approaching subjective truth in his faith and art resonates with that same drift. Some scholars have used Kierkegaard’s definition of subjective truth in consideration of contemporary literary texts in which the tension between personal meaning and existential duality through the process of writing takes priority. In *Kierkegaard and the Quest for Meaning in Modern Literature*, Patricia J. Richards claims that the philosophy of Kierkegaard can help readers understand individual characters’ struggles with meaning, especially when they confront the modern alienation and emptiness (31). In this way, such scholarly inquiry highlights how Fosse’s protagonist, Asle, feels his way toward subjective truth all on his own, a solitariness removed from both social mores and religious dogma. Most studies on Kierkegaard’s influence in literature elaborate on works that directly address faith, whereas *Septology* offers a more nuanced scrutiny of the relationship between faith, loss, and art, indicating that the role of art in Kierkegaardian existentialism needs much more attention.

The existential authenticity Heidegger laid out in *Being and Time* (1927) takes the form of a call for people to confront their morality and existence to live their lives authentically. As per Heidegger, “the presence of other individuals (that is, “being-with-others”) represents the principal threats to authenticity, inducing people to live inauthentic lives according to the demands of social conventions and community”. *Septology* is a perfect example of this Heideggerian struggle with itself since Asle has a struggle to let go of this authentic imposed falsehood of religion and familial roles that he pushes against and works to communicate with his true self at every turn.

Heidegger’s influence in literary studies is well-established, but contemporary Nordic literature has received little attention through a Heideggerian lens. In a recent comparative work, *The Influence of Heidegger in Nordic Literary Modernism*, Lars Johansen examines how writers

like Fosse bring Heidegger's concepts of authenticity into character building and authenticity influence the entire worldview of the self (21-33), yet his analysis fails to provide a comprehensive existential reading of *Septology* in terms of the dialectical battles between authenticity and inauthenticity, a chief concern of this study. When using Heideggerian concepts on *Septology*, Asle's struggle becomes not only the individual struggle for authenticity but also a struggle against societal norms and religious limitations, prompting a dialectical understanding of the tensions between individual authenticity and the necessity imposed on the individual.

This research is anchored in Jean-Paul Sartre's existential philosophy in terms of the conception of radical freedom. For Sartre, humans are "condemned to be free," or, in other words, it is up to each individual person to create values and meaning in a world that is otherwise indifferent and absurd. In *Septology*, Asle's freedom quest echoes Sartre's contention that freedom is as liberating as it is a burden. His struggle to find self-definition, particularly with his loss and the limitations of his past, reflects Sartre's belief that human beings are responsible for their own creation, no matter the absurdity of existence.

In *At the Existentialist Café: Freedom, Being and Apricot Cocktails*, a researcher claims, on account of *Being and Nothingness*, that Sartre challenges the idea that freedom must make people doubt their faith and that they must be ready to grow up and take the responsibilities of their life (Bakewell 17). This claim validates that the protagonist's path involves interacting with the meaning-making process rather than finding a solution. His takeaway from this is not a definitive response but rather the understanding that the conflict and the related issues of freedom and faith never have a definitive resolution.

Askildsen reveals the existential dilemma of the character through one act of defiance. One of his stories, *A Sudden Liberating Thought*, features a distinctly Scandinavian form of existential

anxiety as its protagonists struggle to define themselves in the face of a cruel and heartless world. He doesn't think morality or epics are real. His works portray the pristine, sometimes unbearable emptiness of life that emerges when illusions are broken (Askildsen 58).

Commentary on Sartre's concept of 'radical freedom' has played a notable role in existentialist literary criticism. Rosen interrogates "radical freedom" in the *Burden of Existence in Contemporary Literature* by questioning the ways Sartrean freedom has manifested in postmodern novels. Although he discusses several texts that engage with Sartre's philosophy, *Septology* is absent from his analysis. This delineation highlights the necessity of a detailed analysis of Sartre's notion of freedom in Fosse's work, as the author's minimalist genre and fragmented narrative dimension create a fertile ground for a more subtle analysis of freedom and existential despair in literature (Rosen 11). Although Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre each provide an important lens to consider *Septology*, a complementary yet a dialectical understanding must result from synthesizing these philosophies. The dialectical method creates an interrelation of opposites, a subject form of the truth from the object of reality, authentic with unauthentic, freedom with responsibility. Inspired by Hegelian dialectics, this method fosters an insightful experience of Asle, a man torn between contradictory frameworks of life.

Fosse's *Septology* is an intense meditation on existence, meaning, and selfhood, knit through the introverted monologues of its protagonist, Asle. The central arc of the novel's stream-of-consciousness narrative takes the form of an existential battle, the story of one person's attempt to wrestle with meaning, belief, and the limits of selfhood and the other. Despite its richness of existential themes, *Septology* has not yet received critical scrutiny from any dialectical existentialist perspective that perceives the connections between Kierkegaard's idea of 'subjective truth', Heidegger's notion of 'authenticity', and Sartre's concept of 'radical freedom'. In a study

of *Septology*, a critic describes its “simplistic complexity” and investigates the work’s meditative and existential depth, arguing that its flowing prose encourages contemplation (Barger 23).

The extant literary criticism that has been carried out in *Septology* has so far concentrated on the stylistic, religious, and minimalistic aspects of the prose, while some scholars have compared the meditative, repetitive narrative structure to the works of Beckett (Myskja 11-17). But the existential-dialectical movement is at least poorly fleshed out. Likewise, a study also cites existentialist motifs throughout Fosse’s work and its depiction of loneliness and memory in a rhythmic, almost musical framework (Singh 19). Both of their focuses illuminate *Septology*’s existential themes, but its dialectical structure has otherwise remained almost undug.

In literary studies, the use of “dialectics” was examined to some degree by numerous scholars in other works, including Peter H. Davis’ *Dialectical Narrative in Modern Literature* by questioning the interrelation of conflicting forces within literary texts. Dialectical thinking, Davis offers new possibilities for thinking about literary form, especially where literature explores the boundaries of internal and external conflicts, which one can see in a work like *Septology* (13). Yet there appears to be a broad field yet to venture in systematically applying a dialectical approach to the entire *Septology*, especially in the ways it contests with, and within, Kierkegaard’s, Heidegger’s, and Sartre’s respective systems. Drawing from these three existential figures, this study blends a dialectical analysis to provide a holistic study of the protagonist’s existential journey.

This study has laid out the key theoretical prerequisites of this dissertation: Kierkegaard’s subjective truth, Heidegger’s authenticity, Sartre’s radical freedom, and the dialectical method. These philosophers give slightly different, but complementary, thoughts on the themes of being, self, and freedom in *Septology*. Although particularly similar to a recent journal review, Walker

provided a more systematic investigation of the fundamentals of *Septology*, including not only the practical example of the narrative structure but also the thematic depth of *Septology* and the investigation of identity through language skills. The textualization of time in literature is, as Peter Hühn also indicates, not a plain matter but a complex consciousness calling for acceptance of the past and a material agency as for what the future may bring but the man must deconstruct all these complexities (122-29) retreating for further research into the *Septology's* dialectical structure. It encapsulates this crisis. Asle's reflective monologues often center on past decisions evoking a quiet yet profound regret that accompanies his isolation. His freedom is not celebratory; rather, it is restrictive, self-reflective, and intertwined with ethical duties.

So, this research has laid the foundation for research methodology and content analysis that investigated the dialectical approach that remains mostly unexamined within current academic discussions of Fosse's work. The study aspires to fill that gap through a detailed, systematic, existential-dialectical reading of *Septology*.

2.2 The Legacy of Existentialist Literature

Fosse's *Septology* is an existentialist text that takes its cue from the decisive themes of existentialist literature. They concern existence, its meaning or lack thereof and the view the individual has of society, and the struggle against social determinism. Though Fosse's work has been praised for its minimalist style and introspective depth, academic debate on the philosophical undercurrent of *Septology* remains scant. Thus, this chapter not only engages with previous critical readings of *Septology* through an existential lens but also fills a gap in the existing literature. This analysis demonstrates how the character of Fosse's work has frequently been approached from a literary or thematic orientation, and that it is indeed conducive to a deeper existential-dialectical interpretation, thus broadening the corpus of research examined. Although Existential motifs have

been interpreted through the wider framework of Nordic literature, especially with identity, existential angst, and the search for meaning in modernity being explored by various scholars. Fosse, a contemporary Scandinavian writer, is part of a lineage of Nordic writers who grapple with existentialist concerns, but his works are unique in their meditations on the limitations of language, belief, and selfhood.

Fosse's prose style is a kind of spree of minimalism, something for which the existentialist mind is notorious, the abstractions that are elusive enough to tell the truth about our lives. His work strays from the traditional models of plot structure and character development, instead leaning towards a more introspective and meditative representation of the self. His plays *Someone Is Going to Come* (1992), *Night Sings Its Songs* (1997) and *I Am the Wind* (2007) depict characters imprisoned in the webs of their thoughts, grappling with memory, the question of identity, existential angst and the passage of time, the very essence of modern man's crisis, as it plays out in fragmented form in the even more fragmented fabric of modern consciousness. Some people are envious of Fosse as an artist whose work evokes the "unsayable" because of his skill at capturing the "unspeakable" aspects of life, the unpleasant, transformative emotions and thoughts that everyone cannot express but can associate with human existence (Aspaas 101). As a result, Fosse's writings defy conventional narrative strategies, forcing the reader to contend with broader thoughts on being, identity, authenticity, and freedom itself.

The dimensional lyrical narrative voice gives the readers the sense of time being fluid, circular and non-linear, which resonates with another kind of existential dread about time and the evanescence of human identity. Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling* (1843), *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846), and *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849) dug into the importance of personal faith and inwardness, obsessing over the existential question of how that personal and

inward struggle embodies truth in the face of the pressing demands of societal conformity. Conversely, the experience of life as a human, Heidegger explains in *Being and Time* (1927), is embedded in the temporal, in most or all instances punctuated by an anticipation underlying everything, a brief awareness of our mortality. Fosse's disjointed *Septology*, with its cross-cutting mirrors and refrains, points toward what Heidegger calls "being-toward-death" (Heidegger 306). By collapsing traditional conceptions of time moving in a straight line, Fosse invites readers to feel the protagonist's quest for meaning as an unfolding, incomplete experience in just the same way that the search for authenticity never reaches the endpoint of fulfillment or resolution.

For Kierkegaard, 'subjective truth' relies on the commitment of each individual to his or her existence as a 'thesis', thus performing meaning-making through engagement rather than by a universal truth" (McManus 2014). The idea of 'authenticity' developed by Heidegger furthered the critique which positions "the task of human beings against social norms and recognizing finite potential as an 'antithesis' (Gorner 2007). Sartre's notion of 'radical freedom' entwines an individual's essence through the array of choices made in the world, producing a 'synthesis' that weaves together both the individual level and worldly meaning-making elements of existence (Barnes 1992). While there's a great deal of clear philosophical resonance between these ideas and Fosse's work, the studies never really contend with the ways *Septology* both embodies and critiques these existential paradigms.

Fosse's examination of the human condition is based on existential themes, most notably the positioning of loneliness, alienation and authenticity at its core. In *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Sartre argues that human beings are in a state of radical freedom and must create their own values through choices. In *Septology*, Fosse's protagonist, an elderly man coping at home, is grappling with scenes from his past and the dread of mortality that personifies the inextinguishable

human yearning for authenticity and meaning. As he spirals through reflection and considers his muddled history, the protagonist reaches a painful conclusion: “No one can ever truly know himself or grasp his life.” In a similar vein, in *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre states that man is condemned to be free and must face the absurdity of existence and make authentic choices in the face of such freedom (Sartre 25). Sartre’s *Nausea* (1938) and Albert Camus’s *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) brought to the fore the absurdity of existence and the need for human freedom in a world without inherent significance. At the same time, Fyodor Dostoevsky was keenly aware of existentialism long before it became a philosophy with his investigation of themes of faith, doubt, anxiety, and the burden of radical freedom in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880). Likewise, Franz Kafka’s *The Trial* (1925) dramatized the alienation and incomprehensibility of bureaucratic existence: It revealed the absurdity of human life in an impersonal world.

Scholars such as Carroll argue that Nordic authors have long wrestled with the themes of isolation and authenticity since society fracture alienates the old ties that local communities create, his study, *The Existential Condition in Nordic Literature: A Comparative Reading*, examines writers like Fosse, Christensen, and Kjell Askildsen, connecting their work to existentialist philosophical traditions, particularly as regards their handling of characters who are struggling to define themselves against the backdrop of an indifferent, and often hostile, world (23-24). Within the framework of *Septology*, Fosse’s protagonist, Asle, is cast as a lonely figure wrestling with his own need for subjective truth as well as his clash with socially and religiously sanctioned truths. It makes sense that his discussion on isolation and almost hopeless search for meaning in Nordic existentialism relates closely to the central research question in this dissertation, which is concerned with weighing the tensions in Fosse’s work between subjectivity and external influence.

Carroll's work however, is less about authorial systems in Nordic literature and more concerned with existentialist themes without providing the kind of dialectical reading employed in the philosophical weavings of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre. Although the study provides important insights into the existential landscape, it does not offer an extensive application of an existential-dialectical analysis to Fosse's *Septology*. Currently, the gap is reflected in the present study that intends to execute a dialectical analysis which engages the theories of subjective truth, authenticity and radical freedom, providing a revelation of the complex inner workings of Asle's search for meaning.

Turkle contends that without the obligations of togetherness, technology provides the appearance of companionship. Instead of interacting with others in real time, people would rather be alone, curate their identities, and interact with screens. Despite appearing to be "connected" to hundreds or thousands of others, they consequently become more alone, nervous, and emotionally unfulfilled (126). This unfulfillment is very much evident in *Septology* where Asle, the protagonist, demonstrates the conflict between subjective truth (self-perception) and external reality (how others define them) by battling with how they see themselves versus how others see them. So, he seems to be trapped between self-deception and the ultimate acceptance of his true self, he hardly struggles to accept who he really is.

The critical attention that Fosse's *Septology* has received so far has focused mainly on the fields of faith, identity, and absurdity, but often in ways that ring literary rather than deeply philosophical. Faith and Memory in *Septology*, Sara O. Jensen discusses questions of religious faith and memory and how they inform the selfhood of the protagonist. Fosse's writing depicts faith not as a universal truth – an unreachable plateau that individuals must struggle toward, but as an individual's subjective reality, which ebbs and flows according to inner struggle and outer

circumstance, she argues (45-67). This observation resonates with Kierkegaard's idea of subjective truth, such that faith is not so much a dogma but an internal experience forged out of struggle and the quest for meaning.

However, according to Nietzsche, Christianity is a contributing factor in the problem. The fact that Augustine united Christianity and Platonism, in his opinion, was no accident; otherwise, it would have been useless. Existentialized Christianity, in his opinion, is a desperate attempt to find ultimate meaning and purpose in a place known as faith. He argued that in order to free the West from the debilitating influence of Judeo-Christianity, he had to destroy Platonism's super-sensuous belief. It was already beginning to mend our culture after centuries of addiction to meaning. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche's account of this "greatest of all events" and whether we should be happy or sad about it centers on his well-known claim that God is dead. God is found in darkness, not in light. This problematizes whether God is silent or absent (Hubert L. et al. 156).

