



Existentialism of Main Characters in the Movie: Final Destination 5

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Abstract. *This study examines the portrayal of existentialist principles and characterization in Final Destination 5 (2011), directed by Steven Quale. The research aims to identify the methods of characterization used for the five main characters and explore how Sartrean existentialism is reflected in their struggles. Using a qualitative approach, the study applies Kenney's method of characterization and Sartre's existentialist framework to analyze key scenes, dialogues, and character interactions. Data was collected through repeated viewings of the film, with critical moments transcribed and categorized based on characterization methods and existential principles. The findings reveal that Final Destination 5 employs a mixed method, with the dramatic method being the most dominant, supplemented by character on other characters and contextual methods to develop psychologically complex main characters. Existentialist principles emerge strongly, particularly the idea that "existence precedes essence," as characters are stripped of predefined roles and forced to define themselves through desperate actions. The burden of freedom and responsibility is evident in moral dilemmas, while the confrontation between anguish and authenticity shapes their responses to impending death. Sam's journey from fear to acceptance exemplifies Sartrean authenticity, whereas Nathan's ethical crisis highlights the paradox of human freedom.*

Keywords: *Characterization, Existentialism, Final Destination 5, Freedom, Jean-Paul Sartre.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Existentialism, as a philosophical movement, explores fundamental questions about human existence, freedom, and the search for meaning in a seemingly indifferent universe. These themes are powerfully depicted in cinema, particularly in horror films where characters confront mortality and the limits of their agency. Final Destination 5 (2011), directed by Steven Quale, stands out in this genre by presenting a gripping narrative about individuals who escape a catastrophic bridge collapse, only to realize that death is relentlessly pursuing them. The film's premise such as cheating death only to face its inevitability, provides a compelling framework for examining existentialist ideas, particularly the tension between free will and fate.

Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy, especially his assertion that "existence precedes essence" (2007), serves as a key theoretical lens for this study. Sartre argues that humans are not born with a predetermined purpose but must define themselves through their choices and actions. This concept is central to Final Destination 5, where the characters' struggles reflect existential dilemmas: the burden of freedom, the anguish of responsibility, and the challenge of living authentically in the face of death. By analyzing these themes, the film transcends its horror-thriller label and becomes a profound exploration of human existence.

Previous research has explored existentialism in various cinematic and literary contexts. For example, Oktaviani et al. (2022) examined existential themes in *The Worst Person in the World*, focusing on characters' struggles with identity and life choices. Similarly, Pastrana (2023) analyzed *The Professor*, highlighting how characters grapple with existential crises tied to mortality. Within the *Final Destination* franchise, Siiltonga (2019) investigated the psychological impact of the fear of death on character behavior, while McDonald and Johnson (2021) noted how horror films use death to evoke existential anxiety. However, few studies have applied Sartrean existentialism to *Final Destination 5*, particularly in analyzing how the film's main characters embody principles such as radical freedom, responsibility, and authenticity.

This study aims to fill this gap by addressing two research questions: what are the methods of characterization used to present the five main characters in *Final Destination 5*, and how existentialism reflected within the five main characters in *Final Destination 5*.

To answer these questions, the study employs Kenney's (1966) theory of characterization to find out the methods of characterization used to present the five main characters of *Final Destination 5*. Additionally, Sartre's (2007) existentialist framework is used to analyze existentialism reflected within the five main characters in *Final Destination 5*. The film's narrative and visual elements are examined to demonstrate how existentialist ideas are woven into its structure, elevating it beyond a conventional horror story.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to both film studies and existential philosophy. By analyzing *Final Destination 5* through a Sartrean lens, the study highlights the film's intellectual depth and its ability to engage audiences with timeless questions about life, death, and human agency. Furthermore, it underscores the potential of horror cinema to serve as a medium for philosophical exploration, bridging the gap between popular culture and academic discourse.

