

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* (2020) follows the story of the main character, Nora Seed, a woman who is struggling with life full of depression from a very young age. Her entire life, she has been figuratively in a state of denial about the miserable past that eventually leads her to suicide. Just as she attempts to end her life, instead of death, she somehow ends up in a library where every book is a life that she could have lived if she had made different choices. The book is not only about the paths not taken, but it also reflects that she is always avoiding the situations and confrontations that she has experienced. Therefore, Nora's journey in the Midnight Library can also be seen as a psychological journey in which she is forced to confront the painful realities she has long avoided.

Given that the story revolves around Nora's emotional state, denial becomes an interesting research topic to understand Nora Seed's inner conflicts. This psychological condition can be understood through the concept of defense mechanisms, especially denial, which appears as Nora's way of protecting herself from emotional pain. Denial is noted to be an early and normal defense mechanism by which the ego withdraws itself from pain, and looking at this tendency offers an interesting lens through which to analyze Nora's psychological distress. A defense mechanism, according to Cramer (1991), is a system in the human mind that works to reduce the stress level by dealing with painful thoughts outside one's consciousness that are caused by mental conflicts (p. 3).

This tendency to avoid emotional suffering can be further understood through Anna Freud's explanation of denial as a defense mechanism. Denial often appears when an individual's relation to reality is severely disturbed (Anna Freud, 1966, p. 60). The denial theme is very powerful and strongly felt in the daily lives of a large number of people. People, in general, would withdraw from the issues concerned with the hope of lowering the tension or to avoid defeat, even though such strategies rarely provide a real resolution. Eecke (2006) states that individuals may hide behind a mask of denial in order to avoid confronting painful truths (p. 102). Although this mechanism temporarily protects the ego, it may also delay personal change if it is not eventually confronted.

When this concept is applied to literature, the denial theme in *The Midnight Library* becomes significant because it reflects both Nora's personal struggle and the common human tendency to avoid painful truths. Through Nora's experiences, the novel illustrates how denial shapes the way individuals perceive their past and respond to their life circumstances. Nora continuously imagines that different choices would have led her to a better life, which shows her difficulty in accepting her present condition. Therefore, denial becomes an important psychological aspect in understanding Nora's emotional struggle throughout the novel.

To support the analysis, this research thesis is theoretically supported by the use of Anna Freud's (1966) *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* concept of defense mechanisms, particularly the concept of denial. In addition, the narrative elements of the novel are analyzed through character and characterization, setting, and conflict with the use of Richard Taylor's *Understanding the Elements of Literature*.

These theories are important because Nora's psychological condition is not only revealed through her thoughts and actions but also through the narrative elements that shape the story. Therefore, the combination of psychological and literary approaches helps explain how denial is reflected in Nora's experiences throughout the novel.

Through Nora's journey, the novel illustrates the dual role of denial through Nora's experiences as both a source of psychological distress and a barrier that must be faced for personal transformation. However, as Nora gradually confronts the painful realities she has long avoided, denial slowly shifts into self-awareness and acceptance. In this sense, the novel emphasizes that emotional growth can only happen when an individual is willing to face reality rather than escape from it. In sum, this research thesis will explore the characteristics, causes, and impacts of denial reflected by Nora Seed in *The Midnight Library*.

## **1.2 Research Question**

Based on the background of the study, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What are the characteristics of Nora Seed's denial in Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* (2020)?
2. What are the underlying causes of Nora Seed's denial in Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* (2020)?
3. How does Nora Seed's denial impact her journey in Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* (2020)?

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study will focus on three aspects:

1. To know the characteristics of Nora Seed's denial in Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* (2020).
2. To know the underlying causes of Nora Seed's denial in Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* (2020).
3. To analyze how Nora Seed's denial impacts her journey in Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* (2020).