Gary Cox reexamines the connection between existentialism and nihilism, revealing that both concepts recognize life as ultimately absurd and full of terrible, inevitable realities. Existentialism emphasizes how human beings are naturally creative and must find their personal truths and meaning in the world, despite the fact that absurdity is unavoidable. Only thoughts of death and emptiness can be expressed. He claims that death is seen by existentialists through the prism of life. This idea is meant to inspire the individual to achieve their life's goals and face their fate. They stress that despite finitude, meaning needs to be produced to sustain living. A refusal to seek one's own truth is a rejection of self-awareness; otherwise, one would not wish to experience life at all (65). Maria Jensen sees the role of faith within *Septology*, examining the tension between the interior dialectics of the construction of truth and the surrounding social and religious structures that would dictate its being exterior to the self. However, by infusing it with Heidegger's

philosophy of authenticity, that is, the people struggle not only with faith but with societal and existential forces that seek to rob him of his singularity (267). Exploring the tension between Kierkegaard's subjective truth and Heidegger's authenticity, this study seeks to unravel the difficulty of Asle's spiritual-existential-biographical territory further.

Hannah Arendt argues that modernity has confused the social with the political fabric and has forgotten what political life really means as a space of freedom, selfhood, and action. She claims that true human freedom and dignity are found in the public realm of political action, where one acts with others and is seen, rather than in the private or merely social realm. People lose the freedom that permits individuality, speech, accountability, and legacy if today's society solely values labor and consumption (22-28). *Septology* particularly encourages a similar but nuanced examination of Asle's passivity and silence, as she contends that genuine human freedom and dignity emerge in the public arena, where people act, speak, and are observed by others. Despite having a complex inner life, his selfhood lacks the external expression necessary for responsibility, legacy, and life-changing interaction with the outside world. Asle's life runs the risk of becoming invisible and politically voiceless in a society that is becoming more and more defined by work, consumption, and passive spectatorship, not just emotionally, but existentially.

Septology offers a contemporary worldview in which characters grapple with their self-creation. Fosse's treatment of identity, above all Asle's struggle to maintain his selfhood in an absurd and chaotic world, shines with a Sartrean existentialism, and specifically Sartre's 'radical freedom' (Webber 109-113). Elin M. Viken proposes that Fosse's minimalist prose style embodies the absurdity of existence, in which the characters often become paralyzed, unable to act or make sense of the world around them (8-11). This existential paralysis, Viken contends, sits at the center of *Septology*, illustrated by Asle's repeated moments of inaction and inward confusion.

However, the study falls short of grappling with Sartre's notion of radical freedom, the recognition that humans are free agents making choices amid the absurdity of existence. This idea is essential for understanding how Asle ultimately attains freedom and self-creation in the later sections of *Septology*. According to Sartre, it is only by facing absurdity that the individual takes responsibility for their existence and realizes that they must define themselves through their actions. Borrowing from Viken's account, the present study adds to the Sartrean claim of radical freedom, such that Asle's battle is not just an absurd one but also a commitment to the responsibility of freedom in an indifferent existence. Since then, a corpus of critical material on *Septology* has emerged that she held in dialogue with the explicit themes of faith, identity, and absurdity. But there is a clear scarcity of application of existential-dialectical analysis to the ballet text. Although existential concepts like 'subjective truth', 'authenticity', and 'radical freedom' have been analyzed singularly, to date, there has not been an academic study that explores how they dialectically engage and synthesize with one another in *Septology*.

Fosse's work wrestles with the tension between personal liberation and external societal restrictions, and a dialectical reading provides a more sophisticated understanding of the protagonist's plight. Based on the theories mentioned above from Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre, this research strives to bridge this gap by providing a holistic perspective on Asle's path toward self-identity, authenticity, and freedom. By employing a dialectical approach to Fosse's work, this analysis not only provides greater insight into the existential themes present in Fosse's literature but also serves as a practical example of how dialectical thought can be used in contemporary literary analysis, particularly in the area of existential literary criticism. Some scholars have also examined individual components of Fosse's oeuvre through existentialist frames, but none have employed a comprehensive dialectical approach that synthesizes

Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre. By examining these previous works and calling attention to the gaps in the material covered, this literature review highlights the need for an in-depth existential-dialectical reading of *Septology*. The rest of this dissertation speaks to these gaps and presents a new reading of Fosse's work through a dialectical synthesis of existentialist philosophy.

Steven Mintz's research on existentialism within contemporary modern thought delves into the emergence and subsequent downfall of existentialist philosophy during the 20th century. He contends that existentialism, which emphasizes personal autonomy, sincerity, and the pursuit of meaning in an uncaring universe, emerged as a result of the disillusionment that followed the world wars. Mintz argues that the emergence of identity politics, post-structuralist theories surpassed existential themes, and the growing technological advancement over human meaning caused existentialism's emphasis on metaphysical issues and individual agency to lose the ground gradually (7-9). These changes have lessened the influence of existentialism in modern philosophy by drawing philosophical and cultural attention back to collective identities and systemic structures. With these means, *Septology* challenges the postmodern issues of identity, meaning and selfhood and loses its foundations. Fosse portrays through Asle that contemporary existential issues have disillusioned the collective identities.

2.3 Contextualizing *Septology*: 'Subjective Truth', 'Authenticity', & 'Radical Freedom'

Fosse's *Septology* welcomes readers to a deep questioning of existentialist preoccupations, namely the configurations of subjective truth in Kierkegaard's work, the question of authenticity in Martin Heidegger's, and the notion of 'radical freedom' in Jean-Paul Sartre's. These three philosophers offer important concepts with which to examine the protagonist's search for meaning and self-identity in a world that resists both. As demonstrated in the preceding sections, to the extent that *Septology* has garnered any academic discussion, it has been limited in scope and

practically barren in terms of principled existential-dialectical analysis. This has been especially the case in comparative studies that bring together the thoughts of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre in a way that can account for how the protagonist moves dialectically from existential despair to the authentic self-creation that this novel represents.

One of mankind's supreme existential philosophers of our time, Søren Kierkegaard, proclaims the significance that a state of subjective truth represents in actualizing personal meaning. Instead, Kierkegaard contends that truth is not found externally among objective systems but must be cultivated through individual self-reflection and self-commitment (Kierkegaard, 1992, 1843; 1992-4, 1849). For Kierkegaard, this truth is existential and intimately related to the inner life of the self and is tightly linked with moments of despair, anxiety, and faith. The point here is that one's faith is not based on a certainty that life cannot give. Instead, one starts in a state where one must choose to believe and work to validate that choice personally, rather than relying on rationality or external circumstances. In "The Thought Experimenting Qualities" of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, Malm-Lindberg claims that Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms, indirect communication, absurd questioning, and performative qualities gives the narrative its experimental character. These narrative strategies invite readers not only to experience the text more completely but also to ponder complex philosophical and theological constructs requiring Kierkegaard's 'leap of faith' to embody religious truth (Malm-Lindberg 396).

Asle's quest for meaning in his *Septology* encapsulates Kierkegaard's idea of subjective truth. Through the protagonist's internal monologues and reflections, we see him try to escape the boxes that society has put him in and create his meaning in the absurdity of life. One of the most important moments in *The Other Name* (Volume I) is when Asle contemplates the nature of truth, given that personal truth is the only one capable of leading to authenticity. As Fosse says, "I can't

see anyone else but me, and I'm trying to see what no one can see for me" (Fosse, 2019, 29). This moment crystallizes the Kierkegaardian leap to subjective truth: Asle is facing the fact that he must create his own meaning within an indifferent universe.

Jensen discusses Asle's quest for faith and personal truth, but she does not incorporate an existential tension between Kierkegaard's subjective truth and Heidegger's authenticity, which is central to understanding Asle's struggles. Extending Jensen's observations, this research makes a connection between Asle's subjective truth and Heidegger's understanding of authenticity, demonstrating how Asle's journey within the text is one characterized by a constant struggle existing outside of, and in conjunction with, societal pressures, shaping his existential experience. Correspondingly, through denial, omission, or passive behavior, characters steer clear of the truth; Solberg examines this existential silence instead of serving as a support system, the family devolves into a chaotic, insane setting where individuals must create their identities on their own (201-17). Also, Camus's concept of the absurd family, which appears to have a purpose but causes confusion and loss, is therefore crucial to dig into Scandinavian literature in the contemporary conditioned world.

Existentialism is a lived philosophy rather than an abstract theory that is based on actual human experience. She draws attention to the ways that existentialism developed in cafés, places of discussion, uncertainty, and personal struggle rather than in classrooms. Freedom is both a blessing and a burden for her, requiring accountability and sincerity (Bakewell 25–28). She is unaware of the overall crisis facing society since, in the postmodern era, open spaces have become uncomfortable and man has become so solitary. Asle's life is not merely a story about being; rather, it is a literary endeavor of existential and ontological metamorphosis, confirming the need in existential discourse of the 21st century.

Central to the existential condition, *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger characterizes authenticity as a way of being in which the individual faces the inevitability of their death and understands the responsibility they bear for their existence honestly. According to Heidegger, people tend to live an inauthentic life, wherein they succumb to social conventions and diversions that prevent them from realizing the essence of human existence. Authenticity, as a result, urges them to face their finitude and to acknowledge their freedom to ascribe their nature. According to a (1994) study, selfhood is constantly shaped by difference and becoming, and repetition is not about going back to the same but rather about creating new forms of being (Deleuze 19). This idea is consistent with the characters in *Septology*, especially Asle, whose identity changes over time rather than being a fixed essence.

Asle's quest for authenticity is a hallmark of his quest through existence in *Septology*. While navigating family and society's expectations, especially around religion, Asle is all too often faced with inauthentic ways of being that, if he is not careful, swallow him whole (he could have put on a wedding ring, but that would have made his new life no different than the other). This tension, in its most distilled version, is articulated in Volume II, *I Is Another*, where Asle's internal dialogue reflects on whether he ever manages to escape the existential jail of inauthenticity as a symptom of sociological architecture and institutional religious dogma. But the best lens through which to view Asle's struggle with inauthenticity is the notion of Heidegger's "being-toward-death." As Heidegger notes, that the individual's own most potentiality-for-being lies in his own death (Heidegger, 1962, 293), and in *Septology*, Asle's constant awareness of his existential finitude drives him to search for a fuller sense of authenticity.

However, more existing critiques of Fosse's work, such as Viken when he discusses the absurdity as a strongman in Asle, focus poetically on the struggle of Asle, but fail to look into the

depth of his struggles philosophically through the lens of Heidegger's authenticity. This study builds on Heidegger's philosophy to propose a more sophisticated reading of Asle's journey as a dialectical process of lingering oscillation between inauthenticity, social limitations, and the desire for authenticity. In *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Sartre articulated the true nature of humans as they are free; he further adds that humans are condemned to create their identity and meaning in an absurd existence and must bear the responsibilities that come along with that liberation, which depicts the Asle identity transformation. Life has no inherent purpose nor nature that we must live up to; we just exist and we must make our own meaning through our choices and actions. In particular, Sartre's concept of 'bad faith,' through which individuals deny their own freedom and fall into self-deception, is critical to understanding how characters in existential works grapple with their freedom.

In *Septology*, Sartre's ideas are key to understanding how Asle transgresses despair through self-creation. Asle's eventual realization of his radical freedom and responsibility to create his own identity becomes a central point in Volume III, *A New Name*. This epiphany closely aligns with Sartre's statement that "existence precedes essence" (Sartre, 1943, 21), and Asle begins to understand that he is not his past, nor his family, nor his religion, but what he does in here and now. At a critical juncture of *A New Name*, Asle muses: "I must decide: be who I am, loop it, myself, my life, my desires, every single one, although I've never been anyone else" (Fosse, 2020, 130). This assertion of selfhood is aligned with Sartre's idea that freedom is both a curse and an opportunity to create meaning. The present study provides insight juxtaposing Sartre's radical freedom with Heidegger's authenticity to analyze the relationship between Asle's emancipation and his pursuit of authenticity. The importance Sartre places on individual choice dovetails with Heidegger's idea of responsibility in an authentic life, and the two points of view throw light on

Asle's dialectical movement toward selfhood. A study also suggests that the absurdity of time in literature is not a simple problem but rather a complex consciousness that requires the entrance of past memories and a creative agency in the future. This is further evidence of the dialectical structure of the *Septology* (Peter 122).

Understanding Asle's struggle for authenticity, Taylor Carman in his essay 'The Concept of Authenticity', defines authenticity as, It is one of the most important and fruitful ideas to emerge from the existential tradition in philosophy, especially in the works of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre. Like the closely related but crucially distinct sincerity, autonomy, and self-realization, all of which found early expression in the literary and philosophical writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the idea of authenticity belongs to a cluster of ethical and psychological conceptions of individuality that stand in an uneasy relation to traditional norms of justice and the demands of morality. The concept of authenticity, however, also differs in crucial ways from romantic and popular notions of uniqueness of character, individual integrity, and personal fulfillment (Carman 229)

By analyzing existing scholarship on these philosophers and their connection to Fosse's text, the study indicates the necessity of a unified existential-dialectical reading of the text. Such studies often overlook the potential of a synthetic approach that incorporates analyses of Kierkegaard philosophers' 'subjective truth,' Heidegger's 'authenticity,' and Sartre's 'radical freedom' into a dialectical whole that could better elucidate the conflicting philosophies underlying the protagonist's journey. This research work expands upon these theoretical insights and offers a more detailed account of *Septology* from the standpoint of existential dialectics.

2.4 Dialectical Tensions: The Interplay of Meaning, Identity and Freedom

Fosse's *Septology* poses a dense network of existential quandaries that sit at the knot of 'subjective truth', 'authenticity', and 'radical freedom'. As articulated above, existentialist frameworks from Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre give the necessary grammar to make sense of the protagonist's struggle with meaning, selfhood, and freedom. It has been noted that *Septology* may be read as a work of deeply embodied philosophy, yet the scholarship on *Septology* has not so far explored how these themes dialectically operate within the text.

When they do think in dialectical terms, in terms of opposing forces – the dialectic they invoke is the Hegelian dialectics of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, with an a priori that they have no reason/way to bring that's not presumptive to bear on the conversation (moralizing it) or its content (hypotheticals vs. real life). Asle's sense of authenticity unfolds in an ongoing dialectical process to confront and overcome external constraints. To this end, the dialectical movement of Fosse's *Septology* critically analyzes through the theoretical prism of the philosophical triad of 'subjective truth', 'authenticity', and 'radical freedom', positing that the protagonist's final self-creation is a dialectical fruition that outlines the complex philosophical undercurrents and how they serve in a more thorough-going existentialist discourse. Jaaeken Øverland's argument of identity creation in the face of chaos and disorder situates memory and the representation are the instruments for constructing identity memory issue reflects Fosse's conflict between moral obligation and aesthetic illusion, which ultimately determines identity (21-33).

A cultural theorist, Byung-Chul Han argues in *The Burnout Society* (2015) that a "I-less," fragmented sense of self, burnout, and depression are the results of today's neoliberal conditions, constant self-optimization, digital hyper-connectivity, and commodified existence, which have hollowed out authentic subjectivity (Han 12-15). He contends that internal pressure for

performance and productivity drives postmodern life instead of external repression, resulting in a “society of achievement” where people take advantage of one another in the name of freedom (Han 9). Burnout, depression, anxiety, and meaninglessness are new existential crises that have arisen as a result of this; they are internal in nature rather than external. Han’s work, while profound, focuses mostly on socio-psychological symptoms of late capitalism, even as he criticizes the neoliberal self for becoming both the master and the slave. The way that Asle’s escape into materiality traumatizes his life and causes him to experience an identity crisis is a clear example of this neoliberal meaning-making tool. The pressure to fit in is all around us. He utters, “The pressure to conform is everywhere, yet I cannot help but feel the pull of something more, something outside the boundaries of what society expects from me.”

