

Torn between Determinism and Freewill: Self-alienation and Hiding of Identity in Barbery's *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*

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Abstract

This essay explores the influence of discourses of determinism and free will on the major heroines' decisions and behavior when trying to comprehend and apply these philosophies to themselves. The conflicting ideologies of the philosophers create a state of confusion, which in turn has led to the decisions of self-isolation and hiding the real identities to avoid a possible clash with members of the other social classes. The major heroines, Renée and Paloma, hide their intelligence as well because of their firm conviction in the futility of cultural discussions with narrow-minded people who believe in restrictions on social classes boundaries. Therefore, the essay investigates how Barbery addresses both of the philosophical ideologies and trends that control and shape the heroines' behavior and reactions. It also highlights the influence of these phenomenological philosophies on Renée's struggle and suffering, which eventually lead to the dualism of her identity and patterns of tensional reactions and ambivalence because she does not understand these theories deeply. The harmonious and amicable relationship between Renée and Paloma who belong to different social classes indicates the author's hope for a new generation who renounces disagreement and class prejudice; the proximity between them also undermines tools of determinism and discourses of social antagonism among the educated. Finally, the novel manifests itself as an irony of a woman in her fifties who rediscovers her femininity and reprioritizes her needs after years of displacement and self-concealment, and as a paradox for a precocious preteen girl who acts like adults.

Keywords: ambivalence, segregation, stratification, snobbery, philosophy

1. Introduction

The bulk of the debate between discourses of determinism and free will centers on the ideology of whether people's certain conditions are inevitable and prospective or a result of discretion and diligent choices. In this respect, Muriel Barbery's *The Elegance of the Hedgehog* (2008), original title *L'élégance du hérisson* (2006), unfolds a controversy between these two ideologies which manifests through social practices and antagonism. This contention results in attempts of integration or acclimation to undermine the inevitability of social and economical factors and circumstances, and then to achieve emancipation from the traditional socioeconomic norms of the French hierarchy in the novel. To escape the metaphysics of social stratification and its doctrines and clichés, both Renée Michel and Paloma Josse, the major heroines, decide to hide their true identities, intellect, and culture because their ideologies and realities contradict the stereotypical thinking as well as the French traditions and hierarchy. Simultaneously, they also undertake to avoid class struggle but through "clandestine" autodidacticism, then by obscuring their idiosyncratic intelligence and behaviorism. The question of self-alienation and hiding of identity prevails because of the influence of various discrepant philosophies which represent both convictions and doctrines that the heroines indulge themselves in. Barbery depicts how these two characters are affected by those philosophers whose opinions comprise a dogmatic conflict, which shapes the way the heroines perceive social activism, respond to social behaviorism, and think about hiding identities.

In this essay, I contend that both heroines' knowledge and behaviors, including decisions of self-concealment, proceed from the influence of reading different philosophers whose ideologies constitute conflicting ideas concerning determinism and free will, such as Marx, Kant, Hegel, Husserl, Tolstoy, and Freud. As for Renée, she hides cultural and scientific achievements as she believes in the worthlessness of revealing them amid a community that does not accept or value science and knowledge which emanate from lower class members. Therefore, after educating herself secretly, she conceals her real identity due to the fear of accusations related to attempts of climbing the social ladder and absorbing the manifestations of the highbrow culture. Paloma also shares the same conviction in the futility of cultural discussions with narrow-minded people who firmly believe in limitations on the boundaries of different social classes, so they both decide to keep their ideologies to themselves as a sort of autodidacticism and self-improvement. However, the process of self-education grants them, mainly Renée, a sense of confusion as to which ideology she should adopt to escape determinism since she fails to comprehend the philosophers' theories and perspectives deeply. Hence, I also investigate the two philosophical ideologies, and Barbery's contempt and resentment of class warfare by highlighting the heroines' struggle and suffering that lead to the dualism of their identities and patterns of tensional reactions.

Renée exists between two philosophical ideologies that question whether a human being has margin of freedom and personal choice, or if he or she is completely conditioned by biological, psychological, social, and moral circumstances. In trying to comprehend which side she

aligns with, she preliminarily contemplates Kant and Hegel's conception of freedom. Hegel (1820/1991) believes, "As spirit, man is a free being ... who is in a position not to let himself be determined by natural drives" (p. 51) or by external forces of social class and traditions. According to Hegel's dialectic, people are not prisoners of their past or present, so they can free themselves and create another epoch or a future that is entirely different from the past. His ideology refutes Renée's former fears of social interaction, then disenchant her obsession with the illusions of determinism, which the other trend suggests. Conversely, the materialistic philosophers suggest different insights but consent to the belief that a human is conditioned by material circumstances that handcuff all humanity. The conflict between these two philosophical trends penetrates the history of philosophy that Renée tries to comprehend and apply to herself.

The existentialist concept of freedom of choice is a crucial part of the works of Rousseau and Husserl. Their phenomenology regarding freedom collides with the materialistic ideologies of thinkers such as Marx, Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, and Bourdieu. For example, on one hand, according to Marx and Engels (1848/2008) in *The Communist Manifesto*, social determinism prevails, not individual freedom, and history is fixed by coercive laws controlling the fate of man (p. 58). On the other hand, William (2001) thinks that "the social being determines consciousness" (p. 1423); it is not what Marx does when he "puts the origin of determination in men's own activities" (William, 2001, p. 1424) according to social presuppositions. Renée and Paloma are influenced by Lacan's philosophical determinism and think that they are controlled by the external forces of social class and language. In what follows, Renée suppresses her sexuality, and this suppression, according to Lacan and Freud, is a truly powerful factor in her daily life, but she longs for individual expression of her "self." Both Renée and Paloma consider themselves locked in their lives, experiencing social injustice as victims of social structure. In this regard, they reject disadvantageous inequity and pursue individuality by breaking out of the mold of Marx, Freud, and Lacan's determinism and exploring individuality freely. Therefore, their relationship forms "a sort of virtual kinship" (O'Neil-Henry, 2017, p. 156) due to their shared interests and values.

2. Discussion

It is noteworthy that Renée works as a concierge in a luxury building inhabited by the upper-bourgeoisie, and Paloma is the daughter of a socialist member of parliament who lives in the same building. In their diary and writings, both express utter disdain towards the residents of the building, located at 7 Rue de Grenelle Street, because of their sectarian introversion and inward-looking nature. They hide their cultured personalities and the virtue of intelligence equally to avoid attainable cultural tension and class antagonism although they belong to different social classes. Lilja (2017) states that concealing intelligence and unexpected tastes as spheric "women's performances—could be seen as strategic responses to local contexts of power" (p. 132). However, they are selective in revealing the hidden truth about themselves, their present, and their past. Renée's past involves hurt, and Paloma's present includes sorrow due to the unjust social treatment of members belonging to different social stations that renders them reluctant to face the truth or confront Lilja's suggestion of context of power.

