

CHAPTER III

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Narrative Discussion of the Research

This section presents the results and discussion of the narrative elements in *The Midnight Library* (2020). The discussion focuses on how character and characterization, setting, and conflict are key in determining the development of the narrative and thematic components.

3.1.1 Character and Characterization

This section focuses on Nora Seed as the novel's round protagonist and examines how her characterization is constructed through narrative techniques.

3.1.1.1 Nora Seed as the Round Main Character

Nora Seed is the main character of *The Midnight Library*, who has experienced many problems since childhood. These experiences make her feel dissatisfied with her life and burdened by regret. As these feelings continue to accumulate, they eventually lead her to attempt suicide and enter the Midnight Library. However, through the various experiences she encounters there, Nora gradually develops from an indecisive and withdrawn person into someone who begins to recognize her own worth, marking her development as a round character.

This development can be seen through Nora's gradual re-evaluation of the regrets that have shaped her perception of herself. A major turning point is when Nora understands that she had been a good owner of her cat, Voltaire, contrary to her constantly blaming herself for her death. This realization is reflected when "she

saw one of her very last regrets – ‘I was bad at looking after Voltaire’ – slowly disappear from the page. The letters faded like retreating strangers in a fog” (Haig, 2020, p. 67). This represents the dissolution of self-blame that she encounters as she gains new understanding from the alternate life in the Midnight Library, where Nora kept Voltaire indoors but still dies due to illness rather than an accident.

Nora’s re-evaluation of regret continues throughout her journey in the Midnight Library. At first, Nora Seed is described as a woman who is overwhelmed with regret and despair, but as the story progresses, she becomes self-aware and accepts who she truly is, as in “She didn’t want to die. And she didn’t want to live any other life than the one that was hers” (Haig, 2020, p. 269). The quotation marks a significant turning point, as Nora no longer views her life solely through the lens of regret and missed opportunities.

This realization demonstrates Nora’s development as a round character. Her recognition of her actual life is a sign of her emotional growth, as she goes back to her history without denying it. Acceptance of her reality symbolizes the union of self-awareness and self-acceptance, which becomes the culmination of her character development. Through Nora’s transformation, Haig suggests that genuine happiness comes not from living an ideal life, but from accepting oneself and one’s reality. Therefore, Nora’s journey not only illustrates character development but also highlights the human capacity to grow through suffering and self-understanding.

3.1.1.2 The Characterization of Nora through Narrative Technique

Matt Haig primarily uses indirect characterization in order to point out that Nora Seed is a self-reflective and emotionally complex individual. Haig usually illustrates her inner condition through narrative description of her thoughts and reactions. Because of this technique, readers are allowed and invited to infer Nora's personality from how she responds to problems. By focusing more on Nora's internal reflection rather than her external actions, Haig allows readers to sense the emotional burden she carries, making her struggle with regret and self-doubt feel more understandable.

“Nora shook her head quickly, like a dog shaking off water. She didn't want to be confronted with that long interminable list of mistakes and wrong turns again. She was depressed enough. And besides, she knew her regrets. Regrets don't leave. They weren't mosquito bites. They itch for ever.” (Haig, 2020, p. 85)

The quotation above shows that Nora's personality is expressed indirectly through narrative description. The moment when Mrs. Elm encourages Nora to open her “Book of Regrets,” Nora responds quickly by shaking her head, indicating her resistance to confronting the painful memories of her past decisions. Instead of explicitly saying that Nora avoids her past, the narration allows readers to infer her emotional struggle through her reaction and internal thoughts. Her confession that regrets do not leave indicates a certain knowledge that they last forever. Through this narrative technique, Haig indirectly portrays Nora as a character who is deeply burdened by regret and who finds it difficult to face the painful realities of her past.

3.1.2 Setting

The setting in *The Midnight Library* is conveyed through both the setting of place and time. By combining these two as a foundation, the following analysis will create different levels of narrative understanding.

