

Mnemonic Kalachakra: A Phenomenological Approach

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Abstract

Science fiction traditionally explores the impact of innovations, often set in futuristic contexts. Claire North's novel *The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August* leverages a unique time travel premise to delve into themes of life's meaning and personal struggle. It emphasizes subjective experiences such as emotions and states, aligning with the philosophical movement of Phenomenology. The protagonist, a 'mnemonic' with perfect memory across lifetimes, exemplifies this concept. This paper examines how the novel's depiction of 'Kalachakras' reflects Sartre's Existentialism and Phenomenology, revealing how human existence transcends natural laws and highlighting the essence of absurdity.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Existentialism, Kalachakra, Mnemonic, Cronus Club, Ontology

Introduction

Every individual creates their own meaning in life and is responsible for their actions. Claire North's novel *The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August* illustrates this idea through its narrative, aligning with the philosophies of Edmund Husserl and Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre's philosophy highlights the burden of personal responsibility that comes with the realization of the universe's inherent meaninglessness. According to Sartre, life's lack of inherent purpose forces individuals to create their own significance, often leading to what he describes as 'nausea' - a profound sense of existential despair.

Phenomenology, which explores the subjective experience of consciousness, intersects with existentialism in this context. Both Martin Heidegger and Sartre employ phenomenological methods to address existential themes, focusing on personal responsibility and the creation of meaning in an indifferent universe. This integration of phenomenology and existentialism, termed 'Existential Phenomenology,' seeks to understand human existence rather than the external world. Sartre's approach emphasizes the fundamental freedom and inherent instability of human existence, contrasting with the material world's apparent stability. His literary work reflects the tension between truth and freedom in a seemingly indifferent world.

Claire North's Kalachakra

Claire North's concept of Kalachakra in *The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August* is an intriguing blend of cultural and philosophical elements. North's adaptation of Kalachakra provides a rich metaphor for exploring themes of temporal existence, personal agency, and the search for meaning. By using

this concept, she invites readers to reflect on how cyclical experiences and the perception of time influence human consciousness and the quest for purpose in a seemingly meaningless universe.

The outer layer of the research is done by scoping the style of Claire North's narratology. With its frequent use of multiple timelines and non-linear storytelling, Claire's narrative techniques question the nature of existence and conventional ideas of time. This strategy can be interpreted as the means of highlighting the individual's freedom to make decisions and mould their own futures, as well as the effects of those decisions on the trajectory of their lives. Identity and the pursuit of meaning are major concepts which deal with Phenomenology. Claire's main characters frequently face identity, purpose, and mortality issues, and their journeys can be seen as a reflection of the existential search for meaning in life. And yet another important existentialist theme that Claire's narratology frequently explores is the effect of individual decisions on the course of history. The characters in this text make decisions that have a significant impact on their lives, the lives of those around them, and the course of history. This highlights the notion that each person has the ability to control his own destiny as well as the destiny of the world around them.

The central abstraction drawn by the writer is the multiple lives and the impact of one's choices on their future. And so, Claire North uses the characters under the identity of Kalachakra; they are rare individuals who are born with the ability to be reborn into their own life again and again. This is a kind of single cycle that lasts for a long period, more like the ideology of 'Ouroboros'. The characters like Harry August, Jenny, Virginia, and Vincent are serpents who are the images of the single-cycle existence by the writer. The idea of 'Ouroboros' in the book questions conventional beliefs about mortality and the afterlife by imagining a different world in which life continues after death. This begs the question of what it genuinely means to live and whether there is any intrinsic value to our existence if it is not constrained by mortality. The novel's examination of fate and free will address issues on the influence of individual choice on their lives and the environment in which they live.

Kalachakra holds a meaning; 'wheel of time' according to Buddhist disciplines but the author never gets into the track of portraying any religion rather she focuses on the fictionalized events which makes great sense to the readers. Claire North must have some sort of knowledge about histories and be possessed with creative skills, because the way she is able to explore so many factors over hundreds of years, and also the projection of the Kalachakra over their multiple lives drives the readers to some other world of magical spirits where they can alter their life or can get back to their own previous lives or they can even end their life themselves. So, such existence is admirable and highly needed one for everyone in this objective world. Through Harry August and other Kalachakra, North is able to change the insignificant events and show how the effects generate through the time period or time loop. And North keeps a point about what it means to be human when you can fruitfully live your life without any consequences.