Theoretical Frameworks

In analyzing the main characters in *Final Destination 5*, this research will employ theory of characterization proposed by Kenney (1966) and theory of existentialism proposed by Sartre (2007) as translated by Carol Macomber.

Theory of Characterization

Kenney (1966, pp. 34–36) outlines five methods of characterization that authors and filmmakers utilize to develop characters. The discursive method involves the author or filmmaker directly describing the character's traits, personality, or background. This method is explicit and straightforward, as it tells the audience what to think about the character, whether

positive or negative. In contrast, dramatic method which emphasizes ‘showing’ rather than ‘telling’. The dramatic method reveals a character’s traits through their own dialogue and actions. The character on other characters reveals a character’s trait through the perspectives, opinions, or reactions of other characters. Meanwhile the contextual method suggests a character’s traits through the environment, setting, or verbal context surrounding them. Finally, the mixing method combines these techniques for richer character development.

Theory of Existentialism

Sartre’s existentialism is based on the fundamental idea that “existence precedes essence” (2007, p. 22). This means that humans do not have a predetermined essence or nature that defines them before they exist. From the idea that existence precedes essence follows the existentialist doctrine of radical freedom and responsibility, as individuals must shape their own meaning without external guidance Sartre (2007, p. 29). Consequently, this autonomy generates anguish, awareness of one’s absolute freedom and the responsibility it brings. However, Sartre advocates for authenticity, which emerges when individuals embrace their freedom and the responsibilities it entails. Living authentically means confronting one’s anguish and understanding that true meaning and identity are found only through actively engaging with one’s freedom (2007, p. 55).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative method. The analysis and findings of this study are presented descriptively. The research method consists of three parts: data sources, data collection methods and techniques, and data analysis methods and techniques.

The data source in this study is the 2011 film *Final Destination 5*, directed by Steven Quale. The analysis centered on the five main characters: Sam Lawton, Molly Harper, Peter Friedkin, Candice Hooper, and Nathan Sears. Key scenes and dialogues were selected based on their relevance to existentialist principles and method of characterization.

The method and technique for collecting data was the documentation method with note-taking techniques. The film was viewed multiple times to identify critical moments that illustrated existential struggles and characterization methods. These scenes were then cross-referenced with a transcript to ensure accuracy. The collected data was organized into two main categories: characterization using Kenney’s (1966) method of characterization and existentialism applying Sartre’s (2007) existentialist framework.

The method and technique of data analysis involved applying Kenney’s (1966) method of characterization and Sartre’s (2007) existentialist framework. Characterization was analyzed

through Kenney's method of characterization, which divides into discursive, dramatic, contextual, character on other characters, and mixed methods. Existentialism was examined using Sartre's three existentialist principles: existence precedes essence, the burden of freedom and responsibility, and the confrontation between anguish and authenticity.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the Method of Characterization

After analyzing the data, the study found that Final Destination 5 used mixed method—dramatic, character on the other characters, and contextual—to develop its main characters, making them complex and psychologically engaging characters. Among these, the dramatic method stands out as the most prominent. Although other methods such as character on other characters and contextual, are used less frequently, they still play a significant role in creating a well-rounded portrayal of the main characters and enhancing the emotional impact of the story. The analysis can be seen and explained below.

1. Dramatic Method

This method reveals character traits indirectly by showcasing their actions, dialogue, decisions, and behaviors, allowing the audience to infer their personality and motivations. Key scenes demonstrating this method are analyzed below:

Data [3-1] 00:15:16 - 00:16:08

Olivia : "Help me!"

Sam : "Olivia! Olivia?"

Olivia : "Sam."

Sam : "I'm right here. I'm right here. It's coming loose!"

Sam : "Do you feel it?"

Olivia : "Yeah."

Sam : "Alright."

Molly : "Olivia, c'mon!"

Sam : "**It's okay. It's safe now.** Just gonna follow this to Molly's voice. Alright?"

Molly : "**Come towards me. C'mon! You're almost there! C'mon! C'mon!**"

Molly : "No!"

