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The Vitalness of Negative and Positive Freedom on Kathy Hoyle's *Breathe*

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Abstract

This article investigates tensions of positive and negative freedom in a flash fiction of Kathy Hoyle entitled Breathe. The story explores themes of personal growth and resilience through one character's struggle. It fits character development in overcoming challenges and emphasizing the importance of inner strength and self-discovery. Through qualitative method and explorative approach, this paper exemplifies negative freedom with the sense of urgencies in positive freedom. The absence of external restraints must also be accompanied with comprehensive senses of belief. In analysis, the protagonist's journey from vulnerability to strength illustrates the human capacity to endure and transform in the face of life's challenges, highlighting resilience and growth in the face of adversity. In conclusion, it reminds people that even in the darkest of times, they still have the strength to breathe, endure, and ultimately thrive towards following positive freedom.

Keywords *Breathe, Kathy Hoyle, Negative Freedom, Positive Freedom*

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INTRODUCTION

All human beings could not be separated from freedom. It is essentially involved in every human beings' life. It is also related to any attribute of being free. Simply put, freedom could be easily understood from its close synonym. It could mean the absence of coercion or even restraint (Hwang, 2021; Kinsinger, 2020; Oktavia, et al., 2023). Further action could also be enhanced within freedom. In some points, freedom is also indicated as liberation as the power is rather be by their own. Freedom is also a matter of leaving such dependencies towards various independences. If someone did her/his time in prison, she/he could also mean to regain her/his freedom once again. In some points, the idea of being more outspoken is also a matter of freedom as it implicitly shows such included human rights deep within (Levy, 2015; Pasopati, 2016; Pearce, 2021).

Freedom of anyone could be lost due to internal and external reasons. The internal one includes matters of own limitation including mental or physical aspects. These ones are more individual yet particular since someone may experience different perceptions than another. Trauma that results from self-loathing could be one important thing that affects this limitation as well (Hwang, 2021; Oktavia, et al., 2023; Renani & Dinparast, 2021). The external reasons are more social since those include societal matters. those usually involve external power that keeps oppressing. It is related to restriction in which rights may be lost due to lawful aspects or any other social sanction. People's expectations could also be a prohibition to anyone's freedom since any movement is always watched to be suited with normal situations (Levy, 2015; Pasopati, 2016; Pearce, 2021). Some people are told to bear more responsibilities they must not have. They may bear the risks, but actually they are not able to put everything on their shoulders.

The flash fiction of *Breathe* by Kathy Hoyle revolves around personal growth and resilience in the face of adversity. The narrative structure emphasizes the condition where the characters have the ability to act without external restrictions (Fitriani, et al., 2023; Hoyle, 2021; Karimi, et al., 2022). However, the story highlights that even without external constraints, internal conflict and struggle can still exist. The protagonist experiences turbulent emotions and is faced with difficult choices, showcasing the internal struggle they undergo. As the protagonist transforms into a force, the story

illustrates the innate human ability to survive and thrive in challenging circumstances (Fitriani, et al., 2023; Hoyle, 2021; Karimi, et al., 2022). The story ultimately reminds the readers that, despite the darkness, everyone possesses the internal strength to endure, survive, and flourish.

From the above background, freedom is essential in its negative and positive attributes for human beings (Fitriani, et al., 2023; Hoyle, 2021; Kaltsas, 2019). Stated in Hoyle's work, this article would like to explore more about the tensions between the condition of leaving restraints and exercising rights freely in the story. The following analysis includes individual and social tensions about freedom alongside any issues on cultural studies.