The depiction of mnemonic Kalachakra by the author well combines a unique time travel premise and this can be seen as a philosophy on the meaning of life and a phenomenal struggle of wits. Here, 'memory' also plays a vital role where, in particular 'forgetting' usually plays an either role of boon or bane in one's life and it is evident in this novel which bridges the features of kalachakra because in some ways it is to be feared and, in some ways, it allows to proceed. These are the views which are seen scattered throughout the novel.

The words and the ideologies of Sartre goes hand in hand with the aim of Claire North's narratology where the readers could sense a smell of mixed abstracts when they read between lines. Harry August, the main character, is constantly reborn with all of his memories still there, but the decisions he makes in each life have a significant influence on the development of history. This casts doubt on conventional ideas of fate and destiny by arguing that instead of being pre-set, our lives are affected by the decisions we make. The novel tackles significant issues on the purpose of life and the nature of human existence by proposing an alternate reality where death is not the end and personal decisions have the power to affect the course of history. Each

Kalachakra struggles with the question of whether its existence has any purpose or meaning.

Edmund Husserl, a Moravian philosopher, invents phenomenology in the late nineteenth century. It is a technique for determining the essential characteristics of conscious data which is also termed as 'edios', and it looks into occurrences that can be directly observed, touched, verified, and related to our conscious experience. It is a ruthlessly logical system that, sadly, has an odd name. Its foundation is the relationship between conscious activities and meaningful objects.

Sartre builds on Husserl's concept in Being and Nothingness but expands upon it. In contrast to existence, which is thing-ness, he describes human awareness as being a nothingness in the sense of nothingness. Sartre rejects God in accordance with this notion; his choice is moral because he believes that believing in God lays restrictions on freedom and, ultimately, on a person's duty. God cannot be included in the phenomenological system since he cannot be seen, touched, or perceived in a verifiable way. Like the majority of Sartre's philosophical works, Being and Nothingness is a psychological investigation. In order to demonstrate how all objective accounts of humankind that is what he refers to as 'situations' fall short of sufficiently defining humans, he links the theory of freedom to that of human awareness.

In the novel, the protagonist Harry August's character is more applicable to the conception of 'being authentic' than other personae. The novel employs a good description of how Harry August is born in the first place and how he handles his multiple lives. His mother is a kitchen maid who works in a manor for the Hulne family and eventually, she becomes pregnant after she is raped by Rory Hulne. When the rest of the family discovered that she is pregnant, they promptly fired her. Harry's mother had nowhere to go and no support system, and after giving birth to Harry in the women's bathroom at the train station, she dies. Harry is then adopted by the Hulne family's groundskeeper, Patrick August, and his wife, Harriet. The rest of Harry's first life is described as being rather mundane and largely uneventful. At this point, he did not yet know he was a Kalachakra. The first time that Harry is reborn, is a shock. It took him some time to realize what

was going on and to accept his second life. So, it drove him to madness. Unable to understand what was happening to him, he commits suicide at age seven. Of course, Harry is then reborn once again, at which point he realizes that simply killing himself would not end the cycle. Therefore, he decides to spend his life traveling the globe studying the world. As the novel proceeds Harry comes to meet Franklin Phearson, a government agent who spots an opportunity for himself in what others only interpret Harry for his mental illness. He tells Harry about the Cronus Club, a group of people who are rumoured to live their lives over and over again. And only at this point Harry tries to acknowledge his existence and starts to scrutinize the purpose of living an eternal life. He soon accepts his plight and continues to work according to his conscious mind.