Sam : "No!"

In the chaos of the bridge collapse, Kenney's dramatic method effectively reveals Sam's leadership and Molly's compassion. Sam's leadership and selflessness are demonstrated through his calm and reassuring dialogue, such as "**It's okay. It's safe now,**" as well as his

actions in guiding Olivia to safety. His ability to remain composed under pressure showcases his protective instincts and emotional resilience. Molly's compassion is highlighted by her encouraging words, **"Come towards me. C'mon! You're almost there! C'mon! C'mon!"** Her determination to assist Olivia, even in a life-threatening situation, reveals her bravery and care. The shared of "No!" from both Sam and Molly at the scene's climax captures the raw panic of the moment. The high-stakes context of the bridge collapse amplifies the characters' traits, with Sam's leadership highlighted by his calmness and focus in a crisis, while Molly's compassion is emphasized by her determination to help Olivia despite the danger. Thus, this scene effectively uses the dramatic method to reveal Sam's leadership and Molly's compassion, allowing the audience to infer their personalities and motivations through their dialogue, actions, and decisions.

Data [3-2] (01:17:26 - 01:18:05)

Sam : "Hide and I'll distract him. When you can, go!"

Molly : "Okay..."

Peter : "Not done yet, Sam. Where is she? Where is she!?"

/pointing a gun at Sam/

Sam : **"I'm not going to let you hurt her, Peter. You're gonna have to kill me first."**

Peter : "That doesn't do me any good. Death's after you too."

Sam : "This is crazy, Peter. Don't do this! Just think for a minute, alright? You are not a killer."

Peter : **"I don't wanna kill anybody, Sam."** */gunshot/*
"I don't wanna die yet either!"

This climatic scene uses dramatic method to showcase Sam's heroism and Peter's moral conflict, allowing the audience to discern key aspects of their personalities and motivations. Sam's heroism is powerfully displayed through his bold declaration, **"I'm not going to let you hurt her, Peter. You're gonna have to kill me first,"** is delivered with a resolute tone and his stance, unwavering and protective, highlights his ultimate act of self-sacrifice. Peter's moral conflict is revealed in his desperate response, **"I don't wanna kill anybody, Sam. I don't wanna die yet either!"** This expression of fear and internal struggle is palpable as he struggles with the gun aimed at Sam. His hesitation before acting emphasizes his reluctance to abandon his principles, showcasing the tug-of-war between his desperation and his moral values. This scene serves as a poignant illustration of how extreme circumstances can erode moral boundaries.

2. Character on other Characters

This method provides insight into a character's traits by highlighting the perspectives, opinions, or reactions of other characters. Detailed analyses of key scene, illustrating this method, is presented below:

Data [3-3] 00:10:27 - 00:10:41

Nathan : "What are those for?"

Candice : "Oh! It's um... something I do to relax me. And... For luck."

Peter : "Gymnast are worse than Baseball players with this kinda thing. **She's superstitious.**"

This scene uses the character on other characters method to reveal Candice's superstitious nature through Peter's playful teasing. Peter's comment, "She's superstitious," captures his playful teasing and highlights his perceptive nature. This lighthearted comment not only sheds light on Candice's reliance on superstitious but also hints at the closeness of their relationship. Candice superstitious nature is further illustrated through her own explanation of her rituals, which she describes as, "Something I do to relax me. And... For luck." This scene subtly introduces an element of foreshadowing. Candice's reliance on superstitious rituals, presented as a harmless quirk, hints at her underlying anxiety and vulnerability, foreshadowing the tragic events that will later befall her. Overall, this scene serves to deepen the audience's understanding of the characters while subtly foreshadow the tragic events to come, emphasizing the complexities of their personalities and the significance of their interactions.