Barbery highlights certain ideologies which uphold the doctrines of determinism that shape Renée's thinking about hiding oneself. In the first place, Marx and Engels mainly believe that a human being is wholly conditioned by the economy (1848/2008), so the superstructure in the building where Renée works is determined by the economic base that is represented by the residents' lifestyle and inherited customs. Likewise, Freud (1917/2018) thinks that a human being during the sublimation process becomes conditioned by his subconscious and his suppressed sexual motives (p. 290). In contrast, Barbery exposes the mind's underlying metacognitive foundations through aesthetic philosophy concerning knowledge, beauty, and life. Her lofty style successfully communicates a candid insight into esthetic values and forms of art, literature, and the philosophical meaning of life. In response to the deterministic views of the previous philosophers such as Freud's theories of consciousness and the lack of abundant empirical evidence, Renée believes, "We are mistaken to believe that our consciousness is awakened at the moment of our first birth" (Barbery, 2008, p. 45). She rejects the timelessness of Freud's deterministic views, believing that her first consciousness of identity was sparked after hearing her name for the first time at the age of five when she joined the school. Her sense of self-satisfaction and functioning existence was sparked by the authenticity of respect and equality after she was assigned a real name within the domain of the schooling space.

In resisting the deterministic thinkers, Renée expresses a "great admiration for Kant" (Barbery, 2008, p. 55) whose transcendental phenomenology contradicts the metaphysics of determinism. Kant believes in the principles of the individual acts of consciousness; his transcendental idealism holds that individuals only realize what appears to their consciousness as subjective perception, and what people know about the surrounding world is only what they are conscious of (Barbery, 2008, p. 62). However, according to Kant, "[i]n a perception, an individual reports on a person-centered individual claim for experience. In other words, a perception records no more than a subjective impression" (Giordanetti, Pozzo, & Sgarbi, 2012, p. 319). Thus, Renée's propping mind escapes a one-way intellectual pursuit and becomes convinced with the phenomenological philosophers such as Kant and Husserl. Similarly, she also debates the practicality of Husserl's phenomenological ideology as the "science of that which appears to our consciousness" (Barbery, 2008, p. 62); so according to this vein of thinking, only the perception of reality exists. By contemplating Husserl's proposition, she learns how to resist any negative thoughts or facts that are determined or presupposed, such as widowhood, ugliness, lowness, and withdrawal or escapism. For the most part, Kant rules out the idea of considering a human as just a tool or a means to achieve others' goals, so he defends the idea that the human is a purpose, not a means. The human being is sane, not an object, and he has an absolute value. Therefore, Renée's mind and lifestyle are torn between these two ideological trends, but she ultimately decides to stand on the side that supports the individual acts of consciousness and get rid of the illusions of determinism.

Geroulanos investigates Renée's acquaintance with the Husserlian and Kantian ideologies as well as her perplexity that arises from learning different conceptions and theories. He says that "the autodidact concierge Renée Michel, who has no difficulty devouring and dispensing

with other philosophers (Kant included), finally comes around to reading Husserl and finds herself foiled” (Geroulanos, 2012, p. 33). Geroulanos relates Renée’s frustration to a disturbance proceeding from the failure to apprehend Husserl tightly because “[a]ccording to Husserl’s theory, all that exists is the perception of the cat” (Barbery, 2008, p. 62), the idea of the thing, not the tangible part. Based on this supposition, only the idea of Renée’s cat exists, which she named Leo after Leo Tolstoy, but not the cat itself. This assumption forms the most difficult part to grasp; therefore, her perplexity results from the knowledge she gains from the contradictory dimensionality of opposing mentalities and her attempts to apply them to herself. This ambivalence is also applicable to Paloma when comparing her family’s social ideals with her own convictions, where this comparison confers an identical sense of perplexity on her as well.

Through sociological discussions, both Renée and Paloma show ambivalent attitudes towards revealing the gained knowledge and real identities. Their discourses reveal intimidation of violating sociopolitical stereotypes and crossing the frontiers of different social ranks. Lilja (2017) suggests that Renée’s reluctance to reveal her real identity and claim it “probably has implications for gendered power relations as well as entangled subjectivities” (p. 142). On this subject, Barbery conveys her dissatisfaction with the social hierarchy and gendered power inequalities prevalent in France that put restrictions on social interaction and ambition. To contemplate the implication of power structure durability and the possibilities of deconstructing its symbolic order, Renée reads *The German Ideology* (1932) and learns how the proletariat revolt as a result of class antagonism would end their struggle and suffering. However, she also reads Lacan and Freud’s debates on suppressing desires such as her desires for freedom, so these conflicting views create ambivalence and perplexity when deciding which philosophy to adopt as a way of life toward different forms of liberation. The chief dilemma of her enculturation becomes the “brutally mixing of respectable works with others that are far less” (Barbery, 2008, p. 72). Mixing cultures and the inability to distinguish the most appropriate one summoned some studies on the confusion between high and low cultures. For instance, in discussing the middlebrow culture and the attempts to acquire social prestige through art and literature, Holmes (2019) argues that in the Bourdieusian sense, culture constitutes a distinction of a certain social group, such as Paloma’s family for instance, whereas the novel intends to show Renée’s access to the high culture democratically instead of distinguishing between highbrow and lowbrow (p. 203). Despite all this, she conceals the highbrow knowledge gained and only reveals it through closed-session conversations with particular individuals, such as Paloma and Manuela Lopes, the cleaner who works in the same building. When Renée reads about the conflicting points of view, the contradiction creates perplexity because she does not delve deeply into the theory to decide the suitable philosophy. She wants to seem cultured and educated, but she lacks confidence in what she has learned.