METHOD

This paper uses qualitative method and explorative approach to analyze concepts and written data in order to explore the correlation between Kathy Hoyle's *Breathe* and the concept of Negative and Positive Freedom. The analysis involves examining both online and offline texts, such as books and journals, to gain a better understanding of the subject matter. The data analysis process includes sourcing, reading carefully, comparing with other sources, quoting in the text, and documenting sources in the reference list. The research data used in this analysis is derived from Kathy Hoyle's literary work named *Breathe* and arguments by Isaiah Berlin and Charles Taylor on negative and positive freedom.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Breath as a Sense of Freedom

The story of *Breathe* was written by Kathy Hoyle and published by TTS Publishing in 2021. This story tells about how breathing is not merely a matter of physical doing. It goes deeper to see the breath as a noun that is a sense of hope (Fitriani, et al., 2023; Hoyle, 2021; Kaltsas, 2019). Through the idea of hope, freedom exists as well. It is true that breathing is mostly done unconsciously. However, Hoyle states in her flash fiction that anyone should take a breath deeper to introspect their own self and see what could be reached furthermore (Dimova-Cookson, 2021; Hoyle, 2021; Pujimahanani, et al., 2023). The idea is listed in the quotations as follows.

"Take a walk by a river, fingertips touching, hearts pit-pattering." (Hoyle, 2021)

This quote depicts taking a walk along the river, with fingertips touching or hands clasping, and the feeling of love that swells quickly. It is like a couple holding hands who are in love. The idea of breathing is in line with the existence of nature itself. By stating so, a river means something that keeps flowing and follows the sense of heart that keeps understanding any obstacle ahead (Dimova-Cookson, 2021; Hoyle, 2021; Pujimahanani, et al., 2023). The quotation also indicates that breathing is a matter of love which must be prolonged to extend and expand the crucial points of happiness forevermore.

"Take a moment, in the garden of a friend's house – voices murmuring, glasses tinkling – to steal a crooked kiss with a teeth-clash laugh." (Hoyle, 2021)

This quote invites people to spend some time in the garden of a friend's house, where there are whispering voices and the sound of glasses touching. There are kisses with joyful laughter. It also celebrates the small moments of happiness and intimacy in everyday life. It is beautiful how Hoyle explores the matter of breathing in surrounding life. The story asks people to imagine a friend's house where anyone could feel safe and secure (Dimova-Cookson, 2021; Hoyle, 2021; Pujimahanani, et al., 2023). People could chat about anything, even the most random one with friends. By taking a moment to understand this, Hoyle does not provide all illustrations, but she would like to push the readers to imagine more (Dimova-Cookson, 2021; Hoyle, 2021; Pujimahanani, et al., 2023).

"Take a beautiful melody, dance to it, slowly, under a starbright sky." (Hoyle, 2021)

Overall, these quotes create an image of a romantic and soothing atmosphere. It indicates the idea that implies to take or choose a beautiful melody, an element often associated with beauty and happiness. The slow dancing under a sky filled with stars creates a romantic image of a moment filled with elegance and serenity, under a starry sky. There is nothing better than enjoying self to have a sense of freedom (Dimova-Cookson, 2021; Hoyle, 2021; Pujimahanani, et al., 2023). The dancing is not following music since it shows sincere heart. Dancing is the perfect symbol of freedom.

"Take your time, says the sister who knows you better than anyone. Take a call from that ex, tell him – with a smug smile – that you've moved on." (Hoyle, 2021)

This quote expresses the encouragement to take time and make decisions that suit one's self. People must not be hasty or rushed in making decisions. These words show that there is a satisfied smile in which someone has moved on and put the past behind (Carter, 2021; Hoyle, 2021; Raza, 2023). It gives advice to take time in making decisions and shows that people have the strength to face the past with confidence. This quotation is quite straightforward. It asks people to let go of any past regret and be free. It is simple but most people actually could never get out of dead memories (Carter, 2021; Hoyle, 2021; Raza, 2023). Hoyle would like people to embrace more freedom by staying out of any past furthermore.