3. Contextual Method

This method reveals a character's traits through the surrounding environment, setting, and symbolic elements. Below are detailed analyses of key scenes that illustrate the use of this method:

Data [3-4] (00:13:04 - 00:13:10)

Sam : "Peter? **Do you feel that?**"

Peter : "What?"

Sam : "**Something's wrong.**"

This scene employs the contextual method to establish a palpable sense of dread and foreshadow the impending disaster. The environment itself, the violently shaking and cracking bridge, becomes a character, its ominous presence permeating the scene. The jarring visual of the bridge's structural integrity failing, coupled with the cacophony of screeching metal and splintering concrete, creates an atmosphere of sheer terror. Sam's reaction, "**Do you feel that? Something's wrong,**" is delivered with hushed, urgent tone, his eyes wide with apprehension.

This immediate perception of danger underscores his heightened intuition and sensitivity to his surroundings. The environment's chaotic and destructive nature serves not only to heighten the tension but also to reflect the characters' growing fear and vulnerability. Moreover, this scene serves as a powerful example foreshadowing, as escalating environmental cues directly precede the catastrophic bridge collapse. Through visual and auditory elements, the scene effectively conveys the characters' internal anxieties and the looming threat of death.

Analysis of Existentialism

After analyzing the data, the study found that Final Destination 5 revealed that three principles, existence precedes essence, the burden of freedom and responsibility, and the confrontation between anguish and authenticity. These principles are clearly reflected in the five main characters' experiences through their choices, moral dilemmas, and emotional struggles. The following presents the analysis of these principles.

1. The Existence Precedes Essence

In Final Destination 5, this principle is illustrated as main characters face death without predefined roles, compelling them to find meaning through desperate actions. The following section offers a detailed analysis of scene that illustrate how the main characters portray this existential struggle.

Data [3-5] (00:18:04 - 00:18:22)

Sam : "Dammit..."

Dust in the wind...

Sam : "We all gotta get off!"

Peter : "What are you talking about?"

Sam : "**The bridge is gonna collapse!**"

Molly : "What?"

Sam : "We're all gonna die."

Peter : "What the hell's going on?"

Sam : "**We're all gonna die! If we don't get off this bridge! Now!**"

The scene of the bridge collapse demonstrates Sartre's idea that existence precedes essence by showing characters who are suddenly stripped of their identities and forced into pure existence. When Sam shouts "**The bridge is gonna collapse!**" and "**We're all gonna die! If we don't get off this bridge! Now!**" the characters are violently removed from their predefined roles, workers, friends, partners, and forced into a moment where their existence becomes the only certainty. Sam's transformation is especially significant. Before his premonition, he existed as a defined social being. But his desperate warnings mark the moment when he sheds

these predetermined roles and acts from a place of pure existence. His urgency is not just about physical survival, but also reflect the human struggle to create meaning in a suddenly meaningless world. The crumbling bridge becomes a physical representation of Sartre's belief that identity is not fixed but must be built through action.

2. The Burden of Freedom and Responsibility

Sartre (2007, p.29) states that "man is condemned to be free", which highlights the paradox of human freedom, while individuals have autonomy, they must also carry the burden of responsibility for their choices. This dilemma is central in Final Destination 5, where each main character's decision to defy death has consequences not only for themselves but for others as well. The section below provides a detail analysis of scene where freedom and responsibility intersect.

Data [3-6] (01:08:11 - 01:08:42)

Sam : "Hey! Peter, calm down."

Peter : "Did you? Or didn't you? Did you or didn't you!?"

Nathan: "Yes... I.. I think i did. **I killed him.**"

Peter : "So if the theory works. Then... you traded spots. **He should have your death. And...you should have his years.**"

Nathan: "How do we know for sure?"

Sam : "I think there's an order to these deaths. They mirror the order everyone died in on the bridge."

Molly : "Then, who would be next?"