### **1.4 Scope of the Study**

This thesis will investigate the narrative and extrinsic elements related to Nora Seed in *The Midnight Library*. The narrative elements include Nora's character and characterization, setting, and conflict in the novel by applying Richard Taylor's *Understanding the Elements of Literature*. On the extrinsic side, the analysis will examine the characteristics, causes, and impacts of Nora Seed's denial. This research will employ a psychological approach supported by literary research. The central theory of this analysis is Anna Freud's (1966) *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*, particularly the idea of denial as a defense mechanism. Therefore, this study focuses on explaining how Nora Seed's denial appears throughout the story and how it influences the way she copes with her emotional struggles.

## 1.5 Previous Studies

Several previous studies related to *The Midnight Library* and psychological analysis have been conducted by other researchers. In this research thesis, there are eleven previous studies that discuss various topics, such as defense mechanisms, existential crises, depression, regret, and self-discovery in the novel. Those studies contribute important discussion in understanding Nora Seed's psychological condition from different perspectives. However, most of the previous studies focus on general defense mechanisms or broader psychological issues, while specific discussions about denial as the main focus are still limited. Therefore, this thesis attempts to fill the gap by specifically analyzing Nora Seed's denial as a defense mechanism with the use of Anna Freud's theory.

The first previous study is the work of an undergraduate student, *The Main Character's Anxiety and Defense Mechanism in Matt Haig's The Midnight Library* by Salsabilla (2023). It focuses on the behavioral features of types of anxiety, treated with Freud's psychoanalytic theory, and the study depicts the environmental factors, conflicts, and disappointments that cause them. Besides that, it moves further to discuss Nora's defense mechanisms, like suppression, projection, and rationalization, using Anna Freud as the source of explanation on how these particular ways could be giving emotional difficulties to Nora in the plot.

The second previous study is the national journal article entitled *Self-Acceptance of the Main Character in Matt Haig's Midnight Library* by Mutiara Putri, Ni Made Widisanti S., and Shita Dewi Ratih P. (2023). This paper tells the protagonist's fight for self-acceptance and how their mental health improves as a

result. The writer used qualitative descriptive analysis and Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory to demonstrate that self-acceptance has a significant impact on an individual's life. The results show that the main character's acceptance of self through a review of the past and acceptance of the past, allowing her to let go and continue her life in a positive way, is the journey depicted in the novel.

The third previous study is an undergraduate thesis entitled *Self-Efficacy Development of Nora Seed in The Midnight Library by Matt Haig*, by Inka Zahwa Sabrina (2022). This study investigates Nora Seed's self-efficacy development using a qualitative method and new criticism, with a focus on her behaviors before and after this transformation. The findings show notable behavioral changes linked to three primary sources of self-efficacy, which helped Nora move from desperation toward a more empowered approach to decision-making.

The fourth previous study is an undergraduate thesis called *Nora Seed's Self-Discovery in Matt Haig's The Midnight Library* by Isabella Ayu Melania Maindoka (2022). It examines the self-discovery journey of Nora, analyzes her characterization, and deals with the psychological side of her change. Through the application of new criticism and Freud's personality ideas, the study uncovers the character of Nora as a person who was indecisive and socially withdrawn, but at the same time, she came to recognize her own value and abilities.

The fifth previous study is by Ulfah Drifiliani Kusumaningrum (2021), an undergraduate thesis titled *The Depression of Nora Seed as Reflected in Matt Haig's The Midnight Library*. This study analyses the dejection of Nora Seed through the

analytical framework of the psychoanalytic ideas of Aaron Beck and Brad Alford. The thesis examines indications of depression through an analysis of Nora Seed's behaviour and characteristics, as well as the examination of the different ways that Nora had been coping with her depression, ultimately concluding that Death is not a valid answer for resolving depression.

The sixth previous study is national journal article entitled *Emotional Void and Childhood Trauma: A Freudian Psychoanalysis Criticism on Matt Haig's The Midnight Library* by Dini Amalia Sharfina Prastyadi and Moses Glorino Rumambo Pandin (2024). Exploring the connection between childhood trauma and adult emotional regulation, this study argues that early experiences significantly shape later behavior and emotions. The use of Freudian psychoanalytic theory to analyze intrinsic elements such as plot, characters, and conflict, showing how childhood trauma is reflected in the novel's protagonist.