Indeed, Renée converges with Paloma at the educational level but diverges at the social status. Thus, according to Marx’s ideas concerning class struggle, their relationship is expected to show a sort of economic or social antagonism as a consequence of socioeconomic competition among irreconcilable social classes: “What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable” (Marx & Engels, 1848/2008, p. 51). Contrary to this expectation, Barbery challenges this suggestion when the relationship between Renée and Paloma shows unexpected affection, respect, and strong proximity. Barbery undermines the class struggle through the amicable relationship that marks the rapprochement between Renée and Paloma, the educated. Again, Barbery expresses hope for a new reconciled generation who renounces disagreement, so political tension and social antagonism can be resolved among educated people regardless of their different social or cultural backgrounds. The harmony and consistency in the relationship between the two major characters indicate Barbery’s prospect that education can be a solution to Marx’s ideas regarding class struggle. The daily conversations between both of the heroines manifest their intelligence level and high philosophy; yet, this intellect remains unobserved until the advent of Kakuro Ozu, who “alone penetrates Renée’s disguise and wins Paloma’s admiration” (Hart, 2019, p. 305). Kakuro is a wealthy Japanese who moved to the fourth floor after the death of Pierre Arthens and the departure of his family from the building.

The Elegance of the Hedgehog enunciates Barbery’s indignation at the French class structure that manifests the premises of the absurd lives of the bourgeois milieu in the novel. The voices of the heroines in their writings express analogous resentment against some practices of unenlightened upper class members that challenge their progression and undermine their achievements. Hitz (2021) believes that this “contempt ... raises the prospect that intellectual life even in poverty is not at all a separate inner island away from social striving and competition” (p. 127). Intelligence is not a factional monopoly on a particular social circle, so Barbery exposes the spiritual emptiness and moral void of people’s programmed lives who subsist on their cultural heritage regarding the mechanism of dealing with people from other strata. Hence, the sequence of events shows a huge gap between Renée, the concierge, and the wealthy tenants. Renée criticizes the fact that the rich residents are completely ignorant of the existence of the lower class people and deny coexistence with them. For example, when Lucien, Renée’s husband, died, the tenants never consoled her and behaved indifferently concerning the incident. This indifference reflects a cultural crisis that deepens the manifestations of arrogance, indifference, extravagance, and selfishness. Sikkema (2012) comments on the impact of this social gap, and how she is dehumanized by misconceptions regarding her profession and origins: “The building’s wealthy tenants see in her their own stereotype of a concierge, a kind of indentured servant and, with few exceptions, have rarely shown any interest in her personally, never considering her as a woman with a life and interests beyond her work” (p. 4). Sikkema raises the issue of disinterest in people of different backgrounds, and how some members of the upper class still have narrow horizons of knowledge despite their schooling.

The novel embodies some prominent aspects that deepen self-isolation and hiding of identity, which are represented by physical, intellectual, emotional, and sexual solitude. Renée finds the comfort of mind and relief from patterns of social pressure in this self-seclusion that becomes closely related to space and time. As an illustration, she lives in a small loge on the first floor of a building that is inhabited by

members of the bourgeoisie, while Paloma lives on the fifth floor of the same building. Renée writes essays, and Paloma writes diaries, so they choose to meet, hide, and discuss issues related to the western metaphysics of hierarchy and institutional binary organization as well as current and controversial issues in the loge. Paloma's resolution of self-hiding in the loge provides an opportunity to avoid the conceptual confrontation with her parents and the inevitable ideological clashes with her sister, Colombe. As stated by Dale (2012), Colombe's fundamental problems are "the external and internal noisiness of life" (p. 50) and her "deaf[ness] to the value of silence" (p. 55), which are not benign. Therefore, silencing noises is vital for cordial understanding and social interaction (Dale, 2012, p. 50), and crucial for their discussions in the loge. Manuela, who is a good listener, substitutes the role of the compassionate sister for both heroines. She sometimes joins their meetings and attentively listens to the constructive discussions; thus the three heroines' subjects of conversations shape tripartite mainstays of topics about western philosophy and education. Indeed, the periodic upscale meetings with Manuela leave a deep impression on the way they perceive unavoidable matters of necessity and possible ways of accessing knowledge. Manuela's regular visitation professionalizes the topics discussed and elevates the themes shared. It also confers a cultured and civilized character on the subjects proposed far from the gossip that Paloma indicates concerning her family and their friends. This transcendence transforms Renée figuratively into a "clandestine monarch," and the "loge is transformed into a palace" (Barbery, 2008, pp. 34, 33). This sublime sensation challenges tools of determination and forces of natural drives that are presupposed for their identities and class. Substantially, the loge becomes a symbol of escapism and social tolerance as well as ideological understanding and intellectual exchange.

Moreover, the loge symbolizes auto-segregation where both heroines avoid resisting the stereotypical social mainstream prevailing among the building residents. According to social norms, a concierge is not expected to educate herself and read for philosophers and critics or discuss her culture with members of the upper class. Herbeck (2018) thinks that during her intellectual pursuits that are cruelly considered incongruous, the main character Renée plays the role of the concierge, not the role of the intellectual (p. 77). Despite this fact, she lives on her illusions until Kakuro confirms, "You see, you are not the only one who goes against the social norm" (Barbery, 2008, p. 228). Kakuro's remark does not negate the prevailing traditions but confirms her lack of singularity in this matter. As for both heroines, the reasons for solitude vary based on various personal issues, but their decision of self-isolation undermines the positive influence of their knowledge and the newly acquired philosophy on their promising lifestyle. In fact, the conversations convened in the loge manifest a paradigm of intellectual rapprochement that establishes an outstanding relationship of converging interests and mutual understanding.

The metaphor of the hedgehog, suggested by Paloma, corresponds to Renée's intellectuality and mindset that contradict her outward appearance or inner feeling; the exterior ugly looking of the quills on the hedgehog hides the interior beauty. In contrast to the luxurious apartments on the higher floors that contain some narrow-minded people, the humble ugly loge on the lower floor contains two personalities who are transcendently intelligent, insightful, and tolerant. Correspondingly, the outer appearance of Renée fails to convey the reality of her essence and the beauty of human intuition. Her reality remains hidden from the community because she suppresses any desire to appear informed or educated and decides to keep in line with the stereotype of the poor concierge. O'Neil-Henry (2017) extends the metaphor to include Paloma as well: "Paloma herself is also like a hedgehog" (p. 156); her exterior seems sullen, yet the interior is full of grace and elegance. Similar to the metaphor of the hedgehog, the imagery of "the camellia on the moss" (Barbery, 2008, p. 107) indicates Renée's beauty of spirit that renders it an opponent to all kinds of physical and moral ugliness. Hiding facts about herself does not necessarily align her morality or values with foxy skepticism that deliberately deceives others. Again, in making a connection between the metaphor of the hedgehog and Renée's life, McClain (2010) argues that "injustice contributes to producing the hedgehog's concealment" (p. 875). McClain examines the heroines' journeys of self-discovery and transformation based on Ronald Dworkin's *Justice for Hedgehogs* (2011), focusing on how some social values and practices bring injustice to female characters.