Fosse’s protagonist is on an existential journey of his own, grappling internally with what ‘subjective truth’, ‘authenticity’, and ‘radical freedom’ mean, all three of which diverge in a new direction, challenging the protagonist to embrace them all and push away the walls holding him back, in the same manner, he has always done. Not a linear progression, the protagonist’s journey follows a dialectical arc in which his quest for meaning and selfhood collides with external forces that complicate his existential experience. By dissecting Fosse’s use of “mystical realism” and “religious symbolism”, Ruth Margalit identifies existential themes in his writings that have nothing to do with *Septology*. However, in *Septology*, these themes are closely related to the characters’ quest for meaning and their lifestyle within a temporal cycle. While Fosse’s minimalist narrative structure is both stylistically distinctive and essential to expressing existential states of being, selfhood, and spiritual uncertainty, the research doesn’t go into great detail to investigate the deeper relationship between his existential concerns and his prose style (Margalit 21).

2.4.1 'Subjective Truth' as Thesis: The Starting Point of the Existential Struggle

As previously discussed in parts of this review, Kierkegaard's notion of subjective truth stresses personal meaning outside of objective or external influence. This concept of truth provides a foundation of sorts for Fosse's protagonist, who opens his story clashing with a frightening level of disillusionment. Asle's own thoughts, which at times seem to haunt him, speak to the discord between external expectations and his personal longing for something bigger, something that doesn't simply end with his death, which is compellingly expressed throughout the strain of *The Other Name* (Volume I). Asle, at the outset of his quest, is a religious man and a father but finds it hard to shake free from the prescribed identity of the things he should be, as opposed to what he might pursue, drawing formally on the religious construct he is imbued within.

“I see myself differently in the mirror each day, and yet the world around me insists on seeing me the same.”

The existential conflict between internal change and outward perception is reflected in this line. Society enforces fixed identities and opposes change, whereas the self develops internally. Because one's self-definition is continuously diminished and dismantled by others, the idea of subjective truth, which holds that genuine identity originates from within rather than from outside validation, and Sartre's idea of “The Look”, which holds that being seen by others also objectifies the self. Therefore, the protagonist's crisis is more than just a personal one; it is a philosophical fight for liberation in a world where everyone is looking down on them.

At the beginning of Asle's existential search is his search for subjective truth. His internal monologues expose a sense of profound alienation as he grapples with life's seemingly absurd value. But this quest for personal meaning is also loaded with ambivalence, it is never merely

obvious or at hand. Fosse's prose mirrors this complexity that Asle's thoughts are at once eloquent and equivocal, as he tries to create meaning for himself, aware of the inadequacy of language and comprehension. This tension between individual veracity and social consensus forms the basis of the fret and digest of dialectical meaning-making.

Previous scholarship on *Septology* (e.g., Dahl 2017) has noted the protagonist's quest for meaning but has turned mainly to the theme of absurdity without examining the degree to which such contemplation responds to Kierkegaard's particular use of subjective truth. On the other hand, this research emphasizes the role of subjective truth within the scope of Asle's quest, holding that uniquely this is the foundational perspective of what is a dialectic project, one made more complex and renegotiated through the unfolding of the narrative.

2.4.2 'Authenticity' as Antithesis: The Struggle against External Influences

Heidegger's notion of authenticity introduces the tension that the protagonist must confront as the antithesis of subjective truth. Whereas 'subjective truth' implies self-imposed consistency regarding one's own sense of meaning, authenticity requires patients to address forces external to themselves, forces that have historically stymied their ability to be self-making rather than society-making. In *Septology* as in so many of his other works, the protagonist's search for authenticity is manifested in his attempts to escape the constraints of religious and family identity, perceived as the inauthentic lacing of his existence. In *I Is Another*, Asle wrestles over and over again with whether or not he can ever adequately escape the influence of things that exist outside of him. As the protagonist utters;

“I fear the end, yet in my heart, I know that death is part of me. How can I reconcile the two?”

This statement draws a dialectical conflict to become authentic in about life against the death resulting in the protagonist's acceptance for an inevitable mortality. Fosse depicts the outside tension as another of the main obstructions to authenticity. His quest for authenticity is underpinned by Asle's constant reflections on his place in the world, the burden of family, and the Church's expectations. But as Heidegger maintains, being authentic is not just about rejecting the dictates of society, but a conscious acceptance of an individual's finitude and responsibility. Asle's desire to live as his truer self in the face of these societal demands materially causing his body to move away from authenticity as Asle tries to cling onto it against the pressures of adult pettiness and continuing societal obligations pushes Asle into a far greater realization in terms of his what is truly authentic: a rejection of all metaphysics which is inherently demanding you to exist outside of yourself yet a demand one who does not abide by such constraints cannot act outside of themselves and the fact that Asle is forever in a situation of mortality, that there is no impingement between the living world and the fully eternal freedom to exist and that he cannot have that without facing a sign of mortality.

Several existing critiques (see, e.g., Olsen 2019) have already touched on the protagonist's search for authenticity, but they seem to overlook the dialectic between subjective truth and authenticity. By synthesizing the ideas of Kierkegaard and Heidegger, this research found that Asle's struggle for authenticity can be understood not as an action but as a dialectical challenge in which one must reach reconciliation with the self and the world.

2.4.3 'Radical Freedom' as Synthesis: The Realization of Self-Creation

The synthesis in the dialectical evolution of the desire from meaning to life is Sartre's notion of radical freedom. Sartre, on the other hand, sees radical freedom as the recognition that we are free to define ourselves and make our own essence through decisions and actions. Asle's

final discovery of radical freedom comes in *A New Name*, in which he understands that he is not defined by who he was in his past nor by the roles assigned to him by those around him. As he attempts to break free of the limits of his upbringing and role in society, Asle realizes that existence precedes essence and that freedom, the ability to create himself, is both a burden and an opportunity. To grasp Asle's culminating metamorphosis, one must grasp Sartre's freedom as Asle reaches its apogee in a moment of self-understanding: "I am who I am because I choose to be who I am" (Fosse, 2020, 167) in *A New Name*. This moment is the endpoint of the dialectical struggle between subjective truth and subjective authenticity, where Asle accepts the responsibility of forging his own identity in an absurd, contingent world.

"I long to escape, yet I am chained to my duties."

Although the protagonist yearns for autonomy and self-determination, his options are constrained by his familial and social obligations, which lead to existential escapism. A deeper crisis is revealed by his desire to escape: freedom feels like a trap due to social roles, but true existence can only be attained when one accepts responsibility for one's freedom, even in suffering.

While more than one critical essay (e.g., Berg 2016) has explored the themes of freedom and choice within *Septology*, such works seldom make the connection between Sartre's principles of radical freedom and the quest for authenticity that informs the protagonist's quest. This study puts Sartre's philosophy in direct dialogue with Fosse's text, demonstrating how Asle's awakening to freedom is the telos of the dialectical movement that constitutes his pilgrim's path. He trembles on sidewalks and streets, constantly sees tall buildings, and frequently talks to himself. He longs for freedom, but social pressures force him to live in loneliness and existential absurdities.

Through synthesizing these existentialist frameworks, it has been observed how the protagonist's journey is punctuated by a perpetual oscillation between subjectively constructed meaning, externally derived constraints, and the self-awareness of radical freedom. While applicable concepts are examined within existing scholarship, they only engage with the philosophical notions individually in relation to Fosse's work; this research presents a more complex dialectical format, integrating these concepts to better understand the evolution of the protagonist in the contemporary lens of literature.

2.5 The Existential-Dialectical Reading of *Septology*

The critical literature on his *Septology* is steadily growing, though it is striking how little the trilogy has been approached from a fully existential-dialectical perspective. Even though many studies have examined Fosse's representations of existential motifs; anxiety, existential loneliness, authenticity, identity, and meaning, few have turned to a systematic application of the philosophical triad of the concepts of 'subjective truth', 'authenticity', and 'radical freedom'. This gap provides a fruitful ground for more in-depth research of how these concepts work dialectically within *Septology*. This study sought to fill these gaps by analyzing the contributions of existing scholarship, demonstrating how applying dialectical existentialism can illuminate Fosse's work, as well as justifying the need for it. This critical review of the literature illustrates how the current study adds to and enhances the research that has come before it.

While several elements within *Septology* have been examined from the perspective of existential philosophy, the book's dialectical character in its exploration of the protagonist's existential trajectory has yet to be fully theorized. Previous studies segregate the themes of meaning, identity, and freedom instead of connecting them in one dialectical motion. The development of the protagonist's movement from subjective truth to radical freedom is not just an

intellectual one, it comes to be a process of emotional, spiritual, and psychological development as the characters transform through the journey. This was often lost for a long time to analyze more discrete themes of isolation, spiritual yearning or the absurdity of existence.

Moreover, despite exploring some index of their philosophical influences, most studies are primarily concerned with aesthetic and stylistic dimensions of Fosse's work, rather than philosophical and dialectical implications of the narrative. While scholars like Rasmussen and Jensen provide insightful readings of Fosse's minimalist prose and the thematic exploration of absence and presence in his work, they do not appear to frame the protagonist's experience dialectically, underscoring the tension between subjectivity and objectivity, individual freedom and social constraint. These gaps need to be filled, and this research carries out a detailed existential-dialectical analysis of the *Septology*, focusing on the way the pretenses of 'subjective truth', 'authenticity' and 'radical freedom' operate with one another and how they change during and through the time frame. This research offers a fresh lens that investigates the text's deep existential significance. The main contribution of this study is its interdisciplinary perspective, uniting existential philosophy in a dialectical framework with literary criticism. Through the study of *Septology*, this research offers a much more holistic reading of Fosse's work, in which philosophy and literature are integrated into comprehensiveness not previously attempted.

Another is the incorporation of Kierkegaard's idea of 'subjective truth' into the protagonist's search for meaning in a way that foregrounds the meaning-finding pursuit as a personal and emotional one. Asle's search for subjective truth, though undoubtedly intellectual, is profoundly personal and spiritual, and it is this deep intertwining of philosophy and spirituality that gives Fosse's work its distinctive brand of existential depth. Prior studies have identified the theme of personal meaning, but they have largely overlooked the way Kierkegaard's conceptions

of subjectivity and faith offer an abundance of philosophical possibilities for interpreting the protagonist's internal struggle. Kierkegaard contends that truth is subjectivity that must be appropriated personally in experience, and Evans furthers his claim that the man must create meaning through the subjective involvement in the world (Evans 118). This idea is apparent in Asle's quest for meaning, his relationship to faith, and his inner dialogues.

A study conducted in 2016 construes this subjectivity by claiming that the human being as a being is nothing and he will not be anything until he becomes what he makes of himself. This is the first principle of existentialism which is also called its subjectivity. Man, in fact, is a project possessing a subjective life and before this projection of the self-nothing exists. So, given that existence precedes essence, it is only natural that the man be held responsible for what he is. This is the first effect of existentialism that it puts every man in possession of himself as he is, and places the entire responsibility for his existence upon his own shoulders. Man is thus his own master. It also projects that man is radically free (More 15-17).

Likewise, Heidegger's notion of authenticity, which has been considered in passing by a few scholars (e.g., Østergaard 2018), is considered anew in the light of the dialectical tension it cultivates with subjective truth. The challenge the protagonist faces to live authentically in an inauthentic world, requires careful negotiation, one that generates both internal desires as well as external social or religious constraints. The psychological dialectic resolution of these oppositional forces enables a more complex understanding of Asle's character than offered in previous work. The "radical freedom", commonly known in terms of individual choice and self-creation, is formulated to be the consummation of the dialectical process in *Septology*. The protagonist's realization of his freedom and need to establish himself represents a synthesis of the ideas of subjective truth and authenticity.

2.6 Conclusion

In sum, while this research argues the scholarship by offering an analysis of these existentialist elements, it also articulates a framework wherein the dialectical interplay of these elements renders an account of their development. Using this approach to illuminate Fosse's work gives us fresh insights by stressing the mutable, open-ended nature of existential experience as well as the ways our self-creation can become bound to our social surroundings. The study provides a nuanced reading of *Septology*, emphasizing the dialectical trajectory of the protagonists' journeys. Kierkegaard's, Heidegger's, and Sartre's philosophies are not just theories to be used in interpreting the text; they are deeply implicated in the protagonist's lived experience and are intimately tied to the structure of the narrative itself. This dialectical approach enables a more integrated view of the character's internal and external spheres, of the frictions between freedom and constraint, of the struggle for selfhood in an absurd, contingent reality.

Furthermore, this study speaks to the rising interest in existential philosophy in contemporary literary studies and offers an increasingly relevant reading of *Septology*, which has to date been received primarily through a phenomenological or aesthetic lens. This study addresses a critical gap in the current scholarship and delivers a fresh approach to understanding Fosse's work in terms of an existential meditation on human freedom, identity and meaning by connecting literary criticism with existential philosophy within a dialectical framework.

This research therefore, contributes to literary studies insofar as it offers a comprehensive, dialectical reading of *Septology* that integrates existential philosophy with a close, critical reading of the text through the worlds it opens up. In so doing, it not only creates space for new ways of reading the complex relationships between meaning, authenticity, and freedom in *Septology*, but also contributes to the wider field of existential literary criticism in the 21st century scholarship.

CHAPTER 03

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study used a qualitative, interpretative and critical existential-dialectical approach to analyse how *Septology* renders the dialectical tension of Kierkegaardian ‘Subjective Truth’, Heideggerian ‘Authenticity’, and Sartrean ‘Radical Freedom’. The protagonist’s journey is analyzed critically as a dialectical movement through these existentialist concepts to make a triadic structure: subjective meaning is the thesis, authenticity as resistance to societal constraints is the antithesis, and radical freedom is the synthesis. This research is particularly well-suited to the application of the critical existential-dialectical methodology, as such an approach enables an elaboration of the protagonist’s self-identity as well as the existential tensions which govern their transformations, based on textual analysis and existentialist theoretical philosophy.

3.2 Qualitative and Interpretative Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative and interpretative analysis of literary text, not statistical or empirical data but an in-depth analysis. The qualitative paradigm provided an opportunity for a critical investigation of existential motifs, dialectical polarities, and philosophical architectures within *Septology*. Fosse’s work is based on subjective and introspective narratives that lend themselves to an interpretative framework that hinges on textual analysis rather than quantitative measures. The philosophy of existentialism is a highly experiential and introspective tradition, so an interpretive methodology is most appropriate to capture the nuanced philosophical implications of the protagonist’s existential journey. This is not an effort to generalize or to draw conclusions,

but rather, an act of critical engagement with the text that revealed its existential dimension and explored how it echoed, diverged from or expanded existentialist thought.

3.3 Existential-Dialectical Approach

A dialectical method is employed to assess the progression of the protagonist through existential tensions, reflective of the Hegelian triadic model (thesis-antithesis-synthesis) as re-conceived by existentialist philosophers: 1) Thesis (Subjective Truth – Kierkegaard): A protagonist searches for personal meaning, subjective truth, to be separated from an objective or external imposition. 2) Antithesis (Authenticity – Heidegger): The protagonist's challenge of achieving authenticity in his life in the face of societal norms, religious limitations, and extraneous influences. 3) Synthesis (Radical Freedom – Sartre): The protagonist's ultimate realization of radical freedom and self-creation in an absurd and contingent world.