3.1.2.1 Setting of Place

The setting of place reflects Nora Seed's inner life and her path of self-discovery in *The Midnight Library*. The Midnight Library is a kind of in-between space, a metaphysical space that is between life and death, reality and imagination, as in "This library is called the Midnight Library, because every new life on offer here begins now" (Haig, 2020, p. 38). The quotation exemplifies the library as a source of new life and change. Portrayed as an infinite cosmos spanned with becomes a physical manifestation of her regrets, desires, and unrealized choices. Through this setting, Haig connects the character's inner turmoil to the outward world, which can reflect the emotional change and growth happening inside.

A contrasting setting of place can be seen in the hospital, where Nora returns after her time in the Midnight Library. The text suggests this when it says, "She was inside and sitting in a hospital bed" (Haig, 2020, p. 275), a line that is said when Nora wakes up after being in a life-threatening situation. Since the hospital is an element of the real world, it stands in sharp contrast with the boundless and intangible realm of the Midnight Library and thus serves to highlight the transition from fantasy to reality. The contrast between these two settings emphasizes Nora's movement from imagined possibilities toward acceptance of her actual life.

The hospital also symbolizes Nora's inner psychological growth and her journey to her real and true life. Sitting in a hospital bed reflects a metaphor for vulnerability and survival, which can also be inferred as Nora deciding to face her reality rather than imagined possibilities. By this setting, Haig shows Nora's emotional growth as she refuses to escape her pain like she always does and instead embraces it as a necessary part of her life for growth. Therefore, the hospital becomes a narrative closure that the greatest healing is found not by avoiding and denying problems, but in the acceptance of the life we actually have.

3.1.2.2 Setting of Time

The setting of time plays an important role in *The Midnight Library* as it connects Nora Seed's emotional condition with the progression of the narrative. The novel begins with a distinct time reference, placing her emotional breakdown right into a modern world that is characterized by isolation and emotional exhaustion. This can be seen in the statement, "Twenty-seven hours before she decided to die, Nora Seed sat on her dilapidated sofa scrolling through other people's happy lives" (Haig, 2020, p. 5). Through this setting of time, Haig portrays Nora's depression as an immediate and urgent crisis while grounding her experience in a contemporary context familiar to modern readers.

The phrase "twenty-seven hours before she decided to die" emphasizes the closeness of Nora's crisis; her depression is localized within a pressing timeline that reflects her psychological urgency. Time functions not only as a chronological marker but also as a reflection of her emotional state. The scrolling through "other people's happy lives" is, perhaps, the most up-to-date symbol of difference, a silent

moment that discloses how time in the modern world can still be but a kind of frozen or empty. The contrast of time and perception adds to one of the themes in the novel by showing how time can change from a sense of lost hope and despair to new hope when Nora faces her own internal world.

Another function of setting time appears near the end of the novel when Nora returns to reality. This function of time is evident in the quotation, “00:03:48. And that is when she allowed herself to collapse, forwards and with considerable velocity, right onto Mr Banerjee’s doormat” (Haig, 2020, p. 273). This change in time emphasizes Nora’s status as being neither fully alive nor dead and implies that her adventure in the Midnight Library occurs beyond normal time boundaries. The clock, suddenly ticking again, stands for her going back to life and her getting in touch with reality once more. By fixing down to a specific second, Haig draws attention to how delicate and desperate Nora is. He argues that survival and destruction are only a blink of an eye apart. Therefore, the setting of time reflects Nora's changing mental state by showing how time contributes to her movement from feelings of despair to acceptance of her situation.

3.1.3 Conflict

Conflicts are divided into internal and external types, which are analyzed to show their role in shaping the narrative and the psychological development of the protagonist.

3.1.3.1 Internal Conflict

In *The Midnight Library*, an internal conflict is what makes Nora Seed's character and her journey the most significant. Haig describes Nora as a person who is caught in her feelings of failure and sorrow for herself, and is not able to make peace with her past because of her abysmal struggle with it. Her brain becomes a battle zone where opposing armies, hatred, and acceptance of oneself, fight with each other nonstop. "There were continual, background regrets, which repeated on multiple pages" (Haig, 2020, p. 34), revealed in the novel as the continual torment of what if questions, which is a reflection of her self-forgiveness deficit. This sentence is an example of the internal conflict that Nora was having.