The seventh previous study is the national journal article *The Influence of Society in Committing Suicide in The Midnight Library Novel* by Matt Haig, by Novi Fatati Syihamun Nahdiyah. This research also investigates how social factors contribute to Nora's choice to commit suicide rather than viewing the act as an outcome that results solely from an individual's psychological issues. By utilizing Emile Durkheim's theory of suicide, this research identifies two main sets of social influences on Nora's suicide: egoistic influences and fatalistic influences.

The eighth previous study is the international journal article *Philosophical Exploration of Existentialism and Absurdism in Matt Haig's The Midnight Library*

by Muhammad Rehan and Gul E Zahra (2021). This paper examines the themes of existentialism and absurdism in *The Midnight Library*, employs qualitative methodology and purposive sampling, utilizing Albert Camus' theories as a framework. The findings indicate that both existentialist and absurdist elements are intricately woven into the narrative.

The ninth previous study is by Rayhan Rafian and Delvi Wahyuni's (2024), an undergraduate essay called *The Return of The Repressed in The Midnight Library* (2020) by Matt Haig. This work follows Freud's psychoanalytic principles to examine selected quotes from the novel that illustrate character attributes, character development, story structure, and plot points. It is ultimately revealed that Nora has repressed emotions related to her anxiety, dreams, and other aspects of her life. The finding asserts that Nora eventually resolves the oppressive emotions she has been experiencing by accepting her past.

The tenth previous study is a master's thesis by Hana Mikaeili (2023) titled *A Jungian Reading of The Midnight Library: Individuation Theory and Literary Criticism*. By applying Carl Jung's theory of individuation, this research investigates the psychological journey of Nora Seed in terms of her active imagination, the role of complex systems, and the use of archetypes. All of these factors influence the way that Nora is addressing her feelings of regret and identity while in limbo between the planes of life and death. The thesis concludes that Nora accepts her true self. It provides insight into mental health issues and adds to Jungian literary criticism.

The eleventh previous study is an undergraduate thesis by Nur Rohmatus Sa'adah (2023) entitled *The Grammatical Cohesion Found in 'The Midnight Library' Novel Written by Matt Haig*. This study employs Halliday and Hasan's theory to examine how grammatical cohesion: reference, substitution, conjunction, and ellipsis, creates coherence within the novel's dialogues. The findings highlight the predominance of certain cohesive devices and emphasize their role in enhancing readability, comprehension, and the delivery of the novel's life messages.

The similarity to all the previous studies above is the use of the same object, which is Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* (2020). Most of the previous studies explore the theme of depression, anxiety, traumatize childhood, repression, existentialism, or self-acceptance, mainly using Freudian psychoanalysis, sociological perspectives, and Jungian criticism. Nevertheless, this research thesis differs from the previous studies above in its focus on denial as the main theme of Nora Seed's psychological struggle. By applying Anna Freud's work, this thesis attempts to provide a more focused discussion on the characteristics, causes, and impacts of Nora Seed's denial, which have not been specifically discussed in previous studies.

## **1.6 Writing Organization**

To organize the study, the writer structures the study into five sections.

## **CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION**

This chapter contains six sub-chapters, which are the background of the study, the research question, the purpose of the study, the scope of the study, previous studies, and the writing organization.

## **CHAPTER II THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This chapter consists of the theories and methods that will be used to analyze the novel, which are narrative and extrinsic elements. The narrative elements consist of character and characterization, setting, and conflict. Meanwhile, the extrinsic elements consist of the theory of defense mechanisms, particularly the concept of denial. Moreover, the methods of the research are the research approach and the method of data collection.

## **CHAPTER III RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter presents the analysis of the narrative and extrinsic elements of *The Midnight Library* by applying the theories discussed in the previous chapter.

## **CHAPTER IV CONCLUSION**

This chapter gives a summary of the results based on the discussion presented in the previous chapters.

## **REFERENCES**

This section lists all sources cited throughout the study. The references are presented according to the American Psychological Association (APA) 7th edition citation style.