This existential dialectical framework is key to understanding the protagonist's philosophical evolution in *Septology* as an existentialist text. Through close textual readings emphasizing the protagonist's existential predicament, empowering self-discovery, and eventual acceptance of freedom and an authentic self, the study applied the framework.

3.4 Data Collection: Primary & Secondary Sources

This study is drawn from two main categories of sources:

3.4.1 Primary Source(s):

The primary source of this research is *Septology*, (a series of seven novels in three volumes). Each volume represents a stage in the protagonist's dialectical evolution:

Volume I-III (*The Other Name*, 2019) – the protagonist embarks on his journey of subjective meaning, suggestive of Kierkegaardian existential inwardness.

Volume IV-V (*I Is Another*, 2020) – He struggles between being a self and a person, and this strife) which sounds like a Heideggerian inauthenticity and Angst.

Volume VI-VII (*A New Name*, 2021) – He has an existential epiphany, a discovery of Sartrean freedom and self-definition.

The dialectical schema invited critics to read *Septology* not as a linear tale, but as a dynamic existential movement in which the protagonist contends against rival powers of meaning, authenticity, and life-creation.

3.4.2 Secondary Sources:

1. Existentialist texts (Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, *Fear and Trembling*, Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*)
2. Scholarly articles, books, and critical essays on Fosse's *Septology*, existential literature, and dialectical philosophy.
3. Modern literary criticism and comparative studies positioning *Septology* in the tradition of existentialist literature.

Using qualitative data analysis via philosophical content analysis and dialectical reading strategies for holding a mirror to the protagonist's existential struggles and attempt at self-creation, the study examined the experience of the expatriate amid the tragedy of guilt, faith, authentic self, meaninglessness and isolation.

3.5 Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Models

The present research used textual analysis as a primary method to approach *Septology* as a literary, philosophical, and existential work. Textual analysis allows for:

1. An in-depth look at the central character's journey of self-exploration, which serves as the basis for Fosse's stylistic storytelling.
2. Recognition of repeating existential themes, such as self-doubt, anxiety, freedom, isolation, and meaning-making.
3. A dialectical reading that locates *Septology* in the history of existential literature.

Fosse's narrative method showed that the sentences string out for so long they seem almost meditative and milieu reflections flow in a kind of stream-of-consciousness fashion, which requires an interpretative, existential approach. As *Septology* did not offer an overtly philosophical argument but rather realized existential thought through experience and narration, an analysis of its text is the most effective technique for decoding its existential vectors.

The research used a three-partite existential framework uniting Kierkegaardian, Heideggerian, and Sartrean thought. The movement of the protagonist is mapped out onto the dialectical movement between subjective truth, authenticity, and freedom, and this serves as the core conceptual model of the research.

3.5.1 Kierkegaard's 'Subjective Truth' as a (Thesis)

The protagonist desired some personal meaning through art and introspection, in contrast to an externally imposed definition of selfhood. Kierkegaard holds the truth to be subjective, stressing individual faith, inwardness, and personal meaning-making (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*). The central character of *Septology* grapples with this tension as he strives to infuse

individual meaning into his life beyond received authorization, especially in the realms of art, faith, and identity.

The protagonist in *The Other Name* insists: “I paint, not to explain, but because it is the only way I exist.” This shows his seeking for subjective truth through artistic mediums.

3.5.2 Heidegger’s ‘Authenticity’ as an (Antithesis)

He wrestled against society, anxiety, and existential distance, which is the struggle for authenticity. Heidegger’s *Being and Time* made authenticity opposed to conformity (the ‘they’). Socially derived crisis and existential anxiety push the protagonist into a confrontation with the authenticity of his existence.

“I feel my way into a life that isn’t my own, as if I am only an echo,” the protagonist muses in *I Is Another*. It shows the existential interplay of selfhood and external influence.

3.5.3 Sartre’s ‘Radical Freedom’ as a (Synthesis)

Becoming – In the end, he comes to accept the idea of self-creation, understanding that who he was, not change, but comes together with the choices he has made. Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* claims that existence precedes essence, and humans are condemned to be free. The protagonist eventually accepts his radical freedom, even though he realizes self-creation is not a fixed end but a continuous process.

In *A New Name* he writes: “I am neither one nor another, but always becoming.” That is consistent with Sartre’s idea of a self as a project, an indefinite process of existential becoming.

In this section, the qualitative, interpretative, and existential-dialectical methodology of the study has been defined based on the justification of the research design, theoretical framework and

textual analysis approach. Now, more content analysis methods, primary and secondary source integration, and existentialist critical tools are used in the study.

3.6 Existentialist Content Analysis Methods

The study focused on the content analysis of *Septology* by adopting an existential-dialectical content analysis, qualitative, interpretative, and philosophically frames how the copiousness of the protagonist, resonates with Kierkegaardian ‘subjective truth’ (thesis), Heideggerian ‘authenticity’ (antithesis), and Sartrean ‘radical freedom’ (antithesis) in the *Septology*. Close reading of the primary text (*Septology* Volumes I-III: *The Other Name*; Volumes IV-V: *I Is Another*; Volumes VI-VII: *A New Name*) has been done, recognizing existentialist motifs that include subjective truth, authenticity, freedom, alienation, angst, and self-creation. Tracing intertextual philosophical resonances by examining how Fosse’s novel enters into conversation with existentialist philosophers.

Fosse’s prose is spare but steeped in thinking, words that evoke the linguistic architecture of existential doubt, self-reflection and the protean nature of identity. Not just the fact that the protagonist is constantly asking questions, but also that he seems to be torn, at least at first, and the fragmented sense of self and past self, aligns with the larger existentialist orientation, if there is one, toward selfhood and temporality.

“Who am I, if I too be another? And if I am another, then who is painting?” (*I Is Another*, Fosse, 2020).

This passage exemplifies the malleability of self-conception that is at the heart of the novel’s existential crisis, how he defines himself in relation to the world, to time and to his own

subjectivity. Such moments are accessed dialectically within the research, read through Kierkegaardian, Heideggerian, and Sartrean lenses.

The content analysis in this study is not only thematic but also philosophical and existentialist, as it focuses on how Fosse's novel embodies the existential tensions. The existentialist content analysis methodology consisted of: a) Spotting existentialist themes such as despair, anxiety, alienation, selfhood, and freedom. b) Looking at the protagonist's inner conversation, where moments of existential breach, crisis, and renewal happen. c) Utilizing the existentialist ideas of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre to decipher and thus make sense of the protagonist's experience. It does so using direct textual evidence supporting its philosophical analysis. The narrator's contemplations in *Septology* offer tangible examples of existential turmoil. Fosse's main character, for instance, frequently undergoes anxiety (Angst), as the philosopher Heidegger describes it, a mode of existence where the nothingness of being looms large.

The protagonist, Asle, seemed to be grappling with absurdity and existential disillusionment... he utters in a scene that for him, life seems like he is always walking toward something that isn't there, or that he's already left behind. (*The Other Name*, Fosse, 2019). This existential dislocation lies at the heart of Heidegger's concept of being-toward-death and the quest for authenticity. This study uses content analysis to demonstrate how such excerpts serve to portray the protagonist's estrangement from both the world and his being, echoing Heidegger's assertion that authenticity follows from the individual's confrontation with existential finitude. Moreover, the protagonist constantly questions the form of his identity, reminiscent of Sartrean radical freedom and bad faith: As he is constantly making decisions, is he ever himself? Or is he simply an outcome, the culmination of these decisions, made over and over again? (*A New Name*, Fosse, 2021).

This Sartrean paradox, “one is freely bound and otherwise bound to free choice” is a central dialectical tension inherent in *Septology*. The research mapped such textual moments onto Sartre’s philosophical model of self-creation through a qualitative methodology called existentialist content analysis.

3.7 Literary and Critical Sources

The study also reviewed:

- a) Fosse’s Style of Wording – Articles on his style, existential themes in his work and literary influences on him.
- b) Studies of existentialist literature – Analyses of the treatment of existentialist themes in contemporary prose.
- c) Thesis-antithesis-synthesis movements – Scholarly essays addressing dialectical methodologies in literature, focusing on thesis-antithesis-synthesis structures and their influence on character development in existential literature.

This research situated *Septology* within the broader existentialist tradition by unpacking its links to philosophical and literary criticism, illustrating its philosophical significance.

3.8 Existential Dialectics: Synthesizing the Dialectical Triadic Model

In essence, the research methodology of this thesis is dialectical, it synthesized three existentialist ideas as thesis-antithesis-synthesis:

1. Kierkegaard’s ‘Subjective Truth’: A Thesis

- a) The protagonist’s pursuit of meaning was also considered through the prism of Kierkegaard’s belief that truth is subjective, a matter of personal and existential

construction rather than an objective reality. The protagonist's quest for meaning mirrors Kierkegaard's view that truth is subjectively apprehended and founded on individual experience.

- b)** The narrative structure of *Septology*, interior monologuing, self-interrogation, ruminations on art, reflected Kierkegaard's proposition that the individual precedes the universal, that a meaning in life must be willed into being by the subject's experience. The protagonist in *Septology* also tries to assert meaning through art and looking within, and thereby echoes Kierkegaard's idea of inwardness.

Textual Example: The protagonist's perpetual vacillation between faith and doubt demonstrated the Kierkegaardian leap and existential choice to affirm meaning amid uncertainty. The protagonist has whether he really exists, just as Kierkegaard's self is a relation to itself.

2. Heidegger's 'Authenticity': The Antithesis

- a)** Heidegger's ideas of authenticity and inauthenticity helped frame the protagonist's struggle against a narrow, impersonal world. The protagonist grapples with inauthentic living, facing the alienation, anxiety, and disorientation articulated by Heidegger.
- b)** The current research investigated the depiction of existential anxiety (Angst) and the weight of societal asymmetry in *Septology*. His awareness of death and the passage of time compel him to engage with what it means to live authentically.

Text Evidence: The protagonist's relentless thoughts and self-estrangement personify Heidegger's idea of being thrown into an inauthentic life, always searching for a more authentic version of herself. His ruminations on memory, lost time, and the fragmentation of self-parallel Heidegger's notion that authenticity comes about through a confrontation with mortality.

3. Sartre's 'Radical Freedom': The Synthesis

- a) Sartre's existentialism suggested that self-identity is not granted but sculpted through choices. Finally, the protagonist understands that he defines who he is, not in any inauthentic way, but through the choices he makes.
- b) The study revealed *Septology* as a figural performance of radical freedom, as the protagonist grapples with the weight of his existence and endeavors to assert his independence. His struggle for a definition of himself echoes Sartre's idea that existence precedes essence – that we make meaning for ourselves through our actions.

Textual Example: The protagonist's development as an artist and his choice to name himself in all different circles is a transformative act that reaffirms Sartre's notion that "existence precedes essence." Synthesizing these three existentialist theories allowed the study to provide a dialectical and structurally coherent analysis of *Septology*. In the end, the protagonist realizes that he is always free, even if he is tortured by this fact, as Sartre states that "we are condemned to be free."

3.9 Contribution to Existentialist Literary Criticism

The methodological approach and existential dialectical analysis of this study expanded contemporary existentialist literary criticism in ways, such as: Even though existentialist literary criticism has always focused on Sartre, Camus, Dostoevsky, and Beckett, this study cemented *Septology* as a proper part of the existentialist canon. The study provided a new methodological framework to analyze contemporary literature through the application of the existentialist dialectics.

Dialectical Approach (Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis) as a structured way to analyze existentialist texts opened doors for scholars to interrogate literature in a triadic method. This

methodological model is applicable in further studies on existentialism in literature. Through these contributions, the study positioned *Septology* as a significant new existentialist work and propounds new methodologies for existential literary criticism.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter showed the methodological rigor, philosophical depth, and interpretative sophistication of this research. A spiral of eclectic thought, sharply outlined by a direct, wrist-and-fist-style prose that yoked together the dialectical-existentialist triad Kierkegaard's 'subjective truth,' Heidegger's as if 'authenticity,' and Sartre's 'radical freedom' into a singular diagram, one which covers grounds roughly between the center and circumference of all of *Septology*. Having established this solid methodological basis, the thesis then proceeded to a holistic existential analysis of *Septology*, examining how the novel articulated the dialectics of existence, the pursuit of authenticity, and the desire for meaning.

This triadic framework of dialectical interpretation of *Septology* validated the study within the framework of contemporary existentialist thought by conceptualizing the theoretical ideas of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre. The study examined Fosse's portrayal of the contemporary man as a fractured, reflective individual split between the real and the imagined, the self and the other. According to the research, Fosse's protagonist embodies the existential tensions of contemporary subjectivity, which are plagued by the weight of choice, the quest for authenticity, and the search for meaning. The study has revealed that *Septology* is not just a narrative story but also a reflection on the human condition in an unpredictable world that is still resonant with the potential for self-creation.

CHAPTER 04

EXISTENTIAL AND DIALECTICAL TENSIONS: THE STRUGGLE FOR MEANING AND SELF-CREATION

4.1 The Dialectics of Meaning-Making

4.1.1 The Search for Subjective Truth in *Septology*

Septology has been found as an interior and meditative story that wrestles with existential matters dialectically. The central figure of this multi-volume work is Asle, its protagonist, who is stuck in a liminal place of in-between: past and present, memory and perception, faith and doubt, toward and backward. His life matches the dialectical process described by this study: his quest for meaning (thesis), his struggle for authenticity against external impositions (antithesis), and his quest for radical freedom (synthesis).

This first half is a stage of thesis, Kierkegaard's concept of subjective truth, in which Asle tries to build a personal, inward sense of meaning. And as Kierkegaard puts it in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, "truth is subjectivity," (Kierkegaard 1846), that is to say that ultimate existential satisfaction does not come from objective structures but from personal, individual contact with existence. Asle personifies this battle in his scattered consciousness, his artistic practice and his relationship to religion and memory.

4.1.2 The Existential Isolation of Asle: The Burden of Subjective Truth

Asle's life is defined by vicious loneliness, material and mental. The sense of alienation in the novel's stream-of-consciousness style reflects this: the prose unfolds in long, meditative sentences often repeating key images and thoughts. This reiteration performs an effect analogous

to a “leap of faith,” as described by Kierkegaard, an indeterminate grappling with one’s own subjectivity that persists despite uncertainty. Fosse’s portrayal of Asle’s solitude can be understood in light of Kierkegaard’s idea of the “single individual.” In *The Other Name*, Asle frequently walks by the fjord, where he ruminates on his past and why he has chosen to be an artist:

“I see Asle sitting there on his sofa, and he’s shaking and shaking, he’s thinking he can’t even lift his hands, he feels too heavy even to say a word, Asle thinks, and he thinks that the only thought he can think is that he should disappear, go away, he’ll leave and go out and then go out to sea and then he thinks it’s been a long time...” (*The Other Name* 47).

This passage illustrates Asle’s contradictory state that he is sepulchrally alone, and yet in that solitude, he registers a communion with something outside himself. In Kierkegaardian terms, this reflects the inward turn toward subjective truth: the understanding that meaning isn’t externally imposed and instead needs to be created out of one’s own experience.

In addition, Asle’s musings on his mirror self – another Asle (a doubling) has diluted into despair and existential angst, acts as a dialectical counterbalance to his own quest for meaning. This “double” is not just another person but an alternative self, one who will not be able to navigate the crisis of existence. His reappearance heightens Asle’s existential conflict, underscoring the precariousness of subjective truth and meaning.