"Take a leap of faith, change your mind, change it back again." "Take your daughters, one still taking milk from your breast, halfway across the country just to be with him." (Hoyle, 2021)

This quote is about taking a big risk, perhaps in the context of life or relationships, and then possibly changing mind, only to change it again. It characterizes a dynamic emotional and mental journey, depicting dedication and sacrifice in relationships (Carter, 2021; Hoyle, 2021; Raza, 2023). A leap of faith is indeed a matter of freedom. As someone chooses one choice from another, there is freedom involved. In this case, the choice is not forced nor dictated. It is the personal heart's choice that will only gain a sense of understanding ahead of a new person (Carter, 2021; Hoyle, 2021; Raza, 2023).

"Take a deep breath... deeper, deeper than that, try not to sigh before you tell him it's his turn to take out the trash." (Hoyle, 2021)

This quote is depicted to stay calm and take a deep breath before passing on a task or responsibility to any partner. This instruction may reflect the importance of communicating with patience and understanding (Carter, 2021; Hoyle, 2021; Raza, 2023). It is interesting how a sense of freedom is actually a matter of action in everyday life. The quotation shows that people must communicate with others more openly than before. Taking a deep breath means to care more patience even to anyone who loves her/him furthermore. The sense of love could only flourish if things are not only out of hindrance, but positively engaged with anyone (Carter, 2021; Hoyle, 2021; Raza, 2023).

"Take a moment to remind yourself that things will take time to settle down, it's a learning curve, you're a family now." (Hoyle, 2021)

This quote is depicted to take a moment to remind that things will take time to settle down. It reflects patience and understanding in building a life together. Settling down means trying to keep down any emotion and prioritize the good one (Carter, 2021; Hoyle, 2021; Raza, 2023). People should understand that reciprocity is only the one that will shape better understanding in freedom. People should always keep learning so that the values keep evolving as well. If people stop understanding, they will only get stuck in nothingness and will never move forward (Carter, 2021; Hoyle, 2021; Raza, 2023).

"Take your heart, crushed under the weight of broken promises, carry it to the shore and wash it in the salt-water to heal." (Hoyle, 2021)

The quote above encourages a person to take their broken and disappointed heart to the beach to feel calmer and relaxed. The waves are very soothing if enjoyed when the heart is broken. It is a real imagination and also symbolizes goodness at once (Carter, 2021; Hoyle, 2021; Raza, 2023). By taking heart to the sense of healing, Hoyle would like to propose that there is freedom to be maintained furthermore. Indeed, it should be more positive than ever.

"Take a bag, pack it with new promises, the ones only you can make to yourself. Take the pills, throw them in the piled-up trash can. Take your daughters, bundle them sleepy-eyed into the car, and tell them this will be the coolest adventure they've ever had." (Hoyle, 2021)

The quote above encourages making personal commitments, discarding negative influences (symbolized by pills), and involving loved ones in a positive journey or adventure for self-improvement. New promises are the senses of freedom waiting to be confirmed. The idea is clear; promises are such an amendment of past wrongdoings (Carter, 2021; Hoyle, 2021; Raza, 2023). Those keep incoming and people should always go forward with them. There is also a perfectness to be struggled in the future.

“Take a breath, deeper, deeper than that. Now, take a chance.” (Hoyle, 2021)

The quotes give instructions to reflect and provide encouragement to take risks or opportunities. It can be interpreted as an invitation to step out of one's comfort zone, try something new, or take on a challenge. It depicts the encouragement to not only be in a calm or passive state, but also to take proactive steps and face situations with courage. It is true that freedom is about leaving out any hindrance (Carter, 2021; Hoyle, 2021; Raza, 2023). However, any better chance will only happen if people try to choose. Choosing is more active than ever.

