

LIFE AND DEATH FANTASY IN MATT HAIG'S *THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY*

Vatina Sinda^{1*}, Hasbi Assiddiqi², Agry Pramita³

^{1,2,3}Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia

*Corresponding email address: vatinasindaa@gmail.com

Abstract

This study discusses the fantasy of life and death desire in Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* (2020). The aim of this research is: To find out what fantasy of life and death desire that represent id, ego, and superego of Matt Haig in *The Midnight Library*. This study uses a psychoanalysis approach, which is used to analyze the fantasy of life and death desire that can representative the id, ego, and superego of Matt Haig as an author regarding to life and death desire. The result of this study show the id is dominant among the ego and superego. prominently features id symbols, indicating a profound exploration of primal desires, instincts, and the unconscious mind, particularly evident in main character's arc. These id symbols, serve to unveil author's innermost wishes and untamed impulses, suspending societal norms and reality's constraints. Through id- driven narratives, readers witness Nora's pursuit of immediate gratification, navigating alternate lives driven solely by desires, devoid of moral judgment. Additionally, ego symbols reflect author's attempts to negotiate reality, while superego symbols embody societal ideals and moral judgments that conflict with author's id-driven desires.

Keywords: Fantasy, Psychoanalysis, Matt Haig, Novel, Life and death.

INTRODUCTION

Life and death desire in psychoanalysis refers to the use of symbols to represent unconscious thoughts, desires, and emotions. According to psychoanalytic theory (Ewen, 2003), the unconscious mind is the primary source of human behavior, and it is often expressed through symbols that are not immediately recognizable to the conscious mind. These symbols can take many forms, such as dreams, fantasies, and creative works of art. Psychoanalytic theorists believe that symbols are a way for the unconscious mind to communicate with the conscious mind, and that by analyzing these symbols, we can gain insight into the underlying psychological processes that shape human behavior. Symbolism is also seen as a way for the mind to cope with anxiety and other negative emotions, by transforming them into more manageable forms (Lurato, 2016).

Psychoanalysis in literature is an approach to literary analysis that interprets hidden meanings in literary texts using the principles of psychoanalysis. According to Brooks this methodology is founded upon the premise that literary compositions embody the author's subconscious thoughts and aspirations in addition to being narratives

(Brooks, 2014). Through the examination of a literary piece's characters, symbols, and themes, psychoanalytic literary critics attempt to discern the underlying unconscious motivations and conflicts. In addition according to Niaz et al. they analyze the author's life and literary contributions for supporting proof that may illuminate the text's meaning (Niaz et al., 2019). The application of psychoanalysis to the interpretation of dramatic, poetic, and fictional works has influenced the evolution of literary theory.

Recognizing the importance of this subject, the researcher wants to embark on a scholarly exploration, diving deeply into the dense artwork of symbolism throughout the themes of desire, life, and death. The researcher being an intrepid explorer exploring new territory, attempts to unveil the layers of meaning that are hidden inside the symbolism of literary works, the researcher hoping to find the profound insights that lie under in the novel *The Midnight Library*. This study used previous studies that were used as literature review for this research. The previous study namely research from Salsabilla entitled "The Main Character's Anxiety And Defense Mechanism In Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library*" (Salsabilla, 2023). The Previous study has been chosen because the study has the same object as what researcher analysis in this study. This thesis analyzing topic of anxiety that happened in the main character of the novel Nora Seed, describe about what kind of anxiety such as Neurotic, Realistic, and Moral that are carried out by the main character while taking some actions.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Fantasy and psychoanalysis are both concepts used to analyze and interpret various aspects of human behavior, thought, and culture but they come from different intellectual traditions and have different focuses. According to Petocz in his book "Freud, psychoanalysis and symbolism" mentioned that psychoanalytic theory suggests that symbols often emerge from the unconscious mind, serving as expressions of hidden desires, fears, and conflicts (Petocz, 1999). For instance according to Hollan a recurring symbol in a person's dreams may reflect unresolved psychological issues or repressed emotions bubbling up from the unconscious (Hollan, 2003).

In this novel the finding of the symbolism of id, ego, and superego of the author was conducted in a various form, in the id symbol there is six symbol, the symbol is *The Midnight Library*, Book, Bedford, Voltaire, Hugo Lefevre and Olympic Swimmer. In the ego form there is 5 symbol the symbol is Mrs. Elm, Tree, Cheesboard, Tatto and Watch. The last the superego form there is 4 symbol the symbol is Bear, The labyrinth band, Dog rescue, and Engagement Ring. Futhermore Petroz (1999) has written about how the interconnection between the tripartite mind Sigmund Freud and symbolism. According to Thaker, the id associated with symbol often reflects raw, primal instincts and impulses (Thaker, 2022). Also in the term of ego Leonita et al. argue the ego related to symbol that often reflect themes of negotiation, balance, and rational decision-making (Leonita et al., 2021). Otherwise according to Wurmser, the superego associated with the symbol that often reflects themes of morality, judgment, and aspiration towards perfection

(Wurmser, 2004). Symbols like figures of authority, celestial imagery, or symbols of purity may represent the superego's influence.

