

## ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN CHARACTER'S PERSONALITY IN "THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY" NOVEL BY MATT HAIG

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### Abstract

This research has the purpose of finding out the personality of the protagonist in the novel entitled "The Midnight Library" written by Matt Haig. The researcher had used the theory of psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud in order to analyse on Nora's personality, the protagonist of the novel. Freud had introduced psychoanalysis on human psyche, which consisted of three aspects, they are the id, the ego, and the superego. The design of this research is descriptive qualitative research, which the data collection is using the method of library research and data analysing is using descriptive analysis method, both theorized by Ratna (2004). It results on the findings of 4 data of id aspect, 3 data of ego aspect, and 5 data of superego. It can be concluded from the analysis result that the main character of the novel, Nora Seed, was controlled the most by her superego, where she built her superego personality through her experiences and journeys in finding the right life for herself. The aspect of superego shown by Nora reflected to ideal standard of society's moral and rules.

**Keywords:** Personality, Psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud

### Introduction

Human's personality is regarded as a person's pattern of unique thinking, behaviour, and emotions. It refers to the self-identity in the past, present, or even future, which blended with some special traits such as habits, talents, loves, hates, hopes, and values (Coon & Mitterer, 2010). In order to evaluate a person's personality, the approach of psychology is needed. Kalat (2008) had compromised to define psychology as a systematic study on a person's behaviours and experiences, which can be concluded that the reasons behind human's behaviour can be understood through psychology as human emotional is involved. Psychology is one approach that can be beneficially used in analysing literature. According to Wellek and Warren (1948), psychological approach in literature is a study on the psychological types and laws that presented in the literary works, and also on how the literature effects the readers' psychology state.

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In this research, it directed to the use of psychological approach in order to discover the psychological aspect found within the work of literature, mainly on human's personality psychologically on a character found in a novel. Stated by Klarer (1999), novel is characterized by the words of individualism and realism, grounding on realistic and individual traits of the novel's protagonist and the other characters. A novel or fiction is a world that is specially made by authors through words (Gill, 1995). Therefore, there would be some parts that are unrealistic while maintained the realistic world as the author themselves are also affected from the real world where they lived, including their descriptions on the characters, plot, and settings.

The title of the novel is "The Midnight Library" written by Matt Haig, published by Canongate Books in the year of 2020. It had won the prize of Goodreads Choice Award for Fiction, and was known as a bestseller book by The New York Times Bestseller, The Washington Post, and The Boston Globe. The novel centred on the protagonist, a young British woman whose name is Nora Seed. She is unhappy with her life because of the choices she had made in her current life. During a night, she tried to kill herself, but she ended up in a library rather than the expected other world. She was introduced by her school librarian, Mrs. Elm, to the library that situated between life and death. It was filled with million books that contained her life stories that she had made different life choices. In the library, she tried to find a life that she felt more contented of. This research used the theory of human psyche by Freud to analyse the novel's protagonist, Nora's personality, which consisted of the id, the ego, and the superego.

The researcher had discovered two previous researches as comparison with the present research. The first study is a journal article that conducted analysis on to find out the personality the characters in a short story. Bilalia (2019) used a short story entitled "Fantastic Mr. Fox, The Twits, and The Witches" by Roald Dahl as the data source of the research. It focused to analyse the personality of the novel's characters, by using the Maslow's theory, hierarchy of needs. The analysis result showed the characters from the short story had fulfilled all the psychological needs in their lives, step by step from psychological needs to self-actualization needs.

The next journal article is written by Situmorang and Evyanto (2020), which is an analysis of the id aspect shown by the main character of the novel chosen entitled "Gone Girl" by Gillian Flynn. The study has the purpose to analyse the character named Amy in the novel, by using Freud's theory of psychoanalysis. The research is qualitative descriptive research. The research concluded that the aspect of id is more dominant than the other two aspects, therefore the research had focused to find out the id aspects on Amy. The main goal of id on Amy is clearly carried out, as her desires for her pleasure principle are fulfilled along the novel. From her successful plan of revenge on her husband, murder, and to her lies. Both previous researches had conducted analysis of the same aim, which is to find out the character's personality. The first study used Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, while the second study used Freud's psychoanalysis theory. Comparing to the previous studies, the present research had conducted analysis by using

the same theory as the second study, which is theory of psychoanalysis by Freud, while the differences situated on the object analysis and with different novel as data source.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalysis**

Psychoanalytic is a theory that had been developed by Sigmund Freud during the years of 1890s, in which the early year of 1896, he offered and used the name of 'psychoanalysis' in order to explain the psychological phenomena (Freud, 1989). His contribution for psychology in modern era is the emphasis on the aspect of unconscious from human psyche (Guerin et al., 2005). He had convinced that human's actions are motivated from the forces of psychology, with limited control. Human's mind is structured for its unconsciousness placed below the level of consciousness, which meant that most of human's actions are based of their unconsciousness, as the conscious proceed in a short time. Therefore, according to Freud of human's mental process, he had assigned three psychic zones which start from the id, the ego, and the superego.