In defending the unity of value as an old philosophical thesis, Dworkin poses the topic of value conflict between fox and hedgehog in seeking the truth of morality. According to him, the hedgehog searches for justice in the theories of ethics and morality (Dworkin, 2011, p. 419). Dworkin also states, "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing. Value is one big thing. The truth about living well and being good and what is wonderful is not only coherent but mutually supporting" (Dworkin, 2011, p. 1). In *Justice for Hedgehogs*, Dworkin tries to tie together theories of justice, morality, skepticism, equality, and free will along with metaphors related to the hedgehog. Flores explains Dworkin's arguments of truth and value as unity against forms of skepticism and pluralism, and he extends his argument marginally to draw parallels between *The Elegance of the Hedgehog* and *Justice for Hedgehogs*. He thinks that, in Dworkin's book, "the depiction of a hedgehog [is] applied to Madame Michel, one of Barbery's characters" (Flores, 2010, p. 103) when investigating value along with skepticism in life. Indeed, McClain (2010) compares Dworkin's and Barbery's books, focusing on more common issues "beyond the word 'hedgehog' in their titles" (p. 870) as well as how Paloma's profound thoughts challenge the established and comfortable ways of perceiving the world of her social class.

Paloma's diary reveals her dissatisfaction and contempt for the absurd lives of the bourgeoisie, but she exhibits this form of disdain in an analogous way that corresponds to that absurdity through ideological and physical defeatism. She confirms, "[O]n the day I turn thirteen, June sixteenth, I will commit suicide" after she "set fire to the apartment" (Barbery, 2008, pp. 26, 28). The hostile relationship between Paloma and her mother, Solange, represents a paradigm of the interrelation with her social class members, which is exemplified by defeatism instead of confrontation and expressing her opinion freely about certain issues that are incompatible with her intellectually and persuasively. In analyzing *Le hérisson* (2009) as a free adaptation of the novel, Granek draws attention essentially to the work of André Green on psychoanalysis and applies it to the characters' behaviors and aggressive forms that inhibit progression. Granek (2019) explains, "Paloma cannot give free rein to her retaliatory aggression towards her mother, both because she feels that she is too vulnerable" (p. 998).

Granek attributes defeatism to both vulnerability and age or to any attempt that diverts the aggression toward other external objects such as hiding in the loge as a consequence. On the other hand, Gullette (2019) thinks that what triggers Paloma's suicidal impulses is the fact that "her future *life course* appears to be a punishment" (p. 74). But Hart (2019) ascribes her frustrated state of mind to the discovery that the "meaning [of life] is illusory" (p. 308). In fact, Paloma's intention of suicide emanates from the lack of some basic needs, such as the lack of beauty in life and beauty of mind, and the lack of meaning, grace, harmony, and intensity.

As a precocious child, she also needs provocative intellectual conversations that influence and shape her intelligent identity and direct her interests. It is the nature of the upper class's fast-paced lifestyle in the novel that does not devote sufficient time to entertaining the mind, so she lacks mental pleasure as a repercussion. Paloma is not living her age where her intellectual progress and precocious talents put pressure on her class codes of nurturing children. Both Paloma and Renée in the process of transformation are affected by the views of Marx and Lacan regarding hierarchy and social determination. Paloma's suppressed rage against the directionless and meaningless lives of the rich is manifested through the escape by suicide; this drastic decision forms a counterpart resolution to reject what Sikkema (2012) calls, "superficial, vacuous, money and power oriented adulthood" (p. 4). Hart (2019) asserts that Paloma is not suicidal, but "she is a caricature of existentialist thinkers who pondered suicide as a response to absurdity" (p. 308). In essence, her intention of committing suicide and burning the building marks a rebellious reaction against the traditions and ideals of her class that have become cliché, practiced without spirit. Subsequently, watching the riot on the television in Renée's loge and the ugly scenes of children burning cars as a suicidal behavior change her mind about suicidal tendencies because she does not want to align herself with terrorist acts. Paloma's physical and intellectual isolation, as well as the intention of the crime perpetration, are products of her social class behaviorism that is negatively responsible for tearing the family apart. Marx and Engels (1848/2008) emphasize, "The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation" (p. 37). On the other hand, to contemplate the heroines' decisions of isolation on several levels, hiding truth estranges reality and suggests the futility of the knowledge they have gained. They have learned abstract theories and do not apply them in practice on the ground. Paloma's academic excellence and Renée's autodidacticism fail to shatter illusions concerning their personal past and the existing French culture.

Renée's haunting past involves an evocative trauma that is exasperating resulting from the death of her sister, Lisette, after the delivery to an illegitimate child. Lisette dramatically lost her honor to adultery and illegitimate conception after she was "seduced and abandoned by some rich man's son" (Barbery, 2008, p. 291) during her adolescence. As a consequence, Renée takes a radical stand on isolation from the rich as a survival technique, emphasizing, "Don't fraternize with rich people if you don't want to die" (Barbery, 2008, p. 291). Freud's deterministic views of consciousness state that a bad experience during childhood will have a considerable impact on adulthood, and it affects the person's conduct and shapes personality and performance (Freud, 1917/2018). The unpleasant situation can lead to depression or paranoia, so according to this theory, Renée's anxiety originating from the traumatic experience remains latent in her unconscious during childhood and manifests in the conscious conduct of isolation during puberty. She sorely recalls that shameful act and remains pledged to the conviction that mixing with the rich may bring disgrace one day. She hides her emotions and femininity and sublimates her sexuality in fear of repeating the same fault of her sister; hence she terribly neglects her body and her physical appearance as a worthless object.