The regret repeated many times conveys that she was going over in her head the past choices she made again and again, thereby her real conflict being with her own mind. She has developed a psychological cycle in which she continually blames herself and uses every recollection or memory to connect her past failures together. This quote exemplifies Nora's inner conflict, being the main contributor to her being stuck, as she does not discover motivation until she has addressed and accepted the past. By this depiction, Haig employs the internal conflict as a means not only to disclose Nora's emotional depth but also to signal the shared human condition with despair and self-forgiveness.

Another form of Nora's internal conflict can be seen in her persistent feeling of stagnation. Through her journey in the Midnight Library, she struggles with the belief that she is fundamentally incapable of changing her life. Although she is given opportunities to experience different versions of herself through alternate

realities, those experiences do not immediately free her from her insecurities and regrets. Instead, they force her to confront the possibility that the source of her unhappiness lies not in her circumstances but in her perception of herself.

“‘Maybe I got stuck. Maybe in every life, I am stuck. I mean, maybe that’s just who I am. A starfish in every life is still a starfish. There isn’t a life where a starfish is a professor of aerospace engineering. And maybe there isn’t a life where I’m not stuck.’” (Haig, 2020, p. 84)

The quotation above illustrates how the biggest challenge facing Nora is that she perceives herself as lacking the ability to change. Through exploring the alternate realities, however, instead of finding relief from her despair, they ultimately create new regrets and subsequently adds to the burden she bears from feeling stuck. This is the reason why Nora is unable to get a sense of purpose or happiness. Haig, through this portrayal, conveys the message that real change cannot result from alterations of the outer world only, but it needs self-acceptance and the readiness to face one’s inner conflict directly.

3.1.3.2 External Conflict

One of the external conflicts experienced by Nora Seed is her fight of ideas and beliefs against the people she meets, and in particular, against her fiancé, Dan. This uncovers the reality that if one wants to be accepted or loved, one has to set aside one’s own personal goals. Therefore, Nora readily adapts to Dan’s world, and this is merely a manifestation of how deeply she craved to be loved and accepted, to the extent of losing her uniqueness. But this return to herself only makes her more alienated and a victim of her own emptiness, as in “‘Sorry, Nora. But that’s your dream. It’s not mine.’....she’d tried to make his dream of a pub in the

Oxfordshire countryside become her dream as well” (Haig, 2020, p. 55). The quotation highlights the gap between Nora's inner desires and the expectations imposed by her relationship. Through this conflict, Haig illustrates how Nora's search for acceptance contributes to her feelings of disappointment, loneliness, and emotional instability.

External conflict is also evident in Nora's relationship with her father during her childhood, particularly through the expectations placed upon her as a talented swimmer. One of the reasons for her father's happiness was her success in swimming, as she showed the potential to compete in the Olympics and was being trained for it. As depicted in the novel, “It was one of the few things that had made him happy,” Nora reflects, adding that she “had associated swimming with her father's approval and enjoyed the wordlessness of being in the water because it was the opposite of her parents screaming at each other” (Haig, 2020, p. 85). The quotation suggests that swimming functioned not only as an activity but also as a way for Nora to gain affection and escape family tension.

Her father's approval almost acts like an unspoken demand that puts so much pressure on Nora, with the result that her self-esteem gets tied to achievements rather than the core of her identity. Therefore, swimming becomes a metaphor for both pleasure and a load of emotions, such as a place where the silence of the water overcomes the noise of the family, and also, where love becomes a matter of condition. Haig uses this situation to explain how external conflicts, especially those related to family, not only determine but also intensify the

character's inner troubles and lead to reflection as well as self-rejection, resulting in the character carrying despair.

3.2 Extrinsic Discussion of the Research

This section discusses the extrinsic elements of *The Midnight Library* through a psychological perspective. The analysis focuses on Nora Seed's denial as a defense mechanism by examining its characteristics, causes, and impacts throughout the novel. By applying Anna Freud's theory, this section aims to explain how Nora responds to emotional distress and how denial influences her perception of herself and her reality.