As he learns to accept and embrace his identity of being a Kalachakra in nature and use his knowledge where his phenomenon takes a turn to make choices through his experience. Harry handles his life through the actions of acceptance and he starts to explore the world to know where religions come from and look for answers that would explain his predicament. He observes,

I have said before of the passage of our lives, that there are three stages. Rejection of what we are, I think I had fairly well covered by the time Phearson came to pump me full of psychotropic hallucinogens. My situation had held me a long way from acceptance, but I believe I was, in my own way, attempting to explore my nature to the best of my abilities. In my third life, I tried God; in my fourth biology. My fifth we shall return to, but in my sixth life I attempted to explore the mysteries of what we are, albeit rather late in the day, through physics. (North 65)

In Sartre's view, authenticity involves taking responsibility for one's own choices and actions, rather than relying on external factors or societal norms to determine one's identity and values. Harry August breaks all the walls of objectivity and he is free to his will in taking his life steps and understanding the existence of Cronus Club and the traits of his kind. This is also reflected in Harry's character development, as he learns to make choices that are true to his values and beliefs, rather than simply following the expectations of others. The concept of authenticity is an important

postulation in *The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August* as it aligns with Sartre's existentialist philosophy of taking responsibility for one's own choices and creating one's meaning in life where this proves the aspect of Self-actualization.

Therefore, this paves way for 'responsibility' which is another key aspect of Phenomenology that is explored in the novel. It highlights the idea that individuals have a responsibility to take ownership of their choices and actions and to consider the impact that their choices have on others. This gives freedom to experiment and explore different paths, but also means that one must take responsibility for the consequences of his or her actions. Harry, in the novel, cannot escape the impact of his choices, even if he can relive his life and try again. The protagonist here struggles for several days to find a useful answer as he feels 'nauseated' by the size of his empty, meaningless situation. The phenomenological ontology of human kind is 'the nature of being' examined in the book *Being and Nothingness*. Because Sartre believes that mankind will never be able to solve these thinkers' age-old concerns, Sartre has little interest in traditional metaphysics. For instance, he argues that the evidence for and against the presence of God is equally strong, that no amount of reasoned argument could prevail. His justification is straightforward and he therefore gives up using logic and choose to use phenomenology instead.

Thus, Harry August is forced to confront the search for meaning in a unique way due to his ability to relive his life over and over again. Throughout the novel, Harry seeks to find meaning and purpose in a variety of ways. He becomes a scientist to better understand the world around him and to make a positive impact on society. He also seeks to build meaningful relationships with others and to contribute to the greater good. However, Harry's search for meaning is often complicated by the knowledge that his existence is finite and that he will eventually die. He must come to terms with the fact that his repeated lives may ultimately be meaningless, and must find a way to cope with this existential angst.

Cultural Origins

Kalachakra is a term rooted in Tibetan Buddhism and Sanskrit, where it translates to 'Wheel of Time'.

It represents a significant esoteric concept in Tibetan Buddhist tradition. The Kalachakra is both a symbol and a practice related to the cyclical nature of time and existence, emphasizing the interconnectedness of the universe, individual lives, and the passage of time. In Tibetan Buddhism, Kalachakra is also associated with a particular set of teachings and rituals aimed at achieving enlightenment and understanding the cyclical nature of existence. But the author never gets into the track of portraying any religion rather she focuses on the fictionalized events which makes great sense to the readers.

Claire North uses the characters under the identity of Kalachakra; they are rare individuals who are born with the ability to be reborn into their own life again and again. This is a kind of single cycle that lasts for a long period, more like the ideology of 'Ouroboros'. The characters like Harry August, Jenny, Virginia, and Vincent are serpents who are the images of the single-cycle existence by the writer. The idea of 'Ouroboros' in the book questions conventional beliefs about mortality and the afterlife by imagining a different world in which life continues after death. This begs the question of what it genuinely means to live and whether there is any intrinsic value to our existence if it is not constrained by mortality. The novel's examination of fate and free will address issues on the influence of individual choice on their lives and the environment in which they live. The central abstraction drawn by the writer is the multiple lives and the impact of one's choices on their future.