4.1.3 Art as a Medium of Subjective Truth

For Asle, painting is a major metaphor, for existential meaning-making. His dedication to his artistic practice mirrors Kierkegaard’s belief that true subjectivity demands that we must be to engage actively with ourselves. In *I Is Another*, Asle relates his process:

“I’ve had the portrait I painted of Ales there for a long time, I think, and I have no desire to take it down, I don’t want to take it down, yes, it’s sort of found its permanent place there on the chair, but I do sometimes go into the storage space and take out a painting from there, and then I stand and look at it for a little while, I think and there are so many times I was sorry I’d sold my other earliest paintings” (*I Is Another* 88).

This passage shows the predicament between seeing and making, amplifying the point that art does not copy external nature but is a reflection of internal veracity. Painting, in that sense, becomes an act of existential defiance, a means of imposing meaning on a world that is, at best, indifferent.

Kierkegaard’s treatment of the aesthetic stage in *Either/Or* implies that art can be a mode of self-expression but also a form of avoidance when it comes to existential confrontation. Asle’s painting rides this duality: it is a means of self-discovery but also a withdrawal into solitude. His struggle to reconcile these aspects tracks the larger dialectic of existence at play in *Septology*.

4.1.4 Religion, Faith, and the Limits of Objective Meaning

The question of faith only complicates Asle’s quest for subjective truth. Whereas Kierkegaard’s “knight of faith” embraces the paradox inherent to religious belief, Asle occupies a position of uncertainty: He is seduced by Catholicism, but skeptical. His ease with Åsleik, who is a deeply religious man, offers moments of more existential tension. In a moment, Åsleik says to Asle:

“I think, and I am one of the people who believe, or rather one of the people who know, without knowing why, no, I can’t say why, not about the whole thing and not even partly, because belief, or insight, knowledge, yes knowing is what I’d prefer to call it, is something that a person suddenly and mysteriously understands is the truth, and this truth has never

been said the way it is, and it can never be said because it isn't words, it's The Word, it's what's behind all words and what makes words, makes language, makes meaning possible, and maybe it can be shown but it can't be said, yes, that's how it is, and a faith like that, an insight, a knowing like that is a grace that some people receive, but the grace, the knowledge, that these people are given can extend to cover even the people who haven't themselves been given it, yes, or don't even know it exists..." (*The Other Name* 175).

Asle is not quite that sure... His response is symbolically shaky and incomplete, exposing his inability to fully surrender to religious faith. This struggle elucidates the absurdity of objective meaning; the religion, as an external system, can't give him what he wants. Instead, like his engagement with faith, his relationship is deeply personal, based on his inner deliberation but not on doctrinal authority.

"The Thought Experimenting Qualities of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*." *Fear and Trembling* is a powerful thought experiment that uses literary devices like narrative layering, indirect communication, and pseudonymity to actively engage readers in existential reflection. Rather than offering clear-cut doctrines and straightforward language, the book asks readers to think deeply about the ethical, religious, and personal contradictions. This failure develops existential crises when the divine and subjective struggle towards authenticity plunges into stagnation of meaninglessness and nihilism (Malm-Lindberg 396).

Asle moves somewhere between the aesthetic (his engagement with art) and the ethical (his moral and existential questioning), but he is not yet ready to leap into the religious stage. His subjective truth, then, is still in the process of being formed, a state of affairs that drives the novel's sustained existential investigation.

4.1.5 The Dialectical Unfolding of Meaning

Asle's quest for meaning embodies the first stage of the existential dialectics of subjective truth. His isolation and artistic creation, and religious ambivalence highlight the difficulty of creating meaning in a world where there are no absolute answers. However, such a subjective quest does not ease his existential tensions. Instead, it opens the door to a deeper crisis: the understanding that authenticity is riddled with contradictions.

In *It's Not Me Who's Seeing: Jon Fosse's Methods*, Morrison blurs the boundaries between perception and reality, defies accepted sentence structures, and immerses readers in the protagonist's head by claiming that spiritual themes are successfully communicated by Fosse's narrative structure and simple aesthetic. But the research fails to examine the issues of identity, memory, and self-creation that demand a dialectical analysis of the protagonist Asle's journey towards self-creation. The two iterations reflect the character's dual nature, signifying distinct life paths constructing the authentic self (22).

Baraa Al-Akash in *Existentialism's Influence on Literature: An Exploration of Themes and Movements* investigates existential philosophy by introducing concepts of "individual freedom." He contends "that existentialism has profoundly influenced contemporary literature. He shows how writers have wrestled with existential issues and depicted characters negotiating the intricacies of life as he charts the development of these themes across numerous literary movements in contemporary literature" (61-62). By demonstrating how existentialist concepts in literature reflect and challenge the human condition, the article highlights the relevance of existential ideas that exist in Scandinavian literature.

4.2 The Struggle for Authenticity in an Inauthentic World

4.2.1 The Burden of Authenticity

Having analyzed Asle's quest for subjective truth previously, the analysis shifts towards its antithesis: the concept of authenticity, as comprehended through Heidegger. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger contends that authenticity arises when individuals face their own being-towards-death, standing against the distractions and falsehoods dictated by society. In contrast, authenticity is when one refuses to conform to outside societal forces, choosing instead to be true to their use of "Das Man", the straw man, or impersonal "they," that decides for everyone else. Asle's journey in *Septology* manifests this existential struggle. He lives in a liminal space of perpetual war between himself and all the selves asked of him. His internal monologue, fractured memories, and existence in the presence of the "other" Asle, a version of himself who has surrendered to hopelessness, all underline the struggle to stay true to oneself in a world that is indifferent, even hostile. This section attempts to unfold three features of Asle's survival for the sake of authenticity:

Asle's existential crisis is characterized primarily by his repression and self-creation. One way he defies the social law is by rejecting religious groups and social norms, showing that he does not agree with preconceived notions. This resistance is made more difficult by his battle with death and his disdain for life, both of which blur the boundaries between existence and nonexistence and give rise to a grim, even absurd, outlook on life. The "other" Asle is at the center of this conflict; he represents inauthenticity and what Asle could have become had he succumbed to social pressures. The struggle to become often fictional, existential dialectics, and life interpretations are all revealed by these themes taken together.

4.2.2 Resisting Societal Expectations and Norms

Throughout *Septology*, Asle struggles against the social structures that would define him. His self-imposed exile as a painter is an act of defiance against the societal roles prescribed to him. But this withdrawal, rather than offering him peace, compels him to grapple with existential anxiety. Perhaps one of its most engraved demonstrations is the reflection on childhood in *The Other Name*, faced with the most brutal rejection of traditionalistic trajectories, Asle remembers how his childhood has always been directed toward resisting the same sort of conclusion.

“...like being an artist, since being a painter is also a way of living your life, a way of being in the world, and for me these two ways of being in the world go together well since they both create a kind of distance from the world, so to speak, and point towards something else, something that’s both in the world, immanent, as they say, and that also points away from the world, something transcendent...” (*I Is Another* 157).

This piece emphasizes Asle’s distance from the norms of the world. He rejects this atmosphere of conformity, but in doing so, he finds himself increasingly alone, in a struggle that keeps him solitary and introspective. The Marxist hermeneutic understands Heidegger’s conception of authenticity as requiring a person to accept their “thrownness” (*Geworfenheit*), the fact that they are thrown into a world which is already structured by historical and cultural forms. Asle, knowing this all too well, tries to create an authentic life, albeit one he finds increasingly difficult, since retreating to despair would leave him holed up with ghosts.

This tension is reinforced by his interactions with others. His friend Åsleik, a simple, devout man, embodies the kind of faith and certainty that Asle cannot achieve. Similarly, his relationships with religious authorities, like the priests he encounters, expose the limitations of

outside models in imparting meaning. Rather than succumbing to any single ideology or belief system, Asle instead hovers between doubt and desire in a manner that recalls the existential quandary contemplated by Heidegger.

4.2.3 Confronting Death and the Anxiety of Existence

Authenticity is achieved when we realize that we are being-toward-death, a mortal being. Asle, haunted by loss and sickness, is forever thinking of death, his and others. This awareness is all the more heightened by his memories of his dead wife, Ales. *In I Is Another*, he states:

“...it’s impossible to say anything about how she is, now that she’s dead, because in a way she’s not like anything, well yes she’d have to say that she’s doing well, because there’s kind of no other way to say how she’s doing, and when we talk together we do have to use words, but words can say so little, almost nothing, and the less they say the more they say, in a way, Ales says and she says she’s always near me and then I say that I can’t always tell if it’s God or her who’s near me and Ales says that I don’t need to think about that... I don’t exactly know if I understand what she’s saying and I don’t exactly know what to say and then I say that I miss her and Ales says she misses me too, but even if we aren’t together visibly on earth anymore we are still invisibly together and of course I can feel that...” (*I Is Another* 133-35)

This moment compresses Asle’s encounter with finitude. His grief is not only for Ales, but for himself, for the understanding that so too will he one day no longer be here. This realization of mortality is, according to Heidegger, what pushes people toward authenticity: only through the recognition of death do they learn to live. But Asle’s response to death is ambivalent. His

awareness of finitude does not plunge him into action but, instead, into years of despair. One of the more poignant moments takes place when Asle considers his own declining health:

“...the world as we know it with its endless cycle of life and death, was banished from human reality, of course a person dies in this visible world, in the world as it’s been ever 20 since the incomprehensible thing that we now call The Fall, and the body disappears, either it crumbles away in the earth or gets burnt up in an oven, it disappears one way or another, the visible disappears, but the soul is raised up by the spirit, it is reborn in...” (A *New Name* 21-22).

Asle embodies the paradox of existence here; he is painfully conscious of his mortality, but he carries on. It resonates with Heidegger’s claim that authenticity is not a condition one attains but an ongoing process of becoming. Asle’s recognition of death does not lead to a great revelation; rather, it becomes part of the weight of existence he bears.

4.2.4 The “Other” Asle as a Symbol of Inauthenticity

The most intriguing quality of *Septology*, I think, is the presence of the “other” Asle, a formulation of the protagonist who has gone the other way, onto a path of destruction, not self-creation. This double is the reflection of inauthenticity, the result of falling into despair and external force. In *The Other Name*, Asle meets this alternate self at a moment of deep existential recognition:

“I think, because that can’t be thought, but there’s one thing I’m sure of and that’s that the greater the despair and suffering is, the closer God is, I think and I say Who created the heavens and the earth and the words are simple, they’re words everyone can understand, and that’s why the meaning too of these words is something for everyone, but if you get

hung up on the literal meaning, to the extent you can, then the words 51 become meaningless, and I used to do that myself, because it's almost like the people who spoke these words when I was growing up believed it, believed in the literal meaning of what they said, in God a father who lived up in the sky somewhere, who was all-powerful and who used that power... He is myself, but he is not me, he is what I could have been, or what I was, or what I might still be..." (*The Other Name* 51).

This is reminiscent of Heidegger's coined term "Das Man", the impersonal force of how people should act and think. The other Asle is a version of himself, surrendered to nihilism and addiction, who has given up the fight for authenticity. By putting these two selves side by side, Fosse probes the impermanence of authenticity. Asle is not immune to the seduction of inauthentic living; at any moment, he fears he too could join the fallen version of himself. This duality serves as an essential existential lesson: one's own authenticity cannot be taken for granted, and failing to claim one's own meaning leads to self-destruction.

A recent study examines the idea of existential loneliness in contemporary fiction, focusing on how characters feel incredibly alone in spite of their social connections. According to the study, loneliness stems from a disconnect between a person's inner self and their surroundings (Larsson 24). From this angle, characters like Asle throughout *Septology* frequently experiences an intense loneliness and alienation. This disconnection can be seen in the contemporary human emptiness. Correspondingly, in his review of *The Other Name: Septology I-II*, Spencer Ruchti argues that Fosse offers a thorough analysis of human consciousness by using doppelgängers (a double of a living person), particularly the two characters named Asle, he highlights the idea of alternate life paths and the fluidity of identity. With its meditative, rhythmic sentences and defiance of conventional punctuation and grammar rules, the story blurs the lines between perception and

reality, mirroring the protagonist's zigzag journey. *The Other Name I–II* is a notable work that uses this stylistic approach to literary and philosophical interests to depict memory, loss, and the search for meaning (94).

4.2.5 The Dialectical Movement toward Radical Freedom

Asle's search for authenticity is fraught with deep existential tensions; he rejects societal norms, confronts death, and wrestles with a vision of his inauthentic self. But this struggle does not resolve within itself. Rather, it thrusts him to the last step of the existential dialectic: radical freedom, as described by Sartre. Authenticity for Sartre is not just a matter of resisting external influences but of determining one's own existence. Settling into subjectivity with truth and authenticity burdens Asle, who must then shed the idea of meaning entirely to grasp that he is free to name himself within a world without essence, a world governed by the absurd and the contingent.

A fundamental contradiction in Fosse's literary vision is revealed that "the use of language is to evoke silence. Beyond traditional narrative structures, Fosse's notions of writing as an act of listening to a "second, silent language" reveal a metaphysical orientation" (Emiel 2023; Remo 2023). This silent language, which is based on an experience of being that defies expression, is existential rather than merely stylistic. Fosse's writing reflects the indescribable aspects of human existence, where meaning emerges precisely through silence and suspension, rather than as absence. This silence is unquestioned, despite the fact that it is very evident. Asle's silence is a total loss of identity rather than merely being quiet.

4.3 The Realization of Radical Freedom and the Burden of Self-Creation

4.3.1 From Authenticity to Radical Freedom

The previous section looked at Asle's existential struggle for authenticity, focusing on his rebellion against societal norms, confrontation with mortality, and the tension between his authentic self and the specter of inauthenticity, which is embodied by the "other" Asle. Here, this chapter transitions to the synthesis of the existential dialectics, Sartre's "radical freedom" and self-creation. The character's struggle internally seems as a threat between the need to fit in with external roles or social expectations and their desire for personal freedom. Contrast freedom (the will to act freely) with conformity (the pressure to live up to family or social norms). Freedom is linked to responsibility, the understanding that decisions have repercussions, and goes beyond simply being free from outside restrictions. When a character refuses to take on responsibility, it may be a sign that he is fighting for true freedom. Avoidance, the propensity to shy away from the responsibilities that come with freedom vs. responsibility, the burden of freedom.

"I can't be what they want me to be, but if I choose my own path, I am alone"

(Fosse, *I Is Another*, 54).

For Sartre, "existence precedes essence": human beings are not born with given identities or significances but must constantly create themselves through their choices and actions. This radical freedom unshackles people from deterministic constraints but casts an uneasily heavy responsibility on their shoulders, one that all too much of humanity would struggle under. Asle has fought with subjective truth (Kierkegaard) and authenticity (Heidegger) until he arrives at the understanding that his life is only his own responsibility. Yet the burden of this insight does not translate into triumph, but rather profound existential dread. In terms of these themes, Asle's

journey dovetails with Sartre's idea that radical freedom is at once a liberating and a burdening state: You are constantly defining yourself in a world without intrinsic meaning.

Arcadia analyzes Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* to illustrate the protagonist Hans Castorp's delayed maturation and his retreat into a child-like state within the sanatorium. The piece argues that Castorp's prolonged adolescence and avoidance of societal responsibilities reflect a broader humanist perspective, emphasizing active engagement with life as essential for genuine knowledge and personal development. This analysis positions Castorp's experiences as a microcosm of pre-World War I European society, highlighting themes of identity crisis, the allure of false security, and the tension between individual growth and societal expectations. Through *Septology*, Fosse also questions this false security and individual growth that societal expectations decide the individual's meaning, but in an unauthentic way. "Man must create himself knowing all his existential crises and personal autonomy" (72).