3.2.1 Nora Seed's Characteristics of Denial

This section explains how Nora characterizes denial as a psychological defense mechanism from being exposed to anxiety, emotional distress, and unpleasant realities.

3.2.1.1 Refusal to Acknowledge Painful Realities

The ego's refusal to acknowledge reality is, in fact, its most contradictory feature, given the very function it has of recognizing and evaluating the outside world. Denial occurs when the ego refuses to acknowledge painful realities in order to maintain psychological balance. Response to reality becoming extremely sad or threatening, so the ego rejects it to maintain its emotional balance. Therefore, denial is considered to be a temporary escape and not a solution, as it is incapable of providing real interaction with the emotional side of oneself.

Nora demonstrates this form of denial by refusing to openly acknowledge the emotional pain she is experiencing. Rather than confronting her grief and deteriorating mental condition, she attempts to present herself as emotionally stable in front of others. This tendency becomes apparent after the death of her cat, when she interacts with Neil, her employer at String Theory. Although her suffering is evident to those around her, Nora chooses to minimize her struggles and avoid discussing them honestly.

“‘I’m feeling much better, generally,’ she lied.

‘And I know you’ve got mental-health stuff.’

‘Everyone’s got mental-health stuff.’

‘You know what I mean. ’” (Haig, 2020, p. 9)

The quotation above shows the characteristics of Nora's denial that shows how scared she is to reveal that she is a fragile emotional person to others. Nora, knowing her recent loss and her emotional instability, keeps saying that she is a much better person, thereby downplaying her pain and pointing out how denial is used as a psychological shield functioning only momentarily. By attempting to persuade others that she is fine, however, inside, she is really quite lost and full of despair. Therefore, denial causes Nora to store more and more of her feelings, which in turn makes her depressive state even more severe.

Refusal to acknowledge painful realities is also evident in Nora's experience when she enters an alternate life in which she is married to Dan, a life she has long idealized as the source of her deepest regret. Nora reflects, “This was the life she had been in mourning for. This was the life she had beaten herself up for not living. This was the timeline she thought she had regretted not existing” (Haig, 2020, p.

56). The quotation illustrates how Nora initially clings to disbelief that this alternate life would be free from pain.

Even though she is married to Dan, Nora discovers that the life she once idealized is far from perfect. She finds that Dan neglects her emotionally and is unfaithful, making out with other women while excusing his behavior by claiming that he is drunk. The experience challenges the idealized image that Nora has constructed in her mind and exposes her reliance on denial as a coping mechanism. Rather than accepting that some of her regrets are based on unrealistic expectations, Nora initially struggles to acknowledge the flaws within the life she had long considered her greatest missed opportunity. Through this revelation, Haig demonstrates that denial can distort an individual's perception of reality by encouraging them to romanticize the past while overlooking its painful truths.

Denial is also reflected in Nora's relationship with her best friend, Izzy. Nora's denial becomes evident when she encounters an alternate life in which she remains close to Izzy and is still active as a successful member of The Labyrinths. This moment is marked by her questioning reaction, as stated in the novel, "Why was she still friends with Izzy in this life and not in her root life?" (Haig, 2020, p. 163). The quotation reveals Nora's difficulty in accepting the painful reality that her friendship with Izzy has ended in her real life.

Nora's brief hesitation and confused answer show that she is in denial about the painful truth that her friendship with Izzy is over in her roots life. Instead of immediately acknowledging this loss, she figuratively 'holds' herself between two

realities, giving the alternate life room to be a psychological shelter. This denial allows her to maintain her balance even for a while by not dealing with the feelings of regret that still linger after the breakup of their friendship. While it helps her for a while, it turns out the denial is an internal prison for Nora because it does not allow her to grow, as it keeps her in a state of indecision.

