

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the inner and social conflicts of Riggan Thomson, it is found that the major cause of the conflicts is Riggan's ambition to define his existence and have a meaningful life. It is related to existentialism theory by Jean Paul-Sartre that states "man first of all exists, encounter himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards . . . he will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself" (3). In other words, Sartre believes that people's lives or existence are meaningless. It is up to people themselves to give the meaning of their lives by their own actions and efforts. This theory helps in understanding where Riggan's ambition comes from.

Both inner and social conflicts show that Riggan "first of all exists" (3) as Birdman. In the first conflict, Riggan's delusion of Birdman points out the fact that Riggan is famous for being Birdman in the past, and most people know Riggan as Birdman and nothing else. Riggan's daughter, Sam, also mentions in the second conflict that Riggan has a career in the past as Birdman. Mike Shiner in the third

conflict also points out how Riggan should go back to be Birdman as he used to be, rather than making a Broadway play. Tabitha Dickinson in the last conflict also mentions that she hates Riggan and everyone he represents, which in this case is the actors who are only famous for Blockbuster films. It can be seen that being Birdman is the only thing that most people can associate Riggan's existence with. Yet, being Birdman is not something that Riggan is proud of since Birdman films are Blockbuster films which mostly are made only for entertainment with little artistic value compared to a live Broadway performance.

Later on, Riggan "encounters himself" (3) which means he realizes that his existence as Birdman is actually meaningless. All the conflicts also contribute in pointing out the fact that being Birdman is indeed meaningless. In the first conflict Riggan himself says that although he grosses billions of dollars for portraying Birdman, it does not mean anything to him. Sam also says that people have already forgotten him as Birdman, which emphasizes that being Birdman is not something that can be long remembered. Mike Shiner points out Riggan as 'not a great actor' for portraying Birdman. Furthermore, in the last conflict, Tabitha Dickinson describes Riggan as a talentless actor for being famous only in Blockbuster films.

Sartre states that someone's life is nothing until he makes something of himself, or in other words, something through his own actions and efforts (3). Riggan thinks that there is no point of him alive if he continues living a meaningless life as an actor who is only famous for a comic-book character which does not require much talent or effort. Therefore, he decides to really define his existence as himself and to be known as a talented and capable actor. His decision and choice to move on from

being Birdman and act in a Broadway play which he also produces and directs, can be described as his step to “surge up in the world” (3). Making a Broadway play obviously requires more talent and efforts rather than portraying Birdman. He holds on to his belief of making a successful Broadway play even though others tell him otherwise as can be seen from all the conflicts. It shows his strong ambition to define himself and make his life meaningful.

The visual elements have an important role in showing the conflicts. As in the first the conflict, it can be seen that the Birdman figure spreads its wing over Riggan and keeps following him. It shows that the Birdman figure dominates him even though he tries to detach himself from it. As in the other social conflicts, the visuals always start with a two-shot type to emphasize two opposing forces between Riggan and the other characters that he has conflict with. The visuals in each conflict also have particular ways to emphasize Riggan’s meaningless existence.

In the first conflict, it can be seen that the Birdman figure looms over Riggan, and the Birdman poster is hanged higher than Riggan’s costume for the play. They emphasize how being Birdman dominates Riggan’s existence and overshadows him since people only know him as Birdman and not as himself. As in the second conflict, there is a toilet paper that Sam writes on which symbolizes Riggan’s existence that has not been completed or defined. In the visual of the third conflict, there is a blue color which is meant to symbolize that Riggan’s dominance is just a mirage. Lastly, in the fourth conflict, there is an empty glass on Riggan’s side which may symbolize the emptiness of Riggan’s life. In all the social conflicts, Riggan also always ends up on the left side which tends to show that he is in a weaker position.

In the end, Riggan cannot overcome all of the obstacles. As hard as he tries to make a successful Broadway play and define his existence as himself, he still cannot change the way people see him. Recognition plays an important part in his career as an actor. He thinks that his talent and true capability as an actor will be overshadowed by Tabitha's bad review. He still cannot achieve a meaningful life that he wants because he will be known as a failure and unable to move on from the fact that people will still know him as Birdman. Yet, the result turns out unexpectedly. As Sartre states in his theory, "one could have drawn quite different conclusions from such a series of reverses" (7). It means the outcome of the choices or decisions that people make towards defining their existence in this life can vary, and there will be "a plurality of possibilities" of outcome. Sartre's statement is applicable to what happens to Riggan. His suicidal attempt in his final act actually makes his performance more powerful and authentic. He successfully defines his existence as a talented and respectable actor, as metaphorically proven by the final scene which suggests that Riggan is as "powerful" as Birdman.

Thus, it can be seen that the analysis of the conflicts shows what actually happens to the protagonist in the story. In addition, Sartre's existentialism theory helps in understanding what the conflicts truly represents. It represents a belief that a person's existence is the outcome of every choice and decision that he makes. As Sartre further explains that "A man is no other than a series of undertakings, that he is the sum, the organization, the set of relations that constitute these undertakings" (8). What Sartre means is that a person will achieve their meaningful life after a series of making choice, decisions, and taking actions towards something they want to be in

their lives. Riggan’s existence as a talented and respectable actor that he achieves in the end is the outcome of his choices and decisions of producing his own Broadway play, which makes his life meaningful.

This analysis also shows that Innaritu is a skillful director and *Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)* is an interesting film. It is not only an entertaining film to watch, but it also has a meaningful message to deliver to its audience. It also successfully blends a dark comedy with an interesting topic such as existentialism. The film shows a belief from the existentialist point of view that people are completely responsible for their existence and people have to take actions in their lives to achieve a meaning of their lives.