The first symbol of id is *The Midnight Library* that the researcher discovered a relevant example in the first set quotes in the novel of *Midnight Library* aligns with Hossain explanation that id is primal urges and desires often find expression in the realm of fantasy (Hossain, 2017). The quotes is from page 47 that the quotes was suggests when individuals grapple with the desire for life and death, they find themselves at a crossroads in the word of "now," represented as midnight, where all potential lives are open to them. *The Midnight Library* offers individuals the chance to sample different lives and experiences, mirroring the id's impulsivity and pursuit of pleasure. In addition according to Bruno et al. even though a person is in a coma and appears unconscious, their brain may still be active to some extent (Bruno et al., 2018). There could be random firing of neurons or even some level of consciousness that is not externally observable. This activity might generate experiences that feel vivid and real to the person in the coma.

The second symbol that representative the id of the Matt Haig is Book, regarding to the page 39-40, it is said that book represents a different version of the protagonist's life, showcasing the multitude of choices and possibilities available to her, caused of this multitude of choices life the feeling of life and death desire are abstract regarding to what kind of life was experiencing by Nora in this novel. Additionally according to Muñoz-Seca & Riverola that alternate lives can be seen as manifestations of the protagonist's subconscious desires and impulses, reflecting the id's primal urges for gratification and fulfillment (Muñoz-Seca & Riverola, 2009). The books in *The Midnight Library* offer Nora the opportunity to explore her deepest desires and fantasies. According to Arlow, by delving into these alternate lives, human confronts her unfulfilled wishes, dreams, and aspirations, tapping into the hidden recesses of her subconscious mind where the id resides (Arlow, 2008).

Bedford was the third symbol that representative the id of the Matt Haig, as portrayed in the quotes from page 44, the Bedford as a place where the protagonist Nora feels stagnant and unfulfilled. Matt Haig's portrayal Bedford as a symbol of confinement and limitation resonates with the id and refers to big desire of death more than life desire, which represents primal desires and impulses. In the context of depression, according to Cole, the id may be overshadowed by feelings of despair and hopelessness, making it difficult for individuals to access their innate desires for freedom and self-expression (Cole, 1989).

The symbol of Nora's Cat Voltaire was the fourth symbol that representative the id of matt haig. In the page 15 there is shown the scene about how Voltaire's serene and peaceful expression, contrasted with Nora's own experiences of pain and turmoil, symbolizes the allure of escape from suffering. Nora may envy Voltaire's apparent freedom from pain, longing for a similar sense of peace and tranquility in her own life. This could be interpreted as a subconscious desire to escape from the struggles and challenges that every people who experience depression faces, including their struggles

with depression.

In *The Midnight Library* novel, Hugo can indeed be interpreted as a fifth symbol representation of the id of Matt Haig, as well as a broader representation of the human experience of suffering and depression. In the quote that we can read at the page 134 Hugo was the symbolism of the thing that Matt Haig wants to tell to his reader that not only Nora (Matt Haig) who experienced this suffering but also there is another one, there is someone who also experienced this suffering that is Hugo who represent another people who also have the same disease that is depression.

The symbolism of olympic swimmer indeed offers insight into the sixth symbolism of the id, particularly in the context of life desires and regrets experienced by individuals, such as the protagonist Nora Seed. This quote below suggests that Nora's decision to quit swimming has led to feelings of regret and disappointment. In the quote that we can read in page 94 the quote hints according to Kim et al. the individuals with depression often grapple with strained relationships and feelings of guilt or shame for perceived failures or shortcoming (Kim et al., 2011). The Matt Haig embodiment towards this situation was the Nora's acknowledgment of her father's love and her desire to reconcile with him reflects, Hamer et al. argue that the id's instinctual drive for connection and belonging, as well as the universal human desire for forgiveness and reconciliation (Hamer et al., 2013).

Otherwise the term "ego" typically refers to the part of the human psyche that is responsible for a person's sense of self-identity and self-awareness. The first symbol that can representative this explanation was the symbol Mrs. Elm that in *The Midnight Library* novel the librarian, can indeed be seen as a symbolic of representation of the ego and its role in navigating the desires related to life and death. In the quote that conducted in page 69 Mrs. Elm's reassurance to Nora about her cat's passing reflects this balancing act. She helps Nora reconcile her guilt about her perceived failure as a cat owner (a concern rooted in the super ego's moral standards) with the understanding that her cat's actions were natural and not a reflection of Nora's shortcomings.