3.2.1.2 Denial Enacted through Words and Acts

Nora Seed in *The Midnight Library* demonstrates denial not only through her thoughts but also through her words. When confronted with questions about her life and choices, she often responds with exaggerated and self-condemning statements rather than addressing her feelings realistically. Such a move is in line with Anna Freud's theory that denial can be shown outwardly through speech and activities, especially when even a little acknowledgment inside is too much to bear: "Did you do anything wrong?" That was an easy one. 'Yes. Absolutely everything.'" (Haig, 2020: 32). The quotation illustrates how Nora transforms her emotional struggle into a verbal expression of denial.

Nora changes her refusal to a verbal act with this quote, where she uses overgeneralization to avoid dealing with the real side of her feelings. She distorts reality into an extreme and simplified version by saying that she has done absolutely everything wrong; thus, her denial dramatizes or reverses the truth, which is in line with Freud's idea. Haig brings this scene to light to show how Nora's words serve as her shield, protecting her from facing the depth of her hurts, and at the same time, they help her to maintain her general feeling of sorrow.

Denial enacted through words is evident when Nora encounters an alternative life in which she desires to have a child, as reflected in her utterance, “We’re trying for a baby? I want a baby?” (Haig, 2020: 54). Her disbelief is expressed through the repetition and questioning tone of her response, revealing her difficulty in accepting a reality that differs significantly from her understanding of herself. Rather than calmly accepting the information, Nora immediately verbalizes her surprise, turning her denial into a visible expression through speech. The quotation demonstrates how denial may be enacted outwardly when an individual encounters a reality that contradicts their existing beliefs and self-perception. Through Nora’s reaction, Haig illustrates that denial is not limited to rejecting painful experiences but can also emerge when confronting unfamiliar possibilities that challenge one’s sense of identity. Consequently, Nora’s words become a reflection of her inner struggle to reconcile different versions of herself.

Denial may also be manifested through subtle expressions, particularly through an individual’s choice of words and interpretation of events rather than through direct rejection of reality. This tendency is evident when Nora encounters a version of life that challenges her assumptions about her brother. Reflecting on his behavior, she states, “It might have been money, but her brother had never been particularly money-motivated” (Haig, 2020: 103). The quotation shows Nora’s attempt to explain away a reality that conflicts with her existing perception of her brother.

Through her wording, Nora appears reluctant to accept that her brother may have changed in ways she did not expect. Instead of fully acknowledging the

possibility, she searches for alternative explanations that align more closely with her previous beliefs. Such a response demonstrates how denial can be enacted through language, as the ego seeks to reduce emotional discomfort by reinterpreting reality rather than confronting it directly. Although this mechanism provides temporary emotional protection, it also prevents Nora from fully accepting change and understanding the complexities of her relationships. Consequently, her denial continues to hinder her emotional growth and self-awareness.

Denial enacted through words is also evident when Nora states, “Well, I still think my actual life isn’t worth living. In fact, this experience has just managed to confirm that” (Haig, 2020: 155). Although Nora previously demonstrated a strong survival instinct when she attempted to escape death during the bear attack in her alternate life, she continues to verbally insist on her desire to die. This contradiction is an example of denial through words, as her conscious rejection of life is at odds with her natural desire to live. Nora, by ignoring the survival response in her body, is in effect denying the value of her life and is thereby reinforcing her negative self-image. Through this, Haig shows how denial keeps the protagonist locked in her internal struggle and prevents her from facing and accepting her feelings.

3.2.2 Causes Shaping Nora Seed’s Denial

Nora Seed’s denial does not appear random but is caused by several psychological pressures related to her personal experiences and emotional condition.

3.2.2.1 Internal Instinctual Pressure

Internal instinctual pressure is the force within a person that is usually associated with feelings of guilt, shame, or self-blame that threaten the person's self-esteem. Nora Seed's struggle is a fine example of how denial is used as a defense when anxiety of a very personal kind becomes too much. The most difficult self-judgment, extreme disappointment, and fear of failure in her mind were the reasons for the emotional pressure that her ego could not accept. Nora, by making up her mind that her life was a mistake, managed to evade the confrontation with the deeper wounds, as in "After the wine a realisation hit her with total clarity. She wasn't made for this life. Every move had been a mistake, every decision a disaster, every day a retreat from who she'd imagined she'd be" (Haig, 2020, p. 21), which were the cause of her collapse into despair. This quotation illustrates how Nora's overwhelming internal pressure relates to her use of denial.