“Take six months’ worth of counseling to try and smooth things over and admit, through bleak and angry tears, that it’s taking all you’ve got just to stay. Take the pills.” (Hoyle, 2021)

The quotes imply the struggling process of overcoming emotional or mental difficulties. There are various journeys that require significant time and effort to overcome psychological or emotional challenges. Then, taking a pill can be interpreted as an attempt to manage mental or emotional wellbeing, which may include the use of prescribed medication as part of treatment. This quote creates a picture of a difficult situation, where one is trying hard to stay strong and persevere through emotional struggles (Carter, 2021; Hoyle, 2021; Raza, 2023). It is true that difficulties may always come, but people should always be ready to choose to go forward as well.

“Take a test. Take in two blue lines in a white plastic window – try to picture his face when you tell him.” (Hoyle, 2021)

The given quote hints at someone taking a pregnancy test and receiving a positive result indicated by two blue lines. It suggests imagining the reaction of someone important when the test result is shared with them. This moment of disclosing the news is described as emotionally charged, potentially evoking anxiety, anticipation, or happiness. The overall context highlights the significance of this moment, as it can greatly impact a person's relationship or life (Carter, 2021; Hoyle, 2021; Raza, 2023). Freedom will come if someone could make a choice and not get doubted by that.

The Tensions of Negative and Positive Freedom

In the short story entitled "Breathe" written by Kathy Hoyle, numerous connections can be drawn between the narrative and the theory of positive and negative freedom. The main character finds herself embroiled in various disputes, including one with her former partner (Baum & Nichols, 2013; Crowder, 2021; Hoyle, 2021). Interestingly, her sister consistently advises her to reconcile with her ex due to the abusive nature of her current husband. However, instead of blindly following the opinions and suggestions of others, the protagonist exercises her autonomy by making her own decisions. This aspect of the story directly relates to the theory of positive and negative freedom as it entails the protagonist's deliberation on whether to comply with her sister's counsel or to act according to her own volition, without being swayed by external influences (Baum & Nichols, 2013; Crowder, 2021; Hoyle, 2021).

One must note that Isaiah Berlin, a renowned philosopher, introduced the concepts of negative and positive liberty in a seminal essay published in 1958 (Berlin, 2002; Gould, 2022; Schubert, 2020). Berlin categorizes the former as a state characterized by the mere absence of certain conditions. These conditions encompass obstacles, hindrances, limitations, or encroachments imposed by others. In other words, an individual can be deemed free if they are not bound or restrained by such factors. On the other hand, positive liberty necessitates the presence of certain elements, namely control, self-mastery, self-determination, or self-realization (Berlin, 2002; Gould, 2022; Schubert, 2020). Achieving positive freedom proves to be a more challenging endeavor as it demands the cultivation of affirmative influences, rather than simply avoiding negative ones.

Within his work, Isaiah Berlin argues that negative freedom represents the minimum threshold of liberty, while positive freedom embodies the maximum level that can be attained (Berlin, 2002; Gould, 2022; Schubert, 2020). In order to convey his point, he prompts his readers to envision the predicament of a perennially oppressed minority group. Although the members of this marginalized community partake in a democratic system characterized by majority rule, they can be considered free solely due to their participation and the semblance of self-governance it entails (Hwang, 2021; Kinsinger, 2020; Oktavia, et al., 2023). However, their existence remains one of oppression and certainly does not align with the notion of freedom. By making this assertion, Berlin aims to emphasize that the concept of freedom is not one that can be easily defined. It is a

multifaceted construct in which various elements may perpetually clash with one another (Berlin, 2002; Gould, 2022; Schubert, 2020).

Furthermore, even in a democratic society, the majority group may experience oppression in the name of preserving freedom (Levy, 2015; Pasopati, 2016; Pearce, 2021). Berlin himself exhibits a preference for negative freedom, as it implies that individuals are masters of their own fate. Negative freedom upholds the ideology of an unburdened self, whereas the potential for despotism arises when the state determines what is in the best interest of its citizens (Akbar, et al., 2023; Barry, 2019; Simhony, 2021). Given these considerations, Berlin advocates for the primacy of negative freedom due to its practicality and the transparency with which it can be implemented on a broader scale.