Mrs. Elm's role as a librarian, guiding Nora through the midnight library, can be interpreted as a metaphor for the ego's function of navigating the external world. Just as Mrs. Elm helps Nora explore different versions of her life, Bando argue that the ego helps individuals navigate through the complexities and challenges of reality (Bando, 2018). By offering insights and perspectives, Mrs. Elm assists Nora in understanding her experiences and choices, ultimately leading to personal growth and self-awareness.

The second symbol of the ego Matt Haig was the tree, the quote that provided from page 107 highlights several key aspects of the symbolism of the tree and its connection to the ego. The branches branching off in often opposing directions illustrate the complexity of life and the multitude of possibilities that exist. This complexity mirrors the conflicting desires and impulses that individuals must navigate through their ego. The ego must balance these conflicting demands while striving for coherence and fulfillment. The tree serves as a powerful metaphor for the complexity of life and the myriad choices

individuals face. Through the symbolism of the tree, Matt Haig explores themes of destiny, regret, and the search for meaning, inviting readers to contemplate their own life journeys and the role of the ego in shaping their experiences and perspective.

The chessboard game was the third symbol of Matt Haig's ego, The passage that provided from page 64 is about how Mrs. Elm act of playing chess against herself reflects Nora's internal struggle with her own shadow self, which represents her doubts, fears, and regrets. Similarly, Nora must confront her inner conflicts and navigate the complexities of her own psyche to find a path forward in her life. Same as what chess players align their moves with their overall strategy to achieve victory, individuals with depression can use their ego to align their actions with their goals and values in life and cultivate self awareness an introspection. This involves setting clear objectives and identifying the steps needed to attain them. By focusing on activities and pursuits that resonate with their aspirations and principles, individuals can cultivate a sense of purpose and direction, helping to alleviate feelings of hopelessness and despair.

The tattoo in *The Midnight Library* novel with the quote "All good things are wild and free" serves as a fourth symbolic representation of the ego's role in balancing life and death desires, as well as providing a benchmark for awakening from the depths of depression. The moment when Nora notices the tattoo on her forearm and is momentarily distracted from her depressive thoughts signifies a shift in her consciousness. The tattoo serves as a catalyst for awakening, prompting Nora to pause and reflect on its meaning. In this sense, the tattoo acts as a benchmark for awakening from the grip of depression, providing a moment of clarity and insight amidst the darkness.

The serves as the last symbol that represent the ego of Matt Haig was the symbol of watch. As portrayed in the novel, Matt Haigs was often associated with new beginnings and fresh starts. Similarly, individuals with depression can use their ego to recognize the significance of pivotal moments in their lives and seize opportunities for change and growth. The watch, in novel *The Midnight Library* page 31 particularly with its digital display showing midnight (00:00:00), represents the relentless passage of time. Time is a fundamental aspect of life, and the constant ticking of the watch serves as a reminder of the finite nature of existence. The digital display of the watch at midnight prompts Nora to engage in existential reflection, contemplating the meaning and purpose of her life. This moment serves as a catalyst for Nora's journey of self-discovery and introspection, as she grapples with questions of identity, regret, and the nature of existence.

Within *The Midnight Library*, time operates differently than in the physical world. Time is depicted as unlimited or even non-linear, allowing individuals to revisit moments from their past and explore potential futures. In *The Midnight Library*, there is a sense of the eternal present, where past, present, and future converge. The concept of timeless in *The Midnight Library* novel represents freedom from the mortal constraints of life and death.

While ego was the mainly important part as a middle between conscious and

unconscious mind, the superego is a concept in Freudian psychoanalytic theory that represents the moral and ethical component of the mind. The superego's primary function is to regulate behavior, ensuring that individuals conform to societal norms and moral values. The first symbol that have the same definition with this was Bear.

The bear represents the looming threat of death that Nora faces. Its presence symbolizes mortality and the fear of the unknown, reminding Nora of the finality and inevitability of death. The encounter between the bear and Nora in page 127 was triggers Nora's instinctual desire for self-preservation, highlighting her natural inclination to avoid death and cling to life. According to Freud, the superego functions on the basis of moral principles and aims to govern behavior in accordance with societal norms and moral values. When faced with death, Nora's immediate response to safeguard herself not only demonstrates her basic survival instincts but also reveals the impact of her superego, which drives her to follow society's mandate of preserving life and preventing harm.