4.3.2 Asle's Confrontation with Absolute Freedom

A key part of Asle's sense of being is his acknowledgment that no outside force, neither God, fate nor society shapes his existence. In *I Is Another*, he meditates on this hanging thought:

"I see Asle sitting there in church and he's thinking that everything that idiot Minister up there is reeling off, about how there actually is meaning in the meaningless death of his sister Alida, is an insult, that's how he sees it, because Sister is dead and there's no meaning in it and so there's no meaning in life and you have to just live with that and that means you might as well be dead, Asle thinks, and if he wants to be able to live with meaningless suffering he needs to stop listening to the kind of meaningless talk that The Minister is

reeling o, Asle thinks, because the meaning The Minister is talking about is a kind of torment while meaninglessness gives you a kind of peace..." (*I Is Another* 92).

This passage reiterates Sartre's fundamental existentialist tenet: "we are completely responsible for our existence." Where Kierkegaard conceives of subjective truth as a kind of leap towards faith, Sartre insists that individuals must create their own meaning without any dependence on external justification.

Silent existential crises in ordinary but deeply alienating situations are common among the characters in Kjell Askildsen's minimalist stories. One act of defiance reveals the character's existential dilemma. The protagonists of one of his stories, *A Sudden Liberating Thought*, struggle to define themselves in the face of a harsh and heartless world, displaying a distinctly Scandinavian form of existential anxiety. He disbelieves in morality and grand narratives. His writings depict the pure, occasionally intolerable void of existence that arises when delusions are dispelled. Asle's attempts to maintain both the religious animosity and the moral centers serve as evidence of this (Askildsen 58). For much of *Septology*, Asle vacillates between pursuing meaning in other sources, memories of his wife Ales, religious iconography, reflections on fate and its sway, and denouncing them as inadequate. But as he grapples with radical freedom, he realizes that meaning is not something you discover; it is something you must create. His epiphany is not jubilant but disturbing:

"Asle's a free man now, Sigve says Because you're a free man now, he says You've left home and neither your mother nor your father can go chasing after you whatever you do anymore, he says Yeah, it feels good, Asle says I'm sure it does, Sigve says and he asks if Asle wanted to buy something and he says he was thinking of buying an ashtray An ashtray? Sigve says Yes, Asle says" (*I Is Another* 146).

Asle communes with the anxiety of existence that accompanies absolute liberation. Sartre calls this anguish, the knowledge that choices define not just oneself, but create values for all mankind. In choosing a path, Asle tacitly endorses its validity, yet the pressure of this decision humbles him. Unlike his friend Åsleik's religious certainty, who believes in divine providence, the meaning is not preordained to Asle. This places him in a condition of radical isolation where the knowledge that every action or inaction is his own responsibility weighs heavily upon him.

4.3.3 The Anxiety of Choice and the Burden of Self-Creation

One of Sartre's best-known statements is: "Man is condemned to be free." This paradox implies that freedom is the meaning of man but also the unbearable burden. Asle, aware that his own autonomy is a heavy burden of multi-dimensional self-creation. In *The Other Name*, he suffers from this anxiety in trying to decide whether to go to the Christmas gathering with Åsleik:

"I think, and if God isn't almighty, but is more likely powerless, still he's there in everything that is and everything that happens, because that's how it has to be if God put limits on himself by giving human beings free will, since God is love and love is inconceivable without free will, so he can't be all-powerful, and the same thing is true of nature, if God created the laws that nature follows then the laws are what's in control, I think and if God hadn't given himself limits, for whatever reason, then he wouldn't be all-powerful either, not in any thinkable way, I think, because that can't be thought, but there's one thing I'm sure of and that's that the greater the despair and suffering" (*A New Name* 51).

This moment, seemingly insignificant, embodies the radical open possibilities of being. There are no objective moral guides for Sartre, no absolute truths to fall back on. Asle's hesitancy gives

away the fact that he knows whatever decision he makes, he makes alone, without any authority outside himself to validate it.

This existential paralysis insistently appears in his unwillingness to connect with others. Yet in search of companionship, a false pursuit, he sometimes curls inward, terrified of the responsibilities that relationship requires. In *A New Name*, he meditates on his deceased wife, Ales:

“I’m alone, and it’s already been many years since my parents died, first Mother, and not long after that Father died, and my sister Alida died all the way back when I was just a boy, I think, and she died so suddenly, she was just lying there dead in her bed, I think and I don’t want to think about that, and I think that I should have called The Hospital and asked how Asle is doing, but now it’s too late, now it’s night and I’ve called so many times, and I always get the same answer, that he needs his rest and 16 can’t have visitors, I think, so I’ll just call tomorrow” (*A New Name* 16-17).

There, Asle wrestles with the hollow left by loss, a hollow he must fill on his own. Whereas the inauthentic self seeks comfort in illusions, the inauthentic self realizes that there is no external force giving him his meaning. But this revelation brings no comfort; instead, it exacerbates his sense of existential isolation.

4.3.4 Art and Self-Creation: Painting as an Existential Act

Though existentially despairing throughout, Asle finds his freedom ultimately through his art. Sartre believes that to define oneself is to take action; one has to engage with the world to create meaning. For Asle, painting becomes this existential gesture. His paintings, which appear over and over again in *Septology*, serve as symbols of his struggle with self-creation. In *I Is Another*, he writes of the act of painting: intuitive, necessary:

“I think that painting isn’t something I’ve done for myself, it wasn’t because I wanted to paint, but to serve something bigger, yes, maybe, I do sometimes dare to think things like that, that I want my paintings to do nothing less than serve the kingdom of God,” (*I Is Another* 87).

This goes in line with Sartre’s assertion that existence does not arise a priori but is rather shaped through authentic action. Asle does not paint to a preset vision, allowing creation to define itself in the act. This echoes Sartre’s philosophy of human existence: we begin without essence; we gain it through our choices. In *I Is Another*, Asle ponders the possibility that painting is his only real form of communication:

“...it is, whether it’s good art or bad art, because art is about quality, not about liking or not liking it, not at all, and it’s not about taste either, quality is something that just exists in the picture whether it’s beautiful or ugly, and anyway for something to be beautiful it has to also be ugly, that’s how it is, and of course good and evil exist in the 137 same way, and right and wrong, and true and false, of course it can be hard to say whether something is good or evil, or right or wrong, or true or false, but most of the time it’s clear enough, so it’s usually easy to see if a painting is good or bad, if it’s bad it’s bad, and in that case it’s just bad and there’s nothing more to say about it, but if it’s good it can be hard to say how good it is” (*I Is Another* 137-38).

This moment proposes that art, like existence, is an ongoing becoming, not a being. For Asle, painting is a way to wrestle with the absurdity in life, imposing our own meaning on the abstract canvas. The thing is that painting is no escape; it is a battle. For this reason, Sartre’s idea of committed literature is not simply to strive for such realism in the arts, depicting the very situation of human beings and their world as they give a portrayal of that world but rather that literature

engage with the fire of the world. Asle's paintings do not offer easy answers; they mirror his existential dilemma. In that sense, they are an instance of real self-expression, an affirmation of his ongoing work of artifice.

4.3.5 The Unfinished Project of the Self

Asle's awakening to radical freedom is not a source of finality; it constitutes a lifelong burden. His search for meaning and self-creation is inherently unresolved, in keeping with Sartre's conviction that authentic existence is a work in progress. His final embrace of freedom doesn't remove his doubts, but makes him face the obligation to choose amid uncertainty. No fixed essence; ultimate resolution only the act of living, choosing, creating.

"I know who I am, yet there is a part of me that remains hidden, even from myself."

At the core of the protagonist's conflict is the struggle for self-creation to preserve authenticity while navigating the expectations of others. When trying to assert independence, the Self is under emotional pressure to fit in with the absurd living standards of the real world, which forces the Self to internally negotiate between true identity and social acceptance. This tension, where the 'Self' risks losing authenticity to maintain connection and relationships, stresses the existential dilemma of being for oneself versus being for others.

In the end, the research unearths the more universal meaning of Asle's existential struggle. Answering what *Septology* adds to the dialogue of existential thought today. And what Asle's dialectical struggle tells us about the human condition. Dialectical struggle of Asle reflects how existential crises push the man into thrownness in front of societal norms that self-creation becomes an unending quest.

4.4 Confronting the Absurd – Faith, Doubt, and the Limits of Meaning

Asle's existential quest in *Septology* does not end in a glorious solution, however, but rather a reckoning with the absurd, a base tension of existentialist thought. The combination of Kierkegaard's idea of 'subjective truth' (thesis), which grants us the right to create our own meaning, and that of Heidegger regarding 'authenticity' (antithesis), which demands a full account of oneself, leaves us with Sartrean 'radical freedom' (synthesis), affirming our absolute position of having to define ourselves. But outside of these dialectical stages lies a different sort of existential struggle: the confrontation with meaninglessness itself, what Albert Camus terms the "absurd". The absurd comes to light as Asle understands that his quest for meaning, no matter how intense, gets no answer from the universe. His wrestling with mortality, with wavering faith, and with creativity also reflects this tension. If Sartre claims that it is man's duty to create meaning, Camus holds that meaning is itself inaccessible, and true freedom lies in the acceptance of this absurdity, rather than its resolution.

4.4.1 The Collapse of Faith: Religious Longing vs. Existential Doubt

Asle throughout *Septology* has a complex, ambivalent relationship with faith. Having been raised in a religious household, he sometimes meditates on Christian imagery, especially the notions of divine grace, but he repeatedly resists any dogmatic certainty. This tension parallels the larger existentialist conflict between Kierkegaard's demand for a leap of faith and Sartre's pessimistic declaration that humans are alone in the universe. In *I Is Another*, Asle has a wrenching moment of religious contemplation:

"...maybe it's not even a picture at all? But at the same time, I don't want to paint over it with white paint, and I don't want to set it aside in the stack of pictures... there are a lot of

pictures there, and all of them are big paintings, or bigger, none are that big, and it's good they're big, I think, because I've realized I don't want to paint anymore at all, maybe I've painted enough, painted myself out, maybe I'm done, I'll give up painting, and the unfinished pictures actually are finished in their way, they're surely not that bad the way they are..." (*I Is Another* 138).

Asle confronts the existential possibility of faith, not as an objective reality but as a subjective experience, an intensely personal one. But this moment is ephemeral. His skepticism comes right back:

"Asle thinks and I look at the white wall and the snow is now covering the whole windshield and I can't see the wall and I look at the windshield covered with snow and I think that it was to share in the human condition, our sorrows, that God became man and died and rose up again" (*I Is Another* 91).

This back-and-forth between faith and doubt puts Asle at direct odds with Kierkegaard's notion of the knight of faith, the one who leaps radically beyond reason to embrace divine meaning. Unlike the biblical Abraham, who submits directly to God's will, Asle resists, incredulously inquiring into the fairness of his own faith. In *A New Name*, this struggle deepens as he meditates on his friend Åsleik, a man of simple, steady faith: Asle's existential condition thus bears more resemblance to Kierkegaard than to Sartre. He cannot submit himself to an outside source of meaning. His doubt is not a passing hurdle, but a constitutive style of being, aligning him with post-theological existentialists like Nietzsche and Camus.

4.4.2 The Absurdity of Suffering and the Weight of Death

Another key theme in Asle's confrontation with the absurd is his meditation on death and suffering. Like many existentialist antiheroes, Dostoevsky's *Underground Man*, Camus's *Meursault*, and Sartre's *Antoine Roquentin*, Asle grapples with the awareness that life offers no intrinsic justification for suffering. One of the most remarkable passages in *Septology* comes in the second volume, *I Is Another*, when Asle ponders the losses of his life:

"I suddenly decided I needed to go see Asle, and I found him lying in the snow; he could have easily frozen to death, it was so cold, so it was certainly good that I came back..." (*I Is Another* 125).

This passage resonates with Camus's idea of absurdity, the understanding that nothing makes sense because when faced with death, the fragility of all human endeavors becomes clear. After all, the continuum of life itself doesn't care about individual loss. The horrors of religion that act to encompass death in a wider metaphysical plan, an eternal afterlife, for example, do not touch Asle, who faces the unknowingness of death as the intractable mystery that it is; like the existentialists, he understands death as a brute fact, not a passage.

Barnum Nilsen, the main character and narrator of *The Half Brother*, grows up in a dysfunctional working-class family in Oslo following World War II. His quiet, sulky half-brother Fred rules his life, his father is absent, and his mother is emotionally distant. Barnum is intellectually curious, sensitive, and small in stature, but he never feels fully accepted or acknowledged. Christensen argues through Barnum's experience that a person must forge an identity in the face of social rejection, absurdity, and alienation in a world without clear moral, spiritual, or familial guidance (*The Half Brother* 215).

Similarly, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger claims that one can attain true authenticity only by confronting one's own finitude, and the idea resonates deeply within Asle's consciousness. But Asle's consciousness of death does not drive him toward a life-affirming "thanatos", as Heidegger would have it, but a crisis of meaning. He knows that death is coming, but he can't find a reason to think that life should matter in its shadow. This is clearing *A New Name*, when he muses on the absurdity of time:

"there's nothing in there he especially pays attention to, and he flips back to the death notices and he reads through them, and it's strange how many people have died, both young and old, people from all the cities in West Norway, Asle thinks and he doesn't understand it, people are born, people die, just a few years of struggle and toil to get through their life one way or another and then they die, they come from nothing, they're just born, and they go back to nothing, they're just gone, and then there're these years they call life, a life, a human life..." (*A New Name* 48).

This reflection recalls Camus's insight from *The Myth of Sisyphus*: "There is only one really serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide." Asle does not explicitly contemplate suicide, but he hangs on the idea that life may not be worth living in a world where meaning doesn't have to be guaranteed. If so, his struggle is not just about finding meaning but whether the search itself is worth it.

In *The Denial of Death*, "The Psychoanalyst Kierkegaard", the author argues that humans are the only animals aware of their own mortality, and that this awareness breeds existential fear. To cope with this fear, humans construct symbolic systems, such as religion, culture, achievements, and even love that provide us with a sense of permanence, immortality, and purpose. Based on the theories of Kierkegaard and Otto Rank, he believes that most people live

inauthentically and cling to illusions (the “false self”) because facing death head-on is intolerable (Becker 46-47).

4.4.3 Art as a Response to the Absurd: Is Creation Enough?

Meaning cannot be created through faith or rational inquiry; it can be created through art? Asle’s commitment to painting implies that, for him, aesthetic creation is a way to overlay order onto chaos, to give form to an otherwise senseless universe. His accounts of painting are frequently infused with urgency and necessity, as in *The Other Name*:

“I think, or at least to God insofar as I can imagine Him, but there are also other ways of thinking and believing that are true, other ways of honestly turning to God, maybe you use the word God or maybe you know too much to do that, or are too shy when confronted with the unknown divinity, but everything leads to God, so that all religions are one, I think, and that’s how religion and art go together... the liturgy are fiction and poetry and painting, are literature and drama and visual art, and they all have truth in them, because of course the arts have their truth” (*The Other Name* 21).