However, in Charles Taylor's perspective, he tends to argue that the concept of freedom should always have a positive connotation. Taylor acknowledges that the application of negative or positive notions of freedom necessitates a foundational understanding of what is considered significant (Akbar, et al., 2023; Barry, 2019; Simhony, 2021). This understanding dictates that certain restrictions are deemed irrelevant to freedom, while others are assessed as either greater or lesser. Although Taylor's preference for simplicity does not overtly acknowledge or emphasize a connection with this foundational understanding, it remains relevant to political freedom. Taylor acknowledges that a negative theory can address the primary thrust of discrimination, but it will ultimately diminish the noble virtues that lie behind its complexities (Levy, 2015; Pasopati, 2016; Pearce, 2021).

Taylor formulates ideas and explanations that posit both negative and positive liberties as integral aspects of everyday life. According to Askland (1993) and Taylor (1985), positive freedom is contingent upon the concept of exercising one's freedom, while negative freedom is based on the notion of having opportunities to exercise freedom. However, the mere existence of opportunities to realize freedom holds no meaning if an individual lacks the knowledge or ability to exercise that freedom in practical life (Akbar, et al., 2023; Barry, 2019; Simhony, 2021). Furthermore, self-realization is rendered meaningless if one is unaware of their own potential for positive freedom.

Consequently, giving exclusive importance to negative freedom will inevitably leave no room for the development of a positive sense of freedom. Although it is widely recognized that positive freedom may be too precise and predictable, it is still necessary to underscore ethical conscience (Akbar, et al., 2023; Barry, 2019; Simhony, 2021). Even in the face of the widespread influence of utilitarianism, there remains a need for deontological aspects. Without a deep understanding of the underlying principles of being truly free, any form of discrimination cannot be eradicated.

Moral understandings must serve as guiding principles to determine how and what actions are necessary to safeguard freedom. Failure to apply these understandings will result in negative freedom perpetuating further discrimination. This is because freedom will no longer be based on essential factors, but rather on the arbitrary preferences of individuals (Akbar, et al., 2023; Barry, 2019; Simhony, 2021). Such an approach only serves to diminish the true value of freedom instead of nurturing it within the realm of self.

Moreover, the notion that negative liberty is inherently social undermines its individualistic aspects. The pursuit of authentic desires is eradicated as the sole focus becomes escaping any form of constraint (Akbar, et al., 2023; Barry, 2019; Simhony, 2021). Conversely, the positive understanding of freedom is still crucial, not due to its metaphysical implications, but due to its authoritative nature. The positive understanding questions who is entitled to legitimate freedom. In defending this perspective, the emphasis is placed on the importance of choices in bridging the gap between the positive and negative senses of freedom (Askland, 1993; Djanarko & Pasopati, 2017; Taylor, 1979). Individuals should have the ability to exercise choices and have access to opportunities to exercise their freedom. As such, the negative sense of freedom should gradually transform into a positive one, ultimately enriching the former.

It is a result of the reality that freedom is not entirely reliant or autonomous. In some way, both can function as methods to enhance one's ability to make decisions and one's understanding of the environment in which one exists (Askland, 1993; Djanarko & Pasopati, 2017; Taylor, 1979). By depending on external sources, one can acquire a broader range of knowledge since societal issues can always provide support for individual needs. Conversely, embracing independence can be beneficial in a philosophical sense of morality and can also lead to more significant contributions to the well-being of others (Askland, 1993; Djanarko & Pasopati, 2017; Taylor, 1979).

The Crucial Point of Freedom in *Breathe*

The flash fiction *Breathe* by Kathy Hoyle presents a story rich in meaning drawn from personal experience. From the available data, the story emphasizes the positive and negative aspects of freedom affected by the harsh treatment the main character receives from her husband (Askland, 1993; Djanarko & Pasopati, 2017; Taylor, 1979). It is tragic to watch her leave the house, breathing heavily, looking away as her fists hit the fence. Notice, this is how she deals with it. This is the data from the author and the experience becomes the catalyst for the protagonist to find freedom from an adverse situation.