The second symbol was the labyrinth band, that the labyrinth band can indeed be interpreted as illustrating the consequences of not adhering to societal norms and moral values, as influenced by the superego. The quote that implies in page 169 shown the protagonist's actions were influenced by the discovery of the manager's betrayal, leading to consequences such as termination. This suggests a form of social sanction or accountability for wrongdoing, reflecting societal norms and moral values upheld by the superego. The protagonist's response to the manager's actions demonstrates a desire for justice and integrity, reflecting the superego's influence in regulating behavior and ensuring adherence to moral principles.

The quote from page 171 that telling about the member's death in the Labyrinth Band due to an overdose can indeed be interpreted as illustrating the consequences of not adhering to societal norms and moral values, as influenced by the superego. The member's death due to an overdose serves as a consequence of disregarding social norms and succumbing to destructive behaviors.

The act of participating in a dog rescue reflects as the third symbol of the superego's Matt Haig. The dog rescue conducted the qualities such as compassion, empathy, and altruism. In many societies, rescuing animals is seen as a morally commendable action, aligning with the superego's emphasis on moral values and ethical behavior. The quote from page 185 shown the Nora's satisfaction with their behavior in the dog rescue scenario. Nora feels affirmed and validated by the positive feedback received from others, suggesting that acts of kindness contribute to a positive self-image and sense of self-worth. As mentioned by Flett et al. this sense of validation reinforces the superego's influence, as adherence to moral values and altruistic behavior are rewarded with feelings of comfort and fulfillment (Flett et al., 2014).

The engagement ring that provided in the novel *The Midnight Library* was the last symbol of superego's Matt Haig. In many societies, marriage is often considered a significant milestone and a societal norm. According to Scott the engagement ring

symbolizes commitment, partnership, and the fulfillment of traditional expectations regarding relationships and family life (Scott, 2000). In page 49 there is quote that telling about Nora wearing her old sapphire engagement ring, along with a simple silver wedding band, this explanation suggests a continuation of societal norms and values associated with marriage.

The superego, as proposed by Freud, represents the internalized moral standards and societal norms that influence behavior and decision-making. In the context of Nora wearing her engagement ring, the superego's influence can be seen in her adherence to societal expectations regarding marriage. The act of wearing the ring reflects Nora's acceptance of these norms and her desire to conform to social conventions.

Both in his personal journey and in his writing, Haig reflects on questions of meaning, purpose, and fulfillment. His exploration of life and death desires often revolves around characters seeking answers to existential questions and grappling with their place in the world. This quest for meaning resonates with Haig's own search for understanding and reconciliation in the face of depression and mental illness.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion that the researcher find in this researchers that the presence of id symbols is dominant in the novel *The Midnight Library*, This prevalence indicates a significant focus on the primal desires, instincts, and the unconscious mind of the characters, particularly reflecting their deepest fears, desires, and the raw essence of human nature. This dominance indicates a narrative focus on the characters' deep-seated fears, desires, and the fundamental motivations that drive their actions and decisions, particularly those of the protagonist, Nora.

The id symbols in the novel, such as *The Midnight Library* itself, Book, Bedford, Voltaire, Hugo Lefevre, and the Olympic Swimmer, function to illustrate the innermost desires and the untamed, instinctual parts of Nora's psyche. They represent the raw, unfiltered essence of her wishes and regrets, providing a space where societal norms and the constraints of reality are momentarily suspended. The id operates on the pleasure principle, seeking immediate gratification without considering the consequences. In the context of the novel, these symbols allow the readers to explore various lives she could have lived, driven by the id's desire to achieve satisfaction and fulfillment without the mediating influence of reason or moral judgment.

Ego symbols, such as Mrs. Elm, the tree, chessboard, watch, and tattoo, serve to represent reality's negotiation within the narrative. The ego, operating on the reality principle, tries to satisfy the id's demands in socially acceptable ways. It mediates between the desires of the id, the demands of the superego, and the external world's constraints. In "*The Midnight Library*," these symbols reflect Nora's attempts to find balance, make decisions, and navigate her path through life's complexities, symbolizing her search for identity, meaning, and a sense of belonging in the world.

Superego symbols, like the engagement ring, the labyrinths, dog rescue, and bear, embody the moral compass and societal rules that guide behavior. The superego strives for perfection, governing the sense of right and wrong and imposing moral judgments. In the novel, these symbols reflect the ideals, the shoulds and oughts that Nora feels pressured by, and her struggle with guilt, obligations, and societal expectations. They represent the internalized societal norms and the ideals she strives to live up to, often causing conflict with her id's desires and ego's mediating efforts.

Conclusion is not just data repetition but presents the essence of interpretation. It can be a statement about expectations as stated in the introduction, ultimately based on the findings and discussions.

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