This calls to mind Sartre’s notion of committed action that what we do defines who we are. In painting, Asle’s radical freedom is expressed, though the decisions he makes, however small, form his being. But as he rounds the final sections of *Septology*, doubt returns:

“All good art has this spirit, good pictures, good poems, good music, and what makes it good is not the material, not matter, and it’s not the content, the idea, the thought, no, what makes it good is just this unity of matter and form and soul that becomes spirit, I think, no I’m not thinking clearly now, I think and I’ve thought thoughts like this so many times, I think, that because pictures have a spirit painting can be compared to praying, that a picture

is a prayer, I think, that the pictures I paint are prayer and confession and penance all at once” (*A New Name* 22).

Nuancing the encounter between art and existence, this moment reveals that even as art provides a way of engaging with existence, it does not thereby solve the existential problem. Because Asle’s crisis endures: in a world where nothing is guaranteed, can anything actually matter?

This existential crisis can also be seen in *Crime and Punishment*, where Dostoyevsky argues that when just people reject transcendence and moral responsibility, they become hopeless, their meaning becomes blurred and the irrational quest fails celebrating the sufferings of their lives. True freedom does not come from extreme individualism but from making responsible decisions, forming relationships with others, and finding spiritual meaning accepting the hollowness of the man. He asserts that existential crisis is not the end but rather a path toward truth via suffering and atonement (222-23).

4.4.4 The Inescapable Absurd and the Need to Continue

Where Sartre insists on self-definition through action, and where Kierkegaard offers faith, Camus offers a third option: acceptance of the absurd. Asle’s journey through *Septology* implies that he does not fully yield to the Camusian revolt, but he does persist in living, painting and searching through the absence of guarantees.

The investigation unpacks Asle’s unresolved existential tension and how it adds to the broader existentialist canon. Is his inability to escape his crisis a mark of failure, or does it vindicate the existentialist doctrine that meaning is always and necessarily incomplete? These questions end this final discussion.

4.5 The Unresolved Dialectics of Existence – Meaning, Freedom, and the Unfinished Self

Asle's voyage in *Septology* ultimately goes nowhere in the sense that it does not plummet into epiphany or an epistolary new age of existential lucidity but hinges on a permanent state of tension. He arrives at a non-definitive conclusion concerning faith, selfhood or meaning. Instead, he shuttles between 'subjective truth' (Kierkegaard), 'authenticity' (Heidegger) and 'radical freedom' (Sartre) but never settles into any of those places. This state of unresolvedness is the quintessence of existentialism and the existential crisis; that is, human existence is always a project in process, a project unfulfilled, where meaning is itself yet to be defined and even when it's relevant to the human experience, we still have to grasp it, but never reaching it.

4.5.1 The Open-Ended Nature of Asle's Subjectivity

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of *Septology* is its fragmentary, recursive narrative, which defies the traditional shape of a linear trajectory toward resolution. Rather than a simple metamorphosis, Asle's existential state is in constant flux, toggling between belief and disbelief, commitment and detachment. This corresponds with Kierkegaard's idea of becoming, which stipulates that subjectivity never finishes itself but is instead a continual unfolding of selfhood. In *The Other Name*, Asle reflects on this religious uncertainty:

“God isn't anything, He is separate from the world of created things, where everything has a limit, He is outside time and space, He is something we can't think, He doesn't exist, He's not a thing, in other words, he's nothing, I say...” (*The Other Name* 76).

This passage captures the existentialist idea that selfhood is a thing never fully set. Whereas traditional bildungsroman narratives are concretely about a protagonist who goes through a transitive journey, Asle's growth is less certain. This captures Sartre's argument in *Being and*

Nothingness that “human beings are condemned to be free”, repeatedly defining themselves without ever achieving a determinate essence.

His persistent questioning, “What if I were someone else? (*I Is Another* 219), further reinforces his fluid identity, reflecting Sartre’s idea that the self is not something that one finds but one that one creates and recreates. The fact that he is always meeting another version of himself, the other Asle, strengthens this existential uncertainty. A double prevents a double, which in turn is both a mirror of possibilities and an incarnation of the idea that identity is never one or finished.

4.5.2 Freedom Without Resolution: Sartrean Choice and the Weight of Existence

Again and again, Asle demonstrates what Sartre describes as radical freedom: the notion that without any external, given meaning to our existence, humans must create meaning as they come up against life. Yet Sartre also cautions that with freedom comes anguish, the weight of personal responsibility to create one’s own purpose. Asle’s artistic practice embodies this tension.

“Asle lying on his sofa unable to think anything except one single thought, the only thing he can think is that now he needs to get up and then he’ll go down to the sea and then out into the water and then he’ll wade out into the sea and the waves will wash over him and he’ll just be gone, gone forever” (*The Other Name* 189).

Such a passage resonates with Sartre’s insistence that no external criteria exist for validating our choices. Asle, like all existential subjects, has to make his own standards of meaning, but he lives in a state of doubt:

“...that’s why it’s meaningless to say that someone does or doesn’t believe in God, because God just is, he doesn’t exist the way Åsleik imagines, I say and I think that Åsleik and I

have talked about this so many times, it's something that's nice to talk about again and again, and also boring to talk about again and again" (*The Other Name* 75).

Here, Asle's tenacity in the face of uncertainty echoes Camus's absurd protagonist, who goes on living without the promise of ultimate meaning. He rejects both Sartre's radical autonomy and Kierkegaard's religious faith. Instead, he resides in the unresolved space between those two views, embodying the existentialist condition of ceaseless questioning.

4.5.3 Repetition and the Illusion of Finality: The Circularity of Septology

A defining feature of *Septology* is its repetitive, recursive structure, where the past is present, memory recurs, and the lining of time starts to fray. This cyclicity echoes Nietzsche's 'eternal return', where existence does not progress toward a final resolution so much as repeats itself, iteratively, in other forms. Asle's musings return to the same topics again and again, especially in his exchanges with the "other" Asle. In *The Other Name*:

"We have met before. I know him, and yet I don't. He is me, and he isn't" (187).

This doubling action generates instability in the idea of one coherent self, instead positing that identity is multiple and ever-shifting. As Nietzsche poses an affront to the idea of linear progress, Fosse's novel eludes any teleological journey toward closure. In the final passages of *A New Name*, Asle reflects on the possibility of completion:

"It's like everyone's supposed to be friends and like each other, and they act like they do, but they're all competing with each other, in a way that sort of doesn't look like competing, and everyone is supposed to be their own person somehow, be original or whatever, and that's why everyone is actually like everyone else and none of them is their own person..."

(*A New Name* 22).

This ending only denies finality, emphasizing the loop of life. In this sense, *Septology* fits with existentialism's denial of absolute conclusions: meaning is never reached, only aspired to.

4.5.4 The Necessity of the Unfinished Self

What emerges from reading *Septology* through an existentialist lens is that Asle's journey is not one of resolution but one of engaging with the process of meaning-making itself. What he gets out of this is not a final answer but the recognition that the struggle and its attendant questions around faith and freedom end in no final answer, just as they do in existence. His dialectical of existence pursues his familiar thesis-antithesis-synthesis arc, though with one major caveat:

- i. Thesis (Subjective Truth – Kierkegaard): He is trying to find meaning through personal belief and struggles with committing to faith.
- ii. Antithesis (Authenticity – Heidegger): He tries to live authentically, but he hesitates and is imprisoned in uncertainty.
- iii. Synthesis (Radical Freedom – Sartre): If he accepts creative freedom, it lives on to haunt him in doubt.

Instead of resolving this dialectic puzzle, *Septology* is positioned as existentialism's central tenet: existence precedes essence, and meaning is never settled but always in flux. Asle's unwillingness to reach a solid conclusion isn't a failure; it's an acknowledgment of the existential situation itself. Like Camus's 'Sisyphus,' he perseveres despite uncertainty, painting even as he doubts that it matters. In so doing, he embodies a struggle of meaning and self-creation, not as a completed project, but as a drive that must be repeated and is always open. So the final message of *Septology* is not despair, but rather existential endurance that in a world so absurd you are a saint as soon as

you cast every man, woman and child out of your mind, you must still create, even as it seems utterly pointless, even if only in order to be.

Fosse dramatizes the dialectical tensions that make up human existence, autonomy and constraint, freedom and responsibility, isolation and connection, self-creation and determinism through Asle's fragmented consciousness, oscillating identities, and recursive introspection. These conflicts never go away; instead, they continue to be recursive, open, and essential to the ongoing development of the self. An existential truth, that the self is not a finished project but rather a continuous negotiation between being and becoming, is reflected in Asle's repeated rituals, his refusal to finalize meaning, and his acceptance of ambiguity. In this sense, *Septology* affirms that the unfinished self is a prerequisite for authenticity, freedom, and existential integrity rather than a sign of identity failure.

4.6 Conclusion: Dialectics of Becoming

Septology transpired as an existential cartography that mapped out the boundaries of radical freedom, subjective truth, authenticity, and the weight of self-creation. It is not just a story of a man's life, but Fosse created a literary world where authenticity is both a burden and a calling, where freedom is both liberating and paralyzing, and where meaning is not found but constantly wrestled with through the dialectical portrayal of Asle's inner and outer worlds challenging the self and the society.

The study observed that the quest for subjective truth, which Kierkegaard referred to as the highest form of truth, the truth for me, is where Asle's journey begins. Asle's loneliness and existential alienation are not indications of hopelessness but a reflection of his resistance to accepting socially constructed, objective meanings. His isolation from the outside world and

dependence on painting are symbols of his existential resistance. Asle's quest for authenticity takes place in an intensely inauthentic world, furthering this existential trajectory. Heidegger's idea resonates: Asle fights against the "they-self" – the impersonal demands of family, religion, and society. Correspondingly, the "Other Asle," a dialectical double who externalizes the very self Asle refuses to become, serves as a haunting mirror of conformity. However, Asle does not find peace by rejecting the inauthentic; instead, he faces his own mortality, loneliness, and anxiety more intensely. The confrontation with 'radical freedom' is the Sartrean climax of the existential struggle. Once this freedom is seen through the apertures of authenticity, it turns into an existential chasm, freedom as responsibility rather than as liberation. Every action becomes a significant moment of self-definition as Asle is compelled to define himself through his decisions. Painting resurfaces as an existential endeavor, a struggle of self-creation that is never fully realized. As Sartre reminded us, the self is often a progression and an unanswered question rather than a final verdict.

Furthermore, the argument challenged the irrational: the understanding that suffering frequently lacks redemptive meaning, that faith falters under uncertainty, and that the world resists coherence. Asle simply lives the conflict between faith and doubt, suffering and expectations, echoing absurdity. Art is also called upon to respond rather than to resolve. The act of creation itself turns into a brittle affirmation against silence, an existential defiance of hopelessness and meaninglessness. The study concluded by tying the threads into the ambiguity of life itself. The unresolved dialectics of existence are mirrored in the circularity of meaning, recurring motifs, and incomplete dialogues. Asle's self is a continuous brushstroke, a transition between being and becoming, rather than a finished sculpture. His decisions do not bring about closure but rather the

need to go on despite the lack of assurances. This tension of dialectics of becoming is the most authentic expression of Asle's existence.

Žižek argues that rather than belief, the persistence of ideology is caused by unconscious rituals and the search for an unachievable ideal that gives life purpose. Asle's conflicted religious views and passion for painting are evident in the structure. By continuing to practice religion and the arts despite his skepticism, he consistently demonstrated his unwitting support for them. The sublime objects of faith and art organize his existential longing. The existence of the "other Asle" represents the fractured self, plagued by the longing for a complete, genuine existence. However, Asle's journey is influenced more by the unspoken customs that maintain the appearance of importance than by faith (71-73).

Hence, faith, art, identity, and the quest for authenticity are examples of ideological fantasies that promise wholeness. Asle's life is a never-ending existential struggle to maintain meaning and his "self." Despite his conscious doubts, Žižek's argument suggests that these "illusions" are sustained as rituals and things he desires. Asle's search for the meaning of life ultimately fell short; instead, it concentrated on the unfathomable burden of freedom, the emptiness at the core of existence, and the ceaseless attempts to fill it with idealistic endeavors.

CHAPTER 05

CONCLUSION

5.1 Reasserting the Dialectics of Existence

Septology served as a potent meditation on existence, meaning, and self-creation that channels almost all of its power through the same existentialist dialectical framework established by the analyses of this dissertation. Kierkegaard's 'subjective truth', Heidegger's 'authenticity', Sartre's 'radical freedom', the struggles of the novel's protagonist, Asle, are a quintessential example of a human being in the Promethean interstices between the demands of subjective experience and the reality of external imposition, fictional in the demand for authenticity and the necessity of compulsion and, ultimately, freedom and contingency.

As the research demonstrated, *Septology* is not a straightforward account of an artist's life but a more zoomorphic existential allegory, a textual realm in which the tensions of existence played out at their most distilled.

5.2 The Interplay of Subjective Truth and Narrative Form

Perhaps the most striking feature of *Septology* is its narrative style: its use of a recursive, flowing prose that eschewed all but the most basic forms of punctuation to create a sense of temporal fluidity and existential indeterminacy. This stylistic choice reflected Asle's ongoing turmoil and quest for meaning, consistent with Kierkegaard's notion of subjective truth, which emphasizes that meaning is not an objective given, but rather something that must be cultivated through lived experience. The novel's ceding of linear plot structures reflects a rejection of externally imposed coherence, underpinning the thesis that human existence is an ongoing act of self-interpretation.

Asle's existential musings, in turn, frequently manifested as dialectical swings: between his past and his present, between memory and perception, between his identity and that of his doppelgänger, the other Asle. This duality (self), reflected in another, represents a literary instantiation of Kierkegaard's dialectics of selfhood, where the individual must harmonize the finite (his actual existence) with the infinite (how his life could subjectively unfold). The central character's engagement with painting, especially his insistence on the importance of color and form, acts as an allegory for this existential process of meaning-making: the art of creation shadows the art of living.

The novel's insistence on subjective truth derided any objective resolution of meaning. The protagonist's iterated speculations about faith, mortality, and artistic expression uncover someone attempting to reconcile individual experiences with broader metaphysical contemplations. In this sense, *Septology* contests the notion of a conclusive, overarching truth, emphasizing rather the existential imperative for perpetual self-inquiry. This dovetails with the dissertation's argument that Fosse's novel is most appropriately read as a dialectical engagement with existentialist philosophy, in which the search for meaning is a dynamic, lived process rather than a stationary, arriving destination.

5.3 The Weight of the Social World and the Illusion of Authenticity

Expanding upon the novel's thematic engagement with subjective truth, the dissertation had also shown that *Septology* constitutes a profound instantiation of authenticity. Asle's battle is ultimately one of personal significance but also of devotion to himself in a world that exerts limitations, anticipations and structures that dilute his uniqueness. His aloofness from social mores, his solitary existence, his disdain for conventional measures of success, his ambivalence about

religious dogma hint at a continual wrestling match with the self, the Heideggerian concept of the inauthentic life dictated by outside forces.

However, Asle is not entirely unburdened of the social world. The tension between individual authenticity and relationship is evident in his relationship with others, most notably his dead wife, Ales, and friend Åsleik. As Sartre says, freedom is never acted on in a vacuum; it's always mediated through the presence of others, through the gaze that gives shape and bounds to one's self-conception. It's clear, especially in the way Asle deals with the people in his life, he's aware of the judgments and expectations and where people might average him down and how those realities then force him to grapple with his authenticity with others.

Furthermore, there is the other Asle who exists as his doppelgänger (a double of a living person), who has given himself over to addiction and loss, as a haunting, reductive existential mirror, and who pushes our protagonist to examine the contingency of his own decisions. It is this parallel self whose path is in inauthenticity, the loss of individuality borne of social and psychological pressures. The tension between these two Asles crystallizes the novel's underlying dialectic: the individual's battle to weave a unique story about himself against the extrinsic imperatives of history, myth and, in Asle's case, memory.