In the context of negative liberation theory, this character struggles to be free from the harassment and oppression experienced in her household. However, negative liberation does not only revolve around escaping from an abusive husband (Baum & Nichols, 2013; Crowder, 2021; Hoyle, 2021). Take a moment, in the garden of a friend's house - voices murmuring, glasses clinking - to steal a crooked kiss with toothy laughter more related to the concept of positive freedom. Those are emphasizing social interaction, personal agency, freedom of speech, and shared enjoyment in a community context (Baum & Nichols, 2013; Crowder, 2021; Hoyle, 2021).

Taking one's own time can be linked to the concept of negative liberty, which highlights the absence of external barriers to individuals making decisions, communicating, controlling personal lives, and expressing feelings. Taking a leap of faith and changing mind also indicate negative liberty because overall, this depiction illustrates the freedom of individuals to make decisions, change their minds, and live their personal lives without external interference or restrictions (Baum & Nichols, 2013; Crowder, 2021; Hoyle, 2021). Taking a moment to settle can be linked to the concept of positive liberty as this message emphasizes acceptance of time, learning as a curve, the importance of family, and recognition as a learning process in achieving the fulfillment of individual potential and collective well-being (Baum & Nichols, 2013; Crowder, 2021; Hoyle, 2021).

Taking a bag and packing it with new promises also presents a narrative that includes various scenarios where individuals exercise their freedom to make choices without external interference or pressure. This idea signifies the freedom individuals have to make personal decisions and plan their own future without interference or coercion from outside forces (Baum & Nichols, 2013; Crowder, 2021; Hoyle, 2021). It highlights the idea that individuals have the right to make promises and commitments to themselves without external influence.

The freedom to make appointments, decide on medication use, and create memorable experiences for their families are negative liberty that emphasizes the freedom from external interference. It also entails individuals' responsibility for the consequences of their choices on themselves and others (Baum & Nichols, 2013; Crowder, 2021; Hoyle, 2021). In other words, individual freedom within the concept of negative liberty must be guided by ethical considerations and a sense of personal responsibility. The data discusses the act of recovering from disappointment and taking care of oneself, connecting it to the concept of positive liberty. It states that individuals have the freedom to perform acts of self-care and recovery to achieve personal well-being (de Silva & Kenyon, 2022; Hoyle, 2021; Shoikhedbrod, 2023).

The metaphor of washing a broken heart with seawater represents the cleansing and healing of emotional wounds. In the concept of positive liberty, individuals have the freedom to seek their own emotional balance through creative and meaningful actions, including engaging with nature or finding peace in tranquil places (de Silva & Kenyon, 2022; Hoyle, 2021; Shoikhedbrod, 2023). The process of healing on the beach is seen as a positive act that exemplifies individuals taking responsibility for their own well-being. Positive liberty allows individuals to recognize their own needs and take positive steps towards meeting them. Ultimately, recovery on the beach signifies individuals' freedom to create conditions that support their personal well-being and healing (de Silva & Kenyon, 2022; Hoyle, 2021; Shoikhedbrod, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The flash fiction entitled *Breathe* from Kathy Hoyle is thick with the theories of positive and negative freedom from Isaiah Berlin and Charles Taylor. Through the lens of both philosophers' concepts, it is shown that both positive and negative freedom could not be easily separated. Going out from a restraint will shape another problem in doing goodness and vice versa. Through Berlin and

Taylor's theories, the analysis points that the narrative becomes a rich tapestry, woven with the threads of violence, advice, hesitation, and ultimately, the elusive nature of freedom. The exploration of the protagonist's internal conflict serves as a vital reminder that freedom is not a monolithic concept but a dynamic interplay of forces, shaped by individual choices and societal constraints.

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