#### **1. Id**

The id aspect as explained by Freud, is entirely to be unconscious other than two other aspects. The id is the base of libido, the primary source of human's psychic energy. It has the functions to fulfil a person's life principle, which is the pleasure principle. As it's naturally came from human's true nature, it has the characteristics of not knowing values, the difference between good and bad, morality. The id can be concluded as the source of human desires and aggressions, which is asocial, amoral, and lawless. The force of the id is known to be able to force and lead into destruction from one's greed and satisfaction.

#### **2. Ego**

From the id's possibilities of hazardous, it is necessary for the other two psychic aspect to guard the individual. Ego is the psyche aspect that would protect individual even it lacks of vitality against it, but it helped onto the release of non-destructive behaviours. The ego was based only small portion of consciousness and had governed on the principle of reality, which it stands for a good sense or reason. The ego acted as the middlemen of within the world nor without the world. Ego is the way how to satisfy Id. Ego works based on reality principle

#### **3. Superego**

The superego aspect is the psychic aspect which was based on the consciousness to protect society. It is an aspect that keep the pride and conscience. The function of superego is to serve moral perfection and block off the id with unconscious and impulsive behaviour from society that apparently were unacceptable. Superego is dominated by the principle of morality. Even though superego might be the one aspect that had driven on a person's good behaviour for the society, it might lead to un-comfortability of being themselves. Therefore, the ego who acted as the repository has the important role in order to balancing and maintaining human's healthy mental between the forces of opposite aspect.

### **Research Method**

This research had applied the design of descriptive qualitative to conduct the analysis. The data source of the research is a novel entitled "The Midnight Library" written by Matt Haig. Descriptive qualitative is research done by describing and analysing research's data by using words and sentences narratively (Creswell, 2014). This research used Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis to analyse Nora's personality through finding out the id, ego, and superego. The methods that are used to collect and analyse data are library research method and content analysis method.

The data is collected by having the primary source which are the novel "The Midnight Library", and the secondary source are theory books, research journal articles, and others. Several steps are taken to collect the research's data, which started with reading the book while at the same time highlighting the sentences of the narratives as related to the research's objects. It followed by organizing the data to each category of object. In the other hand, the analysis was analysed by using the method of descriptive analysis, which is the method of describing the validity of data and followed by analysing it using explanation. Firstly, the data was classified into each part as theorized, and continued by analysing according to the theory.

### **Results and Discussions**

The research had been resulted by the findings of "The Midnight Library" novel's main character, Nora's personality by using Freud's psychoanalysis of human psyche. The novel of "The Midnight Library" focused on telling the life of the female main character, Nora Seed. Nora is a clerk of a music store, whose age is 36-years-old. Overall, Nora had filled with regrets regarding of her life choices. She felt that it is meaningless to continue to live her life as she was left nothing as the reason of living. It started with sudden death of her beloved cat, losing her only job, met her former bandmate that blamed her for leaving the music band that could went big, and losing her only piano student. She also found that her brother had been avoiding her, her best friend that lived in Australia did not respond her text, and even her old neighbour said he won't ask Nora's help for his medications anymore. To add it all, she does not have any family, as both her parents had passed away, and she had been living alone after she left her ex-fiancé two days before their supposed marriage. She looked back on her life, it was nothing but regret, grief, and pain.

#### **Id of the main character**

The id is human psyche that principled on self-pleasure. The first aspect of id that Nora had shown from the novel is when she had decided to end her life once she realized that she had no reason to live anymore. It is as shown on the quotation below.

"The time was now twenty-two minutes past eleven. She knew only one thing with absolute certainty: she didn't want to reach tomorrow. She stood up. She found a pen and a piece of paper. It was, she decided, a very good time to die." (Haig, 2020, p. 31)

The quotation above indicated to the moment before Nora tried to suicide by overdosing herself using sleeping pills. She had felt that every choice she had made previously were mistakes, which led her to the life that is a far from how she wanted and imagined. She was lifeless and thought that there is no reason for her to continue living her life anymore. She thought of not wanting to reach the day, and then she decided to end her life in the midnight. The aspect of id on Nora can be seen on her great desire to not continuing her life literally, and to do so, she decided to end her life by overdosing herself. However, as the story goes, Nora did not end up neither in the heaven nor the hell. She was stuck in a space, which is a library. She then met a person who was also in that library, which looked exactly the same as the school librarian that she knew.