The conviction of worthlessness could lead to destructive results and transgression such as Paloma's thinking of destruction. However, schooling and self-education as signs of rebirth refine the feeling of pointlessness by taming aggressiveness and creating an educated personality. In fact, cultural and social misrecognition forms one of Renée's major problems, which historically acknowledges her and Lucien as a marginalized grouping in an industrious society that does not value intelligence. This nonrecognition manifests once through the residents' silence and absence from attending Lucien's funeral, so she correlates the act of indifference to his death with their worthlessness as a kind of communal exclusion of their ethnicity. Indeed, Renée redefines her sexuality based on the past sexual abuse of her sister and abstains from engaging in any sort of promiscuous sexual practices. This asceticism frames the relationship with Kakuro whose efforts bring salvation to save her from the noxious self-seclusion and prevent any further alienation. Kakuro undertakes to cease all paths towards social isolation and worthlessness, insisting, "You are not your sister" (Barbery, 2008, p. 308). The convergence between them indicates the possibility of rebirth, so McClain (2010) thinks that "with respect to Dworkin's framework ... the narrative she has made of her life is premised on a mistaken belief about her possibilities" (p. 879). Nevertheless, Renée remains tenacious and committed to her principles in terms of sexual solitude that can be undermined by cultivating any sort of intimacy or excessive friction with Kakuro.

The newly acquired consciousness regarding sexuality alienates her from deep interaction with Kakuro although his Japanese culture is different from the French hierarchy in the novel. She generalizes her thoughts about him, employing a statement from *The German Ideology*. Marx and Engels (1932/1998) state, "Consciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all" (pp. 49-50). She remains conscious of her sister's sexual abuse and becomes obsessed with the fear of impurities associated with inheriting a sense of shame and losing virtue and honor if she follows in her footsteps. Renée relates the system of social stratification to her sister's tragic death, and thus this dramatic end haunts her thinking and always renders her conscious about hiding sexuality and intelligence. She is also afraid to stand out and move up the social hierarchy because she would live among "a class that reproduces itself solely by means of virtuous and proper hiccups" (Barbery, 2008, p. 18). She tries to accept the legacy of her profession but not the inheritance of abuse that dehumanizes her as a commodity for the upper class. Renée's job as a concierge is inherited from her husband, and she describes its duties as "captivating activities" (Barbery, 2008, p. 97) that hinder her progress. Therefore, she fears that her future will remain determined by this inheritance. Her present is determined by the fact that she comes from a little village, and her "origins in a rural, low-income family shaped the expectations she met at school and hence her life chances" (Holmes, 2019, p. 203). However, when she has become able to distinguish

between philosophies of free will and determinism, she stops flouncing between the two ideological mindsets.

Both Renée and Paloma's debates gradually reveal their resolution to go through the process of breaking out of the mold of Marx and the deterministic philosophy then exploring their individualities. Kakuro's presence urges them to cease social alienation by relating intellectuality to behaviorism. Even though he belongs to a different culture with varied traditions, he shares with the rich residents their aristocracy, but the French class system in the novel has not hampered his thinking with prejudice and antagonism. Sikkema (2012) confirms his indisposition to the aristocrats' typical thinking: "his disinterest in status or self-importance and his attention for authentic meeting are evident" (p. 4). He finds out that Renée and Paloma's subtle characteristic set of behaviors reveals different personalities that are inflicted by social reality and identity politics. His new existence in the building helps them evolve affinity and amicable rapprochement, and it works as a catalyst for them to uncover their real identities and discover each other closely.

Kakuro takes the first initiative to mingle with Renée and investigate her reality, in which the invitation to his apartment breaks the constraints of isolation towards more socialization for the first time since the death of her husband. She reluctantly accepts the invitation, "[s]educed by an aesthetic that permeates M. Ozu's tastes, behaviour and speech" (Holmes, 2019, p. 188), breaking the chains of fear and stagnation. In the interview that was conducted by Paul Peluso and John McIlveen with Augustus Napier, Napier says that the protagonist (Renée) undergoes "a struggle between intimacy and isolation" (Napier, Peluso, & McIlveen, 2013, p. 227), and this struggle is associated with the fear of aging and awareness of death. According to Napier, the "great frontier of aging" (Napier et al., 2013, p. 227) would cease all attempts of hiding love and self, and thus would also pave the way for a new intimate relationship with Kakuro due to the "need sought in marriage" (Napier et al., 2013, p. 227). Regardless of the "need sought," Gullette (2019) describes her resistance to the invitation as a "masochistic refusal" (p. 76) simply due to resisting the temptation of mingling with a wealthy cultured man. Napier's suggestion of the "need" renders Renée at risk of establishing an amicable relationship that might lead to marriage again despite the decision that she already set forth concerning the suspicions and trepidation arising from her sister's hideous story. Kakuro hints at Renée's true identity, confirming, "She's not what we think" (Barbery, 2008, p. 144) after she directly quotes Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1878) during their first meeting. Granek (2019) considers referencing *Anna Karenina* as a "mask slip" (p. 1000) that exposes her reality and eliminates Kakuro's bewilderment. In this context, Kakuro cunningly presents the novel to Renée, expecting that her ecstatic reaction will confirm his supposition regarding her intelligence, and she fails to maintain the unconscious but expresses it through the Freudian tongue slips.

As for Paloma's character, Kakuro also discovers her real identity through a casual conversation, part of it in Japanese, during the elevator incident. The conversation sparks her self-confidence about practicing the language and ceases the hesitation to communicate her knowledge. In this context, Barbery emphasizes the pedagogical concept that a human life carries meaning through communication with others and getting rid of fears. Kakuro's mediocre presence alleviates the identity crisis and makes up for the absence of appreciation from both worlds that the heroines live in. He eventually becomes a fatherhood icon who guides Paloma and dispels her perplexity. Granek (2019) argues, "Lacan emphasized symbolic paternity, insisting that the specificity of the father did not consist of his donating gametes, or even in the Freudian interdiction of incest" (p. 1001). Her father, Paul Josse, as a member of parliament dedicatedly focuses only on his profession rather than on his family, so this paternal neglect creates an emotional vacuum in Paloma's life. Kakuro substitutes the role of the father and Renée the role of the mother during Paloma's self-seclusion, and thus she genuinely finds intellectual and emotional harmony in these roles interchange. In fact, when the heroines find respect, politeness, and recognition, Renée discovers her beauty and intelligence, Paloma recognizes her smartness, and Manuela senses her importance. Finding these facts takes place only through provocative conversations with Kakuro that are devoid of racial cynicism.