Philosophical Context

The novel can be analyzed through the lens of Henri Bergson's philosophy of time, particularly his distinction between 'clock time' and 'lived time'. Harry's experiences, where he lives through historical events multiple times, highlight the subjective nature of time and question the concept of a fixed, linear timeline. This resonates with philosophical inquiries into the nature of reality and whether time is a construct of human consciousness. In the context of *The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August*, Kalachakra is employed to explore themes of time, existence, and existential struggle. Claire North adapts this concept to fit the novel's narrative,

where the protagonist, Harry August, lives his life repeatedly with perfect memory of his past lives. This recurring life cycle mirrors the cyclical aspect of the Kalachakra.

Cyclical Existence: Just as Kalachakra in Buddhism symbolizes the cycle of time and rebirth, Harry August's experience reflects a continuous loop of reincarnation. His repeated lives allow him to confront and manipulate time in ways that echo the Kalachakra's emphasis on cyclical patterns and the possibility of transformation within those cycles.

Existential Philosophy: The novel echoes existentialist themes, particularly the ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger, who explore the nature of being and the self. The persistent rebirths force Harry to confront the fluidity of identity, questioning whether there is a core self or if identity is merely a construct of accumulated experiences. By integrating Kalachakra, North taps into existential themes similar to those explored by philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre. In the novel, Harry's repetitive existence challenges his understanding of meaning and purpose, aligning with existentialist ideas about the inherent absurdity and personal responsibility in a seemingly indifferent universe. The nature of existence and conventional ideas of time can be interpreted as the means of highlighting the individual's freedom to make decisions and mould their own futures, as well as the effects of those decisions on the trajectory of their lives. The Kalachakra framework in the novel emphasizes the perpetual struggle to find significance within of the cyclical nature his lives.

Phenomenological Insight: The use of Kalachakra also engages with phenomenology, which focuses on subjective experiences and consciousness. Harry August's unique ability to remember past lives deeply affects his perception of reality and his personal philosophy, paralleling phenomenological ideas about how individual experience shapes understanding of existence.

Conclusion

This discourse reminds us that no matter how many tries one may have to change something about their life, their past experiences will always leave a mark. Harry has lived for thousands of years, but he

still finds it difficult to let go of some of the most basic memories from his initial existence.

Despite continuously being impacted by his experiences, Harry does learn from them. The importance of being aware of the decisions and actions, and trying to do as little harm as one can, is another significant aspect of this paper. Harry generally stays away from hurting others or materially altering history, despite the fact that every life is the same. This is due to the fact that any significant adjustment Harry makes, may have a negative impact on others. Killing Hitler may have prevented the Holocaust, but it may have caused far more harm. When wandering through the woods, one should observe, respect, and avoid changing their surroundings. Even seemingly insignificant actions can have far-reaching implications. This is the way that Harry carries his life according to his mind. The study expounds that each individual should look at life right in the eye and see it as it is to experience their existence without any predetermined notions. And through such factors, the individual can have the result of taking a true life through the phenomenon of acceptance. According to Husserl and Sartre, existence should not be seen in an idealistic view or an idea rather it should act as a reality and what people undergo currently. This also acts upon the foundational knowledge meaning; the knowledge which when known helps people to reduce or eliminate suffering in their life and also in other people's life.

Claire North, being a unique writer tries to relate one's life with yet another absurd life of that same person. The way she was able to examine so many significant events spanning hundreds of years and establish the influence of the Kalachakra throughout their numerous lives still baffles the readers. Her way of including a historical degree and careful organizing skills opened a wide space for the researcher to study how the concept of existence precedes essence.

The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August also suggests the search for meaning and thus is a deeply personal and subjective endeavour. Each individual must confront their own mortality and seek to find meaning in their own unique way. The novel also emphasizes the importance of human connection and community in the search for meaning, suggesting

that individuals must build meaningful relationships with others to find purpose and significance in their existence. The novel highlights the importance of the search for meaning in existentialism and encourages readers to acknowledge the question of why they are living and what is the purpose of their existence. In conclusion, *The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August* serves as a rich text for exploring deep philosophical questions and literary themes. It blurs the boundaries between genres and disciplines, offering a unique lens through which to examine the complexities of identity, time, ethics, and the human experience.

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