Nora's statement reflects not a rational evaluation of her life but a defensive reaction to the emotional burden she carries. By describing every choice as a mistake and every decision as a disaster, she reduces her experiences to an entirely negative perspective. Instead of acknowledging both successes and failures, she denies the complexity of her circumstances and focuses only on perceived shortcomings. Consequently, denial enables her to avoid confronting the deeper insecurities and fears that underlie her emotional distress.

As noted in the previous discussion, Nora's denial is closely related to her overwhelming feelings of guilt, regret, and perceived failure. These emotions create intense psychological pressure that her ego struggles to manage. As a result, denial

emerges as a defense mechanism that allows her to avoid confronting the emotional pain associated with her past choices. As noted in Nora's suicide letter, there's clearly an inner battle between the two: "I had all the chances to make something of my life, and I blew every one of them" (Haig, 2020, p. 23). The quotation illustrates how Nora's internal instinctual pressure is rooted in an extreme and unbalanced evaluation of her life.

By characterizing her past only as that of lost opportunities, Nora ignores the complexity of her experiences and the chances for seeing her life differently. Her natural urge to avoid emotional pain makes her hide from herself any sense of value, personal development, or untapped potential. Instead, denial encourages her to focus exclusively on failure, reinforcing her negative self-perception. Consequently, denial turns into a mental reaction to inner conflicts more than to external situations; thus, Nora's misery deepens, and she feels like engaging in self-destructive thoughts.

As a continuation of this internal pressure, facing negative emotions directly would result in a severe psychological breakdown from unfulfilled desires and continuous feelings of personal inadequacy. Instead of confronting these emotions, the mind shifts its focus toward constant self-criticism, allowing the painful reality to remain unacknowledged. This tendency reflects the ego's attempt to protect itself from overwhelming emotional pain. Consequently, the internal pressure gradually develops into a mental state in which denial becomes a means of avoiding the full recognition of loss and failure.

“The regrets which were on permanent repeat in her mind. I haven’t become an Olympic swimmer. I haven’t become a glaciologist. I haven’t become Dan’s wife....And now, last of all, she hadn’t even managed to become dead. It was pathetic really, the amount of possibilities she had squandered.” (Haig, 2020, p. 30)

The quotation above depicts how Nora’s internal instinctual pressure breaks out in an obsession with herself revolving around what she has not become. Her identity is almost completely constructed through absence and negation, as she defines herself by lost possibilities rather than by her actual experiences. The repetition of regret suggests a compulsive mental cycle, indicating that Nora is unable to process disappointment in a healthy manner. As a result, the conflict between her unfulfilled desires and her inability to accept limitations continues to intensify, sustaining the denial that remains deeply rooted in her mind.

3.2.2.2 External Overwhelming Reality

External overwhelming reality occurs when painful experiences from the outside world become too difficult for the ego to bear. In such situations, individuals may unconsciously rely on denial to protect themselves from emotional distress. Nora’s understanding of marriage is a good example of this response: “And she got carried away with his enthusiasm. Got engaged. But suddenly she had realised she did not want to marry him. Deep down, she was scared of becoming her mother. She didn’t want to replicate her parents’ marriage” (Haig, 2020, p. 36). The quotation suggests that Nora’s fear is shaped not only by her relationship with Dan but also by her observations of her parents’ marriage.

At first, her engagement is more of conformity to the expectations of society rather than a willingness on her side. The anxiety of “becoming her mother” is the

confession of deep-rooted fear from the family, which Nora tries to get rid of by distancing herself from the concept of marriage. Instead of facing this fear, she chooses to deny the depth of her feelings and escapes the commitment by using rejection as a way of her own protection. Consequently, denial becomes a way for her to avoid dealing with an external reality that she finds emotionally overwhelming.