“There was absolutely nothing wrong with this life, but she felt inside her a craving for other things, other lives, other possibilities. She felt like she was still in the air, not ready to land. Maybe she was more like Hugo Lefèvre than she had realised. Maybe she could flick through lives as easily as flicking pages.” (Haig, 2020, p. 199)

After Nora’s encounter with Mrs. Elm in the midnight library, she had entered several of her lives through the possibility of her choices from the library’s books. She had personally experienced the life that she felt regret for not choosing it, however it did not end up as what she expected to. So far, Nora has not found the right life for her to stay. It is either she felt disappointed, felt despair of losing someone in a life, or she did not feel happy. The quotation above situated when Nora had gone through a lot of lives, but she did not feel contented of the life she currently lived on. The id shown on her desire and craving to experience more of her other living possibilities, as she felt it was not enough that she could not found the right life for her. The id centred on her dissatisfaction on her lives, and her desire to find the most perfect life for her to live.

“‘This is the best life,’ she told herself, a little desperately now. ‘This is the best life. I am staying here. This is the life for me. This is the best life. This is the best life.’ But she knew she didn’t have long. And the words echoed in Nora’s mind. They’ll be okay. They’re looked after . . . And then Ash said something about going to the cinema tonight and how the babysitter was all arranged and Nora had forgotten completely but just smiled and tried really hard to hold on, to stay there, but it was happening, it was happening, she knew it from within every hidden chamber of her being, and there was absolutely nothing she could do to stop it.” (Haig, 2020, pp. 242 & 244)

After several travels to Nora’s living possibilities, she finally found a life where she could live the happiest and quietly. Nora had chosen to experience the life where she did not refuse Ash’s, the male surgeon, invite to have a coffee date. They managed to get married and had a cute little girl named Molly, and a dog named Plato. Nora had never felt of loving someone, even the feel of being loved by someone, until she experienced it in that life. She felt that she finally found the most perfect and right life for her to live,

until she had the urge and feel that she might soon went back to the library. The id aspect that was shown by Nora in the quotation above is her desire of staying in that life. She had tried to insisted and forced to forget about the midnight library, but eventually she was forced to be back to the library. At this moment, Nora had only thought herself, her wellness, her feelings, without thinking about other risks that might happened.

“Take me back . . .’ ‘You know it doesn’t work like that.’ ‘Well, take me to the closest variation. Give me the closest possible thing to that life. Please, Mrs Elm, it must be possible. There must be a life where I went for the coffee with Ash and where we had Molly and Plato, but I . . . I did something slightly different. So it was technically another life. Like I chose a different dog collar for Plato. Or . . . or . . . Or where I – I don’t know – where I did Pilates instead of yoga? Or where I went to a different college at Cambridge? Or if it has to be further back, where it wasn’t coffee on the date but tea? That life. Take me to the life where I did that. Come on. Please. Help me out. I’d like to try one of those lives, please . . .’” (Haig, 2020, pp. 245-246)

On the quotation above, it was the continuation from the previous quotation. It situated after Nora was forced to be back to the library after the life with Ash and her daughter. The id of Nora is when she desperately showed her desire to have the similar life where she could live with Ash and their daughter, with a dog. She continued to appeal and beg Mrs. Elm to grant her and find the book that was closest to the life of what she had desired. Even after Mrs. Elm explained that it was not possible as the library slowly started to break down, it did not stop Nora desperately requesting to have the life that she had found to be perfect. However, it was clear that Nora’s desire of having that life led to a conclusion, which is she did not want to die. That is why the library had broken down as it meant that it tried to give another chance to Nora to live.

### **Ego of the main character**

The ego is the aspect of human psychic that has the role as medium between the one’s id and superego. In the novel of “The Midnight Library”, Nora was controlled by her ego less than her id controlled herself. It is as quoted below.