Renée's initial integration with the community is limited to certain individuals and things that have brought beauty to her life, such as her cat Leo, her friend Manuela, her late husband, and eventually Kakuro and Paloma. She emphasizes that even "a camellia can change fate" (Barbery, 2008, p. 296), so its aesthetic beauty makes the diligence of life tolerable. Morales (2016) correlates the metaphor of the camellia to Renée's self-content and happiness when she subconsciously influenced Jean Arthens to quit drugs (pp. 88-89). Renée endures a problematic life, and the motif that unfolds through the recurrent image of the "camellia on moss" implicates her conception of extracting beauty from the womb of ugliness. She declares, "I am a very camellia-on-moss sort of person" (Barbery, 2008, p. 108). By employing this metaphor, she depicts herself as a counteragent to the other residents through the pursuit for eternity, the "quest of timelessness" in the "movement of life," and the "escape [of] the natural impulses of our species" (Barbery, 2008, pp. 212, 39, 108). Similar to a solitary flower that lives on the moss, people who interact with her are limited, so she starts meditating on all these other events that may make life worth living. Morales (2016) states that Renée's fault lies in creating this solitude and in the inner conviction that "her class are not meant to have that appreciation" (p. 88). Before this conviction, her physical appearance had a considerable impact on staying isolated from others, insisting, "[T]his ugliness ... deprived me of any freshness" (Barbery, 2008, p. 48) and positive power necessary for integration.

The subject of physical appearance constitutes a complexity that characterizes her behavior and alienates her from interaction with people. It also leads to a sense of inferiority but forms the main reason to improve the interior aspect through science and knowledge. She later becomes aware that the beauties of the body and mind are two complementary pairs necessary to complete the full aesthetic scene. On the occasion of Kakuro's birthday party, the bright clothes she borrows and the makeup she wears grant her a new look that falsifies her real identity and makes her look like a high-class lady to the extent that Jacinthe Rosen and Anne-Hélène Meurisse, her neighbors, fail to recognize her figure. The role of clothes and bright apparel emerges to dissociate her from facts related to class and culture that she indulges herself in. In this incident, Barbery suggests that even certain types of clothes are limited to certain social classes, so she criticizes the upper class's superficiality and their ignorance of the other classes' members in terms of judging people based on dress codes and their exterior.

Sabine Pallières's surprise at Renée's beautiful figure in the new clothes and hairstyle indicates her disapproval of the concierge's transformation into a person who belongs to a different class. After years of hiding, she responds to the advocacy for social interaction and contemplates what might become of their relationship soon. She initially accepts poverty and ugliness as agents of determinism but realizes that knowledge and fine clothes render her appear among people as a camellia on the moss.

On the other hand, the function of clothes performs the opposite role of their purpose and evokes the feeling of nakedness. Renée concedes, "Monsieur Ozu's invitation has made me feel completely naked, soul-naked" (Barbery, 2008, p. 179). Wearing a different dress for the first time renders the feeling of nakedness since she initially believes in the finery of the mind, not in the aesthetic dress associated with frivolity or power dressing codes. Furthermore, the feeling of nakedness in front of Kakuro indicates disclosing her intellectual reality and then real identity, but it leads to dispelling her illusions regarding body ugliness eventually. This feeling indicates submitting the soul and the body to the new tenant and changing her mindset regarding marriage. Nonetheless, wearing a borrowed dress that originally belongs to a deceased person, Maria the Portuguese seamstress, foreshadows her near-death as an emphasis on the eternal intellectual beauty rather than the ephemeral physical beauty. Kakuro's invitation involves conversations and discussions that subconsciously prove her intellectual maturity and erudition that dissipate his doubts about her reality.

Barbery shows how language mirrors mind and culture through the style of speech or writing. The heroines' language and manners evolve to signify their educated identities and show their humane and scientific needs. Comparably, the polite letter that Renée receives after Pierre's death has a new style that reflects the writer's talent and self-esteem, so it helps change the way she perceives the outer world that some residents in the building represent. However, the other narrow-minded group of residents exemplifies a certain segment of society that chose to remain self-contained and reclusive in their controversial values and ideals. Likewise, because of living in a "cultural desert" (Barbery, 2008, p. 140), Paloma undertakes reforming language and grammar and rectifying manners such as correcting Tibère's father, one of the "guests who'd said something untrue" (Barbery, 2008, p. 112) when describing the bourgeoisie as elite. Guinebert (2020) asserts that "the grammar she talks about corresponds to the ethical concepts we find at the core of our moral theories" (p. 284). She relates grammar to moral theories that lead to appreciating beauty by complying with the eloquence of moral philosophers, such as "the Kantian celebration of the human capacity" (Guinebert, 2020, p. 284) that responds to heteronomy as well as cultural and spiritual conditions. Paloma's father's exasperation and intervention indicate the helplessness of his education and the haplessness of her efforts in redressing any cultural or verbal shortcomings. As a reaction to Paloma's feeling of the "cultural desert," her diary abhorrently describes how her family and their friends awkwardly interact with philosophy and knowledge. She depicts their interest in seeking knowledge, science, and raising pet animals as ornamental tools only important to add an aesthetic character to their social class that does not conform with the essence of education. Different from them, she finds "an affinity to all living creatures" (McClain, 2010, p. 883) and senses the meaning behind their existence. Observing these mechanical practices creates a perplexing state of mind that renders her striving to escape the limits of this cultural materialism. She desperately senses that some vested standards and practices are a mere production of determinism through birth, stating, "I'm not particularly proud of this because it's not my doing" (Barbery, 2008, p. 25). For this reason, she becomes convinced that the right person is still not in the right place culturally and politically.

Paloma represents a self-critical observer whose agency exposes the arrogance and ignorance of her family towards the existence and the interests of other people. For example, she introduces Pierre as "a first class truly nasty man" (Barbery, 2008, p. 94) whose death brought comfort to others because he wastes his knowledge by writing harmful reviews of restaurants. Subsequently, she depicts Colombe as "an intolerant and depressive little runt who hates other people" (Barbery, 2008, p. 86). Colombe's master thesis on William of Ockham and the medieval central question of whether universals exist or singular things prevail contradicts her lifestyle and does not reflect her real vocation for this issue. This contradiction, whether in her study or lifestyle, loads her personality with skeptical attitudes and pluralism. When Flores quotes Colombe's philosophy of life as a permanent battle that requires destroying the other rival (Barbery, 2008, p. 85), this parallelism aligns Colombe with Dworkin's ideology of foxy causes of skepticism, pluralism, and conflict, while it aligns Paloma with a self-proclaimed hedgehog that functions to defend these causes. Therefore, Paloma's central dilemma with her sister is that the purpose of her intelligence is not meant for serving others or elevating mankind since Colombe's thesis bypasses the metaphysics of morality, epistemology, and aesthetics. On the contrary, she finds in Colombe's conversation with her boyfriend Tibère a kind of degenerated idiocentrism that idealizes the self and demeans the other.