The office confrontation starkly reflects Sartre's idea that freedom and responsibility are inseparable. When Nathan admits, "**I killed him,**" he faces the irrevocable weight of his choice, a brutal manifestation of Sartre's assertion that "man is condemned to be free" (2007, p. 29). His attempt to trade deaths reduces existential responsibility to a transaction, yet his emotional turmoil reveals the truth: every act of freedom demands absolute accountability. The group's desperate theorizing, "**He should have your death. And... you should have his years,**" represents a futile attempt to impose moral mathematics on what is fundamentally an existential dilemma, the impossibility of quantifying human responsibility.

The true horror of this scene lies not in Nathan's violence but in its compulsion for the group to confront Sartre's most challenging premise "in choosing myself, I choose man" (2007, p. 25). Nathan's personal decision implicates the entire group, showing that no choice is ever made in isolation. The collective anxiety mirrors Sartre's warning that freedom becomes most terrifying when recognizes as both profoundly personal and universally consequential.

3. The Confrontation between Anguish and Authenticity

The growing fear experienced by the main characters, shifting between denial and acceptance of their fate, reflects this existential tension. The following analysis highlights scene in which this anguish leads to either authentic response.

Data [3-7] (01:09:05 - 01:09:58)

Molly : “Why are you fighting me on this? **You're not seriously going to work, are you?**”

Sam : “Molly, Isaac died on a massage table. **If death is gonna come for me, I don't think it matters where I am.**”

Molly : “But, you have to do something.”

Sam : “**What, kill someone so I can live?**”

Molly : “No, of course not. We'll just have to figure something else out.”

Sam : “I have figured it out. Something saved me on that bridge. Maybe it doesn't want me to die.”

Molly : “Maybe...”

Sam : “**We can't live our lives in fear, Moll. So, if it happens tomorrow, or 50 years from now, whatever. As long as we're together...**I'll be okay, right? Why don't you come by after my shift... and I'll make you a nice late dinner, okay?”

This pivotal scene illustrates Sam's journey from existential anguish to authentic acceptance. When Molly questions his decision to proceed with normalcy, “**You're not seriously going to work, are you?**” Sam's profound confrontation with mortality's randomness is revealed. His response, “**If death is gonna come for me, I don't think it matters where I am,**” captures Sartrean anguish: the realization of life's inherent meaninglessness and the terrifying freedom within it. Sam's transformation unfolds through three authentic responses to this anguish. First, he confronts the absurd without hesitation, acknowledging that death can occur anywhere, at any time. Second, ethical boundaries for his freedom are established his rhetorical question, “**What, kill someone so I can live?**” demonstrating that authenticity is responsibility. Finally, his resolve to live normally, “**We can't live our lives in fear, Moll.... As long as we're together,**” illustrates Sartre's idea of authentic existence, creating purpose through deliberate decisions despite uncertainty. The emotional power of the scene arises from the moment when anguish transforms into authenticity. Rather than denying death or becoming paralyzed by fear, he chooses to affirm

life through everyday actions, like work and love, which existentialism views as the foundation of authentic being.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study has explored the intricate relationship between characterization and existential philosophy in *Final Destination 5*, revealing how the film transcends its horror-thriller genre to engage with profound questions of human existence. Through Kenney's (1966) framework, the study found that *Final Destination 5* employs a mixed method: dramatic, character on other characters, and contextual method. The dramatic method remains central, while the character-on-other-characters and contextual techniques enrich their portrayals. Sartre's existential principles manifest clearly: the bridge collapse forces characters to redefine themselves (existence precedes essence); Nathan's moral dilemma illustrates the burden of freedom; while Sam's journey from denial to acceptance exemplifies authentic existence.

Ultimately, *Final Destination 5* is more than just a horror-thriller, it is a thought-provoking study of human existence. Through its characterization and existential principles, the film encourages viewers to reflect on life's meaning, the inevitability of death, and the responsibilities that accompany freedom. This research provides deeper insights into the significance of character development within cinematic narratives, demonstrating how films can serve as platforms for exploring profound philosophical inquiries related to life, death, and the essence of human existence.

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