“‘He loved you, Nora. You looked after him as well as anyone could. Go and look at the last page of The Book of Regrets.’ Nora could see that the book was lying on the floor. She knelt on the floor beside it. ‘I don’t want to open it again.’ ‘Don’t worry. It will be safer this time. Just stick to the last page.’ Once she had flicked to the last page, she saw one of her very last regrets – ‘I was bad at looking after Voltaire’ – slowly disappear from the page. The letters fading like retreating strangers in a fog.” (Haig, 2020, p. 71)

The quoted part above situated when Nora had gone to the life she chose of where her cat was still alive. However, her cat Volts was still dead in that life. She found out that Volts was destined to be dead as it had uncured disease as Mrs. Elm told her. When Nora felt awful that she could not take good care of her cat, Mrs. Elm comforted her.

Nora's id was shown when Mrs. Elm asked her to check "The Books of Regrets" once again, she refused to open it as she was afraid that she would feel nauseas again just like the first time she opened that book. However, Mrs. Elm assured her to open it, and due to her ego, she listened to Mrs. Elm to open the last page of the book, which she found that the one regret about her cat slowly disappeared from the page.

"As time stood still, Nora's curiosity about the lives around her slowly grew. It turned out to be near impossible to stand in a library and not want to pull things from the shelves. 'Why can't you just give me a life you know is a good one?' she said suddenly. 'That is not how this library works.'" (Haig, 2020, p. 72)

After Nora had experienced another Volts' death, she confronted Mrs. Elm and insisted that it is pointless to go through the life chances where she only experienced more sadness. Mrs. Elm then challenged Nora to sit still rather than go through her life possibilities. Even though Nora agreed and said yes to it, she could not stay still and it was getting bored because time did not flow there. Nora's id in this moment is she wanted Mrs. Elm to choose a life for her, which she could not bear to go to a life where she suffered. When she asked Mrs. Elm to choose a good life for her, Mrs. Elm refused as the library offer the choice that the owner made. This time, Nora's ego controlled over her, as she decided to give up on asking Mrs. Elm's help and tried to think over what kind of life book she wanted to choose.

'You know what the matter is. This whole place exists because of you. You are the power source. When there is a severe disruption in that power source the library is in jeopardy. It's you, Nora. You are giving up at the worst possible moment. You can't give up, Nora. You have more to offer. More opportunities to have. There are so many versions of you out there. Remember how you felt after the polar bear. Remember how much you wanted life'... The lights had come back on, but still flickered. 'I'm sorry,' said Nora. She started trying to pick up the books and put them back in place. 'No,' snapped Mrs Elm. 'Don't touch them. Put them down.' 'Sorry.' (Haig, 2020, pp. 178-179)

In the quotation above, Nora was faced by her only brother's death in another life that she had chosen. She could not continue the life with that fact, and it pained her to know that there is a life where her brother had really gone. She went back to the library and plead Mrs. Elm to stop as it was too painful for her to go through other life opportunities more, in which she does not want to experience painful and sad life anymore. As she had that determined mind, it slowly crumbled down the library. Her id shown at the moment of her strong desire to stop all of what had happened in the library. When Mrs. Elm assured Nora by reminding her about the polar bear incident and how she deep inside still wanted to stay alive, it calmed her down and stopped the little earthquake that happened in there. Nora's ego had dominated after she heard about what Mrs. Elm had said and reasoned. She calmed down and her id which is stopping to try on her other life opportunities had gone.

### **Superego of the main character**

The superego aspect is the human psyche which has the consciousness to protect society that is based on morality. Superego functioned to serve moral onto the society and prevented the behaviours of id. Out of three of human psyche, it was found that Nora's personality was more controlled by superego other than the two aspects. It can be seen in the quotations below.

"And it became astoundingly clear to her, finally, in that moment: She didn't want to die. And that was the problem. In the face of death, life seemed more attractive, and as life seemed more attractive, how could she get back to the Midnight Library? She had to be disappointed in a life, not just scared of it, in order to try again with another book. There was death. Violent, oblivious death, in bear form, staring at her with its black eyes. And she knew then, more than she'd known anything, that she wasn't ready to die. This knowledge grew bigger than fear itself as she stood there, face to face with a polar bear, itself hungry and desperate to exist, and banged the ladle against the saucepan. Harder." (Haig, 2020, p. 129)

The quotation above situated in a life where Nora became a glaciologist in Arctic, focused in researching. She was chosen as the spotter of the polar bear, while the other scientists conducted the fieldwork of climate. As time passed, she was faced by a large white bear that slowly walked towards her. Nora was seen by the bear as a food, and it scared Nora that made her to think that death is coming near her. At that moment, her nature made herself realized that she did not want to die yet. She thought about staying alive more than her fear at the time. Nora's realization about staying alive considered to be superego as her choosing to stay alive did not hurt the people around her, such as her brother, her best friend, neighbour, and anyone who know her.