Barbery asserts that the main dilemma of the bourgeoisie in the novel is bigotry and ignorance, so Paloma dedicates her diary to exposing their excessive self-confidence, such as Colombe's conviction that "her intelligence is beyond question" (Barbery, 2008, p. 245). Another issue that Barbery raises lies in inheritance as a tool of determinism and its role in restricting those who would access power and politics. Paloma worries about inheriting the same mindsets of her ancestry; hence she finds in Renée's loge a mental and physical comfort to write her *Profound Thoughts* without unwise familial nuisance. Her newly adopted lifestyle that involves isolation and clandestineness prompts Solange to consult Dr. Theid about her daughter's unexplained change in attitudes and unsharing her private life as a state of untimely independence. In response, Paloma dismisses psychoanalysis as a widely circulated standard method for rational therapeutics in medicine among her family and their friends, believing that Dr. Theid's convictions and medical practice are a reproduction of the "Freudian Cause" (Barbery, 2008, p. 206). There exists a serious gap in the relationship between Paloma and her mother, in which this vacuum invokes Green's theory of "The Dead Mother."

According to Green, "In the dead mother complex, the trauma is provoked by the massive, unexpected, and inexplicable loss of maternal love of a mother who is still physically present but is affectively absent, emotionally 'frozen'" (Urribarri, 2018, p. 76). Paloma's act of

hiding correlates with the syndrome of the dead mother caused by a narcissistic injury, where she looks for a figure that substitutes the role of the dead mother and monopolizes it (Granek, 2019, p. 998), so she finds it in Renée's character. Solange who already takes anti-depressants regularly suggests Freud's theories of psychoanalysis to treat Étienne's wife, Madame de Broglie's daughter-in-law, after she sank into depression. Besides this, Bernadette "de Broglie was treated to an entire course on Freud" (Barbery, 2008, pp. 142-143), including sessions interspersed with topics about women's liberation and secularism. These contradictory themes alienate Paloma from this kind of treatment and confer futility concerning the relevance of the topics raised. Their obsession with psychoanalysis insinuates the love of protracted suffering, so Paloma's cynical aversion to engaging in such affairs denotes her refusal to adopt their mindsets or inherit their therapeutic practices.

The bourgeois in the novel inherits wealth and sociopolitical status and guards them in a very routine and tedious way. This selfishness crushes the hopes of other classes members and puts obstacles in front of them on several levels, mainly accessing decision-making positions. The possibility of the poor assuming high positions in the state entails forcing or spreading their archetype and the quality of their ideals in society, so promoting racial and ethnic stratification remains an agent functioning against any possible class union or mutual understanding and respect. For this reason, Paloma thinks that people "are, basically, programmed to believe in something that doesn't exist" (Barbery, 2008, p. 25) and, subsequently, want to defy the feeling of absurdity that renders life a farce. Importantly, both Renée and Paloma confront the stereotyped perceptions of other social groups as inferior segments of society. For instance, Renée rejects Antoine Pallières's stereotypical view as a dominant model concerning misperceiving others. He suspects that "[c]oncierges do not read *The German Ideology*; hence, they would certainly be incapable of quoting the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach" (Barbery, 2008, p. 19). Hart (2019) responds, "To Renée, Antoine represents merely the latest generation of affluent young people to wax enthusiastic over Marx, only to go on sowing the desires that harvest oppression" (p. 307). Conversely, according to Antoine's preconception as a son of an industrialist, reading Marx from a proletarian indicates contemplating subversion and entails an attempt to elevate the mind that should be exclusive to the bourgeoisie as a conceit they could ever entertain.

Contrary to his presupposition, Renée considers Antoine's reading of Marx atypical since she expects him to handle books and magazines as a luxurious element without apprehending the content or their significance to elevating the level of human thought. Hitz explores Renée's character in the film *The Hedgehog*, but she relates her obsession with books and knowledge to unilateralism: "The Renée of the novel, for all her love of beauty and books, finds in them an overwhelming sense of superiority to others" (Hitz, 2021, p. 127). In a similar vein of thinking, Pierre's ordering the "incunabulum" indicates his obsession with possessiveness but not with knowledge and perception. Pierre functions as a self-proclaimed food critic whose observations are remarkable, yet he remains inattentive to the existence of the two intelligent women in the building even though he gazes at Renée's door every time he enters or leaves the building. Barbery indicates that knowledge has not been exploited outstandingly, and pursuing it suggests the mere striving towards perfectionism, not for the happiness of all mankind. Renée abstains from discussing *The German Ideology* with Antoine since engaging in such a preposterous debate would reveal her real identity. Instead, she maintains the "ancestral traditions of concierges" (Barbery, 2008, p. 106) determined by social structure and inheritance. Surrendering to this conventionalism sets a constraint on any socially optimal move which would deconstruct social structure. In a similar context, she remains cautious about raising the attention of others such as Mr. Servant when reading his morning newspapers about wars and colonies that "demoralized [her] early in life" (Hart, 2019, p. 307), believing in the uselessness of revealing intelligence among the ignorant.

The presence of any resident at Renée's door always reminds her of getting a task by virtue of her position; then she becomes self-conscious about this matter after the visit of Chabrot. However, she begins resisting the sense of inferiority through some interpersonal transgressive reactions such as the incidents of slamming the door in Antoine's face when he reproaches her for the disappearance of his scooter, and expelling Colombe when she inquires about the mail courier. This uncharacteristic deliberate harshness is a reaction to the feeling of dehumanization and inferiority that burdens her character and marks the beginning of the transformation in her personality. In this regard, Colombe describes her as "non-entity" and "dregs of humanity" (Barbery, 2008, pp. 254, 144) since Renée does not meet her cultural and social standards. When people stereotype her, Sikkema (2012) thinks that "Renée has also deliberately reinforced this deceit" (p. 4) either by ignoring her physical appearance or hiding intelligence. In contrast, Renée mentally converges with Olympe Saint-Nice who rejects claiming her birthrights as a daughter of an aristocrat and chooses a humanitarian job instead. Olympe represents a community of interests, not class prejudice since she circumvents any social barrier that implicates ethnic or class segregation.