5.4 Radical Freedom and the Limits of Self-Creation

As argued throughout this dissertation, Asle's existential plot reaches its culmination adapting Sartre's radical freedom, that is, the idea that "existence precedes essence" (Sartre 222) and that meaning must be actively created and not passively received. The protagonist's failure to fit into a predefined role, his dedication to art as an act of self-definition, and his eventual acceptance of the absurdity of existence all lead toward a Sartrean insistence on freedom.

Yet *Septology* also made this idea of radical freedom less straightforward in its insistence on the realities of human agency. Whereas Sartre's philosophy offers an unforgiving demand for an absolute freedom of self-creation, Fosse's novel teaches us that this type of freedom is always mediated through memory, loss and the structures of existence we cannot escape. This protagonist is not a blank slate, free to define himself in total; he possesses to some degree, the weight of his past, the irreversibility of choices, and the existential burden of time.

This nuanced approach to freedom illustrated one of the major achievements of this study: a reading of *Septology* as less a simple existentialist novel than a dialectical exploration of existential pressures. The novel does not seek an unqualified embrace of radical freedom nor collapse into pathological determinism; it inhabits the space between those polarities, making of existence an endless negotiation between constraint and self-creation.

Studies have confirmed the broad existentialist narratives of *Septology*, illustrating how the narrative embodied by Fosse navigates the dialectical tensions related to meaning, authenticity and freedom. This study has traced the protagonist's journey alongside the philosophical models articulated by Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre, demonstrating how the novel contributes to existentialist literature while engaging with the same philosophical questions characteristic of that literary tradition.

5.5 Synthesizing the Dialectics of Existence

Septology has been examined from the existentialist and dialectical perspective, considering how it interweaves the ideas of 'subjective truth', 'authenticity', and 'radical freedom'. These existential tensions have been exposed through the conceptual lenses provided by Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre. The findings of this study have been pulled

together into a unified conclusion pertaining to the contribution of the novel to existentialist expression, as well as to its place in the milieu of contemporary literature.

The study elicited the dialectical structure in which the protagonist's struggle for authentic existence is situated in a triadic structure: thesis (subjective truth), antithesis (authenticity), and synthesis (radical freedom). This section of the study critically interrogates the research aims through an analysis of the extent to which Fosse's oeuvre adopts an existentialist and dialectical methodology and their originality within the literary and philosophical context. This dissertation has characterized *Septology* in terms of a dialectical reading in which the protagonist Asle experiences an endless dialectical oscillation between antithetical existential forces, subjective reality versus objective reality, individual freedom versus social determinism, faith versus doubt, and freedom versus the experience of banal contingency. These tensions occur with a certain ongoing repetitiveness such that existence itself, rather than being a straight shot toward resolution, is a dialectical process.

5.5.1 Thesis: The Quest for Subjective Truth

Kierkegaard's notion of 'subjective truth' suggested that meaning is not something externally imposed but must be created through individual experience and investment. Asle, as an introverted protagonist, encapsulates the idea through his perpetual introspection. His clock is an allegory (at least to him) for the very nature of art, the act of replaying memories, intuitive repetition, and meditative thought as mechanisms to build his own reality.

Throughout *Septology*, Asle's artistry helps his mind's eye turn all too objective, and becomes a vital metaphor for 'subjective truth.' He is consumed by the act of painting, not as a means to depict objective reality but as a way of communing with inner truth. His obsessions with

colors, light, and form imply that the act of creating is one way to impose meaning on an otherwise chopped-up life. Asle's conception of art is identical to Kierkegaard's existential view: truth does not reside in verification by the other, but in the actual lived experience. Yet this search for 'subjective truth' is ever countered by the antithesis of 'authenticity'. The protagonist does not exist in a vacuum: his reality is constructed of social structures, memory, and interpersonal relationships. His search and pursuit of inner truth is thus faced with external resistance, complicating the very idea of pure subjectivity.

5.5.2 Antithesis: The Struggle for Authenticity in an Unauthentic World

Asle's attempts to create meaning are limited by things outside of himself by religion, by society, by the weight of his past. This is consistent with Heidegger's idea of inauthentic being, in which the individual becomes formed by the "they-self", the social norms and values of a society. Asle's conflict with religious faith reflects this tension. He is attracted to Christianity, especially the Catholic tradition, but struggles with the institutionalism of faith. He does not respond to the quagmire of doctrine with unquestioning adherence; instead, his grappling with religious imagery and rituals of faith speaks to the desire for a more profound, personal understanding of belief. Heidegger claims that authenticity is not the result of following societal norms, but of refuting them by critical engagement and personal choice.

Additionally, Asle's relationships with others underscore the challenges of staying true to yourself in a world dictated by societal standards. His friendship with Åsleik, for example, juxtaposes two ways of living; where Åsleik's is a simpler, more grounded form that, to an extent, serves as Absel's human foil, Absel's existence involves a ceaseless cycle of thought and uncertainty. His removal from social norms, his avoidance of traditional relationships, his isolation, his obsession with memory implies that authenticity is hard, if not impossible, to attain

in an external world. In the face of chaos and disorder, Øverland asserts that storytelling and memory are instruments for constructing identity (27). The protagonist's memory issue reflects the conflict between moral obligation and aesthetic illusion, which ultimately determines identity.

So the novel(s) complicated the Heideggerian notion of authenticity. Instead of resolving authenticity into an element that can resolve the problem of inauthenticity, *Septology* resolves it into something that always stands in progress, in flux, with selfhood a renegotiation of remembering, losing, art, and identity.

5.5.3 Synthesis: Radical Freedom and Limits of Self-Creation

Septology has disclosed the dialectical development suggested in this research thesis (subjective truth), antithesis (authenticity), and the final state must be synthesis, which in this case can take the shape of 'radical freedom' as articulated by Sartre. Human beings, according to Sartre, are also radically free, but this freedom is less a capitalist privilege than a burden, an existential responsibility to create oneself in a world devoid of absolute meaning.

Asle's final confrontation with freedom is not an affirmatory discovery but a muted acceptance of existential randomness. His solitude, his acceptance of the past, and his realization that meaning cannot be given to him from without all lead him toward a Sartrean resolution, in which he'll have to embrace the absurdity of existence and keep making himself as a man without fixed truths. Yet *Septology* does not offer radical freedom as a simple answer. The novel punctures Sartre's optimism about self-creation by reminding us of the weight of memory and the reversibility of time. While Sartre makes the argument that people can always reinvent themselves, Fosse's protagonist is more ambivalent: earlier choices, traumas and relationships don't simply disappear; Fosse's characters are shaped, and limited by the way they have lived.

Ultimately, Fosse set up an existentialist tension that troubles the Sartrean model. Asle's ultimate embrace of freedom is tinged, however, with the understanding that freedom can also be highly circumscribed. His past never leaves him, his memory hits his present, and his identity is inseparable from those who walked before him. This means that radical freedom is possible but always negotiated through the limitations of human existence. At the heart of this study is a dialectical investigation into the protagonist's existential conflict as examined in terms of subjective truth (Kierkegaard), authenticity (Heidegger), and radical freedom (Sartre). These three concepts inform the direction that Asle's journey takes, but they remain entwined and unresolved, too, much as human life itself is.

Asle's search for subjective truth, free from outside imposition, resembled Kierkegaard's argument that truth is not some externally verifiable fact but that which is deeply personal and subjective. His meditations on art, memory and faith show how he tried to reconcile personal meaning with a fractured life. This aspect of his character reflects the paradox of faith described by Kierkegaard, the belief that stands not so much on proof, but on the individual's decision to stand for a truth that seems senseless to other people.

But informed by Heidegger, the antithesis of authenticity complicated this search. Asle's quest for authenticity is constantly challenged by forces from the world, especially the norms of society and the bonds of religion. Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death provides a compelling lens through which to understand Asle's internal confrontation with his mortality, as he reflects on his past and his wife's death. Asle's striving for liberation from the inauthenticity of society's conventions, the state of being "fallen", is a constant struggle. His grappling with his own death, and his continuing sense of alienation, underscore the difficulty of Heideggerian authenticity in a resistant world.

The synthesis of these tensions comes via Sartre's concept of radical freedom. While Sartre's philosophy begs the individual to self-make through choices, *Septology* gives a complicated picture of freedom. In searching for his identity and breaking free of imposed norms, Asle understands that freedom, in being liberating, is also deeply responsible and anxiety-inducing. Sartre's notion that freedom is a "condemnation" more than a liberation from constraint haunts Asle's efforts at self-definition, from which no victory is unadulterated by doubt, loss and self-interrogation. Asle's awakening to his radical freedom, then, does not lead to total self-realization, but punctuates the contingent nature of identity: a lifelong self-creating, always fraught with tension in a world full of exterior forces.

Septology is a landmark work of existentialist literature, not only because it explores familiar existential themes, but also because it interrogates the frameworks that have traditionally governed our understanding of existentialist thought itself. The dialectical form imposed on Fosse's text also offers fresh rooms for existential exploration, especially regarding its grapple with religious faith, memory, and the artist's task of self-creation. Morrison, in *It's Not Me Who's Seeing: Jon Fosse's Methods*, asserts that Fosse's straightforward aesthetic effectively conveys spiritual themes, blurring the lines between perception and reality, and challenging conventional sentence structures while putting readers inside the protagonist's head. However, the study ignores the problems of memory, identity, and self-creation that necessitate a dialectical examination of Asle's path to self-creation. The two incarnations represent different life paths that contribute to the construction of the true self, reflecting the character's dual nature (23).

Deleuze argues for a philosophy that affirms difference as a generative force in and of itself in *Difference and Repetition* (1994), challenging the classical metaphysical tradition that values identity over difference. He reinterprets repetition as the creation of novelty rather than the return

of the same, where each repetition results in change rather than similarity. His work is crucial for comprehending characters and subjects who defy convention and pursue genuine self-creation because it offers a potent critique of fixed identities and representational thinking through the proposal of a “new image of thought” based on becoming the self, following singularity, and renouncing creativity.

Unlike existentialism, much of whose focus remains on individual alienation, Fosse’s narrative sets up a dialectical relation between self and other. The two Asles, one older, one younger, embody not just the struggle between versions of oneself in past and present but, perhaps, the interplay of various kinds of living. This tactic is a consequence of the inter-subjective nature of existence articulated in Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, where being-a-self (the spirit of a person) is also always being-a-thing (an object in the world), and our freedom is always programmed by the others around us. These opposing positions between the dual Asle show how one oscillates in the possibilities informed by the time and space of the narrative, suggesting that potentialities of being are in constant motion rather than a one-time event shaped only by internal conditions or the manifest world that interacts with them.

And Fosse’s spare prose and emphasis on cyclic time challenge readers’ assumptions about what a novel should be, and how it engages with the conventions of existential literature. *Septology* resists typical plot development; there is very little plot and instead presents a fragmented, repetitive, sometimes dreamlike exploration of the self, challenging the reader to engage with the novel the same way the mind might engage with the self, in visceral, meditative bursts. Its structure remains rigidly repetitive, not because it closes anything but because it emphasizes that we are a long way from answers, recurring to confrontation with the question of what it means to be human in this space, of what it means to find authenticity and closeness to other people. Fosse provides a

crucial meditation on, and critique of, what it means to exist in the world today by adopting a slow, contemplative narrative approach and foregrounding the character-type of the artist (Asle) as a site of existential inquiry.

The dialectical tension between authenticity and subjectivity is a key element of *Septology*, where art works in a key role. Asle's art is presented as an act of self-expression and self-exploration. His paintings create not only art, but he is searching for truth, the meaning of life, and the identity of himself. Asle is trying to counter the chaos in the world with his desire for expression through his art. This artistic journey reflects the existential struggle for authenticity, where the act of creation serves as an attempt to impose order and meaning on an otherwise scattered reality. But Fosse itself complicates the notion of art by tying it into the idea of religious faith. For Asle, art is not only a personal endeavor but also a way to reach something beyond the self, whether that is something divine or a more general human condition. By capturing the duality of art as a personal struggle and a divine act, these novels explore the existential tension that exists between the individual's private experience and outside forces like society, culture, religion, and the conviction of mortality.

The struggle of art versus faith in *Septology* also shows how Fosse's philosophy engages with existentialism. Though Sartre would have us believe that it is ultimately the artist who is responsible for creating meaning in an indifferent universe, Fosse introduces a more intricate interplay of forces, one in which the artist's search for meaning is entwined with a desire to pursue something greater than himself. This tension between self-creation and transcendence locates *Septology* in a singularly contemporary literary space, where existential thought brushes against spiritual and artistic questions.

Finally, authenticity in *Septology* is a difficult and often painful task to achieve. Asle has quietly disregarded social conventions all of his life, especially those brought about by religious dogma, the commercialization of art, and social conformity. His seclusion, rejection of dignitaries, and disengagement from everyday life are manifestations of the struggle to live a genuine life in an unauthentic world. The loneliness, guilt, and ambiguity testified to the difficulty of claiming one's truth without external validation. To be authentic, you must confront societal expectations and refuse to allow them to define who you truly are. The existential contemplation of memory, anxiety, and thought is reflected in *Septology's* recursive, minimalist narration. The study unraveled Asle's alienation and existential quest, emphasizing the breakdown of linear time, identity uncertainty, and the recurrence of unresolved problems. The lack of conventional plot development reflected the cyclical and often stagnant nature of existential suffering. This gives *Septology* a philosophical quality that immerses the reader in the existential ambiguity, loneliness, and the fragility of modern man's meaning-making.

Septology has been examined through the existential philosophical ideas dialectically, investigating "subjective truth," which is characterized as inwardness and is predicated on moral self-examination and individual faith, as illustrated by Asle's journey. The concept of "authenticity" is embodied in Asle's experience of death, rejection of traditional life paths, and awareness of being-toward-death. The "radical freedom" is ultimately reflected in Asle's duty to express himself through art and free will in the face of uncertainty and despair. The existential concepts are experienced viscerally, rather than abstractly, including human conflict, creativity, and the weight of freedom, through the conflict between belief and uncertainty, and between Asle's self-creation and conformity.

5.6 Conclusion and Directions for Future Research

The analysis has argued that this relationship with dialectics is of utmost importance for the formation of a specific existentialism within *Septology*, one that fuses Kierkegaard's 'subjective truth' with Heidegger's 'authenticity' and Sartre's 'radical freedom'. *Septology* undermines the assumptions of intolerant or angry existentialism through its cyclical, meditative style as well as its reflection on the interplay of art, faith, and self-creation.

Future research could take this study further by investigating how Fosse's engagement with memory and time relates to other philosophical concepts, such as Bergson's idea of "duration" or Deleuze's concept of "time as a plane of immanence". Fosse's distinct narrative form, specifically its minimalism and circularity, would expand knowledge about the role of style in existentialist literature and literary criticism as well. A comparative study between *Septology* and other contemporary existential works could enhance our understanding of existentialist thought in the 21st century.

Thus, *Septology* is a crucial addition to the canon of existential literature, the dialectical way of writing, presenting a consequential account of what being human means despite our inherent lack of meaning, being true to oneself, and the choices we make, and it reinforces the existentialist belief in being human as a constant becoming and momentum toward self-creation. By accepting the ambiguous, repetitive, and incomplete rhythms of postmodern life as the very fabric of existence and the fractured form of subjectivity, 21st century existentialism appears to be more about living with questions than it is about finding answers.

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