"Maybe that was the only meaning that mattered. To be the world, witnessing itself. Maybe it wasn't the lack of achievements that had made her and her brother's parents unhappy, maybe it was the expectation to achieve in the first place. She had no idea about any of it, really. But on that boat, she realised something. She had loved her parents more than she ever knew, and right then, she forgave them completely." (Haig, 2020, p. 133)

In Nora's life, it was filled with regrets and fears. She thought that it was passed from what her parents had experienced in their lives. They had expected a great success from their both son and daughter, so they will not suffer just like when they were young. Young Nora and her brother did not notice that and detest the burdens given by the parents. After experiencing the polar bear incident, it occurred in Nora's mind that she now understood her parents' expectation on both of them. The superego that was shown by Nora in the quotation above is when she understood her parents' mindset about their success and willingly to forgive them of what they have done.

"The shock hadn't been that she'd thought she'd been about to die. She had been about to die ever since she first entered the Midnight Library. No, the shock was



that she felt like she was about to live. Or at least, that she could imagine wanting to be alive again. And she wanted to do something good with that life.” (Haig, 2020, p. 134)

The bear encounter incident had made Nora realized something. Her colleagues that witnessed the incident might know how shocked Nora was, but Nora was shocked not because of the bear, but on how her mindset changed after that encounter. While normal people might be shocked by how close death is, Nora was shocked by her wanting to stay alive because death was near to her when she first went inside the Midnight Library. The superego in the quotation above is Nora’s urge of desire to do something good and better in her life for herself, instead of trying to escape from her distress.

“And also, Dylan deserved the other Nora. The one who had managed to fall in love with him. This was a new feeling – as if she was taking someone’s place... She stroked the large dog who’d been licking her and whispered a ‘goodbye’ into the Newfoundland’s wide, warm brow as she left Dylan and his dogs behind.” (Haig, 2020, p. 196)

This time, Nora went into the life of her working in an animal shelter. She was also working along with a man named Dylan, who turned out to be her boyfriend in that life. As she spent time with him, she found that Dylan is a good man and is rare to be found, which she liked that about him. However, she realized that she did not feel attracted to Dylan as much as the other Nora in that life. Nora felt that she does not deserve Dylan, and the superego that Nora had shown in the quotation is by how she decided to leave that life so the other Nora could continue living her life. It considered to be superego as she was being considerate and gave back the good life to the other Nora that was supposed to live in that life.

“‘No one plays here,’ she told Nora. ‘I’m so pleased you came to see me. It was such a surprise.’ ‘Well, I can come every day if you want, Mrs Elm?’ ‘Louise, please call me Louise. And don’t you have work to do?’ Nora smiled. Even though it had only been twenty-four hours since she had asked Neil to put up her poster in String Theory, she was already inundated with people wanting lessons. ‘I teach piano lessons. And I help out at the homeless shelter every other Tuesday. But I will always have an hour . . . And to be honest, I have no one to play chess with either.’” (Haig, 2020, p. 269)

After Nora got out from the Midnight Library and managed to stay alive in her actual life, she stayed in the hospital and got rehabilitation for her health. She reconciled with her brother, Joe, who then told her about his problems all the time. Nora also received a text from her only best friend, Izzy, which made her felt the joy of living after experience enough journey to be able to feel a new perspective. After she was feeling better, she decided to visit Mrs. Elm. She felt the need to spend time with Mrs. Elm as she found the other life that Mrs. Elm had gone early. The superego that was shown in the quotation

above is where she willingly to spare her time to accompany the lonely Mrs. Elm to play chess. Even though she has not secured a job for her living, she still chose to be with Mrs. Elm, wanting to give her a good memory, and trying to repay her for what Mrs. Elm done for her back in her school life.

### **Conclusion**

The analysis of Nora's personality in the novel of "The Midnight Library" had resulted on the findings by using Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis on human psyche. Based on the theory, human psyche consisted of the id, ego, and superego. From the analysis above, it can be concluded that Nora's personality had dominated the aspect of superego, even though the id and ego had dominated her for a few times. The id that appeared in Nora's personality was at the start of the novel, when she was feeling depressed over her life with 4 data, and the ego appeared in the middle of her trying to satisfy her id with 3 data. As the story went on, Nora experienced a lot of her life possibilities which made her able think about the values of life. It caused the superego aspect inside her to dominate more than the other aspects with 5 data, which the superego Nora had shown in the novel reflected to ideal standard of society's moral and rules.

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