Renée coercively but temporally accepts class discrimination, where according to the French traditions in the novel, the bourgeois does not favor mingling with the working class on several levels; this condition leads to her both conscious and subconscious retreat from social interaction. Therefore, she decides to wear, what Herbeck (2018) calls, the "carefully constructed mask of cultural incompetency" (p. 83) because she is aware that the hierarchical modern French society and the institutionalized patterned relationships "prevent individuals from changing/ challenging their social status" (p. 78). Accordingly, her job as a concierge allows her only to observe those residents from afar without the least convenient opportunity to incorporate with them, which enhances her separation from their ideals and culture. Hence, she is blocked by her initial acceptance of Marx regarding determinism. Boudin examines Marx's view concerning the reasons for conscious and perception that are not individually acquired: "It is not men's consciousness which determines their life; on the contrary, it is their social life which determines their consciousness" (Boudin, 1907/2010, p. 16). Thus, the industrial relations between the concierge and the residents constitute complex interrelations that are primarily based on expediency in favor of the residents. Renée's reaction leads to gradual disapproval of Marx's proposition of how social life determines people's consciousness. Her conduct proposes a new social premise that

regardless of people's social statuses, they are expected to interact when they go beyond the criteria of judging races or classes. But since the social class has an important role in isolating her from society, she intends to step over this boundary toward Kant's perspective of the individual acts of consciousness.

Despite Renée's distressful financial situation, she constantly refrains from following a formalized set of behaviors that are typical of lower class ideals. However, she uses certain aspects of social trappings, such as wearing the same poor clothes to deceive others regarding her reality. It is a gradual process to prove that her freedom is not dictated or controlled by her social class. She believes that concealing knowledge and real identity would dissociate her from the rich and help her ease mundane aspects of life, yet there remains an uneasiness about switching social classes and some prejudices against judging class differences. The integration with Kakuro makes her lose the bias against the bourgeoisie and prompts her to eliminate any illusions that lead to self-isolation. Comprehending all sorts of philosophies and the multiculturalism of different thinkers gradually liberates her from egocentrism and excessive fixation on the past, so the more she reads, the more she loses her social background. She also enculturates herself by watching television and comprehending Japanese movies themes and substance while maintaining her business at the same time. In fact, watching Yasujiro Ozu's films as a part of the Japanese culture helps change her ideas regarding isolationism. Bourdieu (1992/2001) correlates the taste of music, art, or furniture with class standing: "People both demonstrate and create their social position through the tastes revealed by what they consume" (p. 1661). Bourdieu believes that a person's tastes reveal his or her real identity in a sustained manner proportional to the quality of the object or matter, and this proposition is true in the incident of quoting *Anna Karenina*.

In spite of all forms of concealment and attempts of protective camouflage, Renée's character subconsciously contradicts all these procedures when she educates herself through accessing literature, visiting museums, and reading philosophy. Nevertheless, her financial standing and preoccupation with household chores before Lucien's death imposed conditional restrictions on any transformation attempts and high aspirations. In fact, Lucien wants a stereotypical housewife from the working class but not with much ambition except for education and knowledge. Besser and Oishi (2020) think that literature and art replace the absence from attending "cultural events," and that endows her with a vicarious "rich inner experience" by contrast (p. 15) and sustains the semblance of mundane normality. Therefore, Renée has the same knowledge as the upper class, but Paloma has the same perplexity as the lower class. Renée enhances her expertise by noticing and imitating what the rich perform, but she conducts such business secretly and hides the resources of knowledge until her concerns have become identical to the interests of the upper class. In fact, the bourgeois in the building respects formal education, but what Renée has done as a "proletarian autodidact" (Barbery, 2008, p. 72) is more physical than cultural isolation.

3. Conclusion

Revealing Renée's secrets and aspirations does not constitute a major concern, but rejection and nonrecognition comprise a source of obsession that worries her and undermines her personal and cultural achievements. The lack of acceptance would form a serious sociological impact on her life and setback towards more prejudices because she has made every effort to transcend, by her knowledge, to the bourgeoisie level. She fears that rejection may be related to the source of her education or resisting the idea that a concierge becomes cultured and educated like members of the upper class. Similarly, Paloma shares the same concerns and navigates with her intellectualism away from her class members' stereotypical thinking. She ponders the same questions about literature, music, and philosophy, and she demonstrates a parallel infatuation with Japan, grammar, and philosophy. She dedicates some of her writings to revealing the reality of the building's concierge after noticing the peculiarity of her lifestyle but remains inattentive until Kakuro's arrival on the scene. James in the *New York Times* review describes Renée's conduct as an espionage activity on the intelligentsia without rendering an explicit opinion on the function of Paloma's diary. She also wonders if American readers or critics would embrace this heroine or even the whole book due to the practice of espionage in an attempt to exclude the novel as a European phenomenon or to reveal Barbery's exposal of "a cultural fault line" (James, 2008). Paloma's discreet decision to hide in Renée's loge indicates establishing the truth of the concierge, where she initially visits Renée on an errand for Colombe but ends with the intercultural exchange. Her existence in the loge functions as a sociocultural agent who subconsciously extends some of her class's cultural patterns and traits such as dress codes and food preferences. In this respect, Renée demonstrates flexibility in respecting the dimensions of cross-cultural variations to evolutionarily modernize herself and align it with some of the upper class practices that she approves for herself. When she finally decides to renounce all presuppositions and intends to interact with the community, she changes her lifestyle, including food and drinks consumption as a highly affiliated act.

Finally, Renée realizes the implication of volitional social isolation and its role in causing all the troubles in her life. At this point, *The Elegance of the Hedgehog* manifests itself as an irony of a woman in her fifties rediscovering her sexuality and femininity after years of hiding, and as a paradox for a precocious young girl behaving like a mature woman, who both leave fear behind ultimately. When Paloma decides to live, Renée died, so the sudden death of Renée replaces Paloma's intended act of suicide. In a reference to the death of the French philosopher and critic, Roland Barthes, who died after he was hit by a laundry van, Renée faced the same inevitable fate when she was knocked down by "a dry cleaner's van" (Barbery, 2008, p. 317). Anyways, Barthes is best known for his essay "The Death of the Author" from the essay collection *Mythologies*. The death of the narrator insinuates reconstructing and judging her life events without prejudices, intervention, or external agendas, and without the context that determines the course of her life. The social inequality that restricts Renée's opportunities and her endeavors in life persists, but Barbery sensitively places intelligence against the culture of the affluent (Holmes, 2019, p. 188). The intellectual union represented by Kakuro, Renée, and Paloma introduces them as kindred spirits that realize the philosophy of life as coming to life, aging, and dying. The excessive thinking in this philosophy pushes Paloma one day to end her life, but Renée's death changes her life stance as she finally realizes the ultimate importance of the suppositions and theories of the philosophy of life.

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