Nora's reaction to the idea of her wedding with Dan is also an example of external overwhelming reality. As she does not perceive it as a symbol of commitment but rather as a sign of inner turmoil. This feeling of being overwhelmed by psychological stress is expressed in the statement, "The wedding seemed such a symptom of this chaotic feeling" (Haig, 2020, p. 37). The external overwhelming reality makes her emotional storms even more potent, instead of giving her a sense of security or understanding.

At the time Nora cancels her wedding, she uses denial as her way of coping with the external reality, which she cannot understand or accept. She is almost treating the idea of the wedding like an unstoppable and relentless force in nature; she sees withdrawal as her only means of regaining power and control over the situation. By rejecting the wedding, she is, in fact, totally unconscious of facing the root of her fear of commitment, her dissatisfaction, and her uncertainty about the future. The denial is to guide the new crisis since it only postpones the self-analysis and makes the victim role more appealing when stress is experienced.

External overwhelming reality frequently emerges in situations involving loss, permanent change, or circumstances beyond an individual's control, as acknowledging such realities may intensify feelings of sadness and hopelessness. This condition is evident in Nora's reaction when she realizes that changing her life does not alter the death of Volts, as expressed in the quotation, "That's even worse! You sent me into that life knowing Volts would be dead. And Volts was dead. So, nothing changed" (Haig, 2020, p. 66). Her strong emotional response reveals her difficulty in accepting an external reality that cannot be reversed, regardless of the choices made in alternative lives. Nora focuses on the fact that Voltaire still dies, rather than recognizing that some losses remain beyond human control. In doing so, she denies the painful truth that certain events cannot be changed, even within the endless possibilities offered by the Midnight Library. Therefore, her denial functions as a defense mechanism against the reality of irreversible loss, while simultaneously prolonging her frustration and emotional distress.

3.2.3 The Impacts of Nora Seed's Denial

The impact of denial is categorized into three aspects of Nora Seed's psychological development throughout the novel. As a defense mechanism, denial produces both positive and negative impacts on the ego. Therefore, this section discusses how denial impacts the character from this perspective.

3.2.3.1 Temporary Relief from Anxiety and Unpleasure

One of the impacts of denial is its ability to provide temporary relief from anxiety and emotional discomfort. Denial that continues into adulthood serves as a source of is a psychological shortcut that provides a small but powerful break from

situations that are too much emotionally by refusing to recognize or by changing the interpretation of the upsetting facts. Hence, relief is only temporary because the underlying problems remain unresolved. This condition can be seen in Nora's experiences throughout the *Midnight Library*, where the alternative lives function as imagined solutions to her dissatisfaction. Although these lives appear to offer comfort, they fail to eliminate the emotional struggles that continue to burden her.

“‘So,’ wondered Mrs Elm, looking at Nora. ‘What are you feeling?’ ‘Like I still want to die. I have wanted to die for quite a while. I have carefully calculated that the pain of me living as the bloody disaster that is myself is greater than the pain anyone else will feel if I were to die. In fact, I’m sure it would be a relief.’” (Haig, 2020, p. 62)

The quotation above is after Nora went on an alternate life in which she keeps a relationship with Dan, a life she thought would have made her happy. Nevertheless, her suicidal thoughts were not being satisfied by the failure of that supposed perfection, which points out the limitations of denial as a way of handling the situation. Denial is typically a short-term form of escape, but at the same time, by sustaining the denial of their feelings, it leads to an increase in the belief that happiness does not exist at all. Haig therefore shows how this delay of emotional healing from emotional trauma will keep Nora trapped in her cycle of hopelessness by continuing to avoid confronting her true underlying emotional state.

Temporary relief from anxiety and displeasure can be inferred from a few details of her attempt to find psychological comfort through her mind. Nora gets a momentary getaway from her real dissatisfaction with life. The line, “As she sang, she felt alive. Even more alive than she had felt swimming in her Olympic-champion body” (Haig, 2020, p. 162), captures the idea that the mentally fabricated

life gives a greatly enhanced feeling of being full of life and satisfaction. As a consequence, denial emerges as a mechanism of short-term self-help whose function is to reduce the tension inside the person by substituting real life with a more satisfying one.

The short-term relief, however, does not solve Nora's deep-seated psychological problem at all. The sensation of being alive is not a sign of genuine recovery, but rather the use of denial as an emotional pain covering mechanism. Rather than face the real reasons she is unhappy with her current life, Nora spends time in an idealized fantasy world that allows her to maintain her pattern of avoiding her reality. Through the continued use of denial, she experiences false feelings of happiness that ultimately prevent her from being able to develop emotionally. Although it may decrease anxiety at the time, this temporary relief from anxiety may, in fact, further develop her dependence upon the false reality of her fantasy, thereby continuing to prevent her from dealing with the real issue of her emotional pain.

A similar impact can be seen when Nora temporarily finds comfort in an alternative life that appears to fulfill all her desires. It is seen in the case of Nora when she is fantasizing about a different life, marrying Ash, and having a child, Molly. Life seems so nice that it could hardly be lacking in anything. However, deep down, Nora knows that it is a fabricated world: "I was carbon-copied into the perfect life. But it wasn't me" (Haig, 2020, p. 265). The sentence suggests that, although life meets the societal definition of happiness, it is lacking in genuineness as it was not the outcome of her own intentional choices.

Nora's denial is therefore not a simple refusal of pain but also a feature of her trying to lead a life that looks perfect on the outside. Although the alternative life provides temporary relief from anxiety and dissatisfaction, it ultimately fails to resolve her deeper sense of emptiness. The gap between outward perfection and her genuine identity makes her realize that borrowed happiness cannot provide lasting fulfillment. Through this experience, Nora develops greater self-awareness and begins to understand that denial cannot permanently protect her from reality.

3.2.3.2 Distortion of Reality

Distortion of reality, in which an individual perceives situations through emotional pain rather than objective understanding. Nora is so overwhelmed by regret that she begins to view her life entirely from the perspective of failure and sorrow, as reflected in the quotation: "As she stared now at the magazine cover – an image of a black hole – she realised that's what she was. A black hole. A dying star, collapsing in on itself" (Haig, 2020, p. 13). The quotation illustrates how Nora no longer separates her temporary emotional suffering from her actual identity. Instead of recognizing her despair as a passing condition, she defines herself completely through feelings of emptiness and hopelessness. Her comparison of herself to a black hole suggests that her perception has become dominated by negative emotions rather than an objective evaluation of her circumstances. Consequently, denial distorts Nora's sense of reality by transforming emotional pain into what appears to her as a permanent and absolute truth.

Distortion of reality is also visible when Nora's grip on reality gets so mixed up at the height of her emotional crisis that she can hardly tell what is real and what

is not. This behavior is shown in the line, “‘I miss you,’ she said into the air, as if the spirits of every person she’d loved were in the room with her” (Haig, 2020, p. 22), which is right before Nora's suicide attempt. At this point, her feeling of being present is no longer based on reality but is rather influenced by her deep emotional desire, thus signifying her retreat from the real world as a mode of psychological defense. The quotation demonstrates how denial encourages Nora to distort reality by imagining the presence of her deceased loved ones. Through this reaction, Nora momentarily replaces the painful reality of loss with an imagined sense of connection and comfort.

She fills the emptiness in her mind with the presence of the people she imagines so that, for a while, she can escape loneliness and the pain of her emotional wounds. Nora creates a fantasy that functions as a temporary relief from her suffering and despair. This form of denial provides emotional comfort, but at the same time, it increases the distance between her perception and reality. Consequently, her refusal to accept her actual situation prevents her from fully understanding her condition and finding a genuine way to cope with her emotional struggles.

Additionally, this impact is evident in Nora's recognition of a life that runs counter to her deeply rooted concept of loss. This occurs when she first steps into a world where her father has not died, which, in turn, breaks her previous emotional reconciliation with the loss of her father. The quotation, “‘She could hardly speak. Or breathe. She didn’t know what to say. Everything felt unreal. It was like time travel. As though she had fallen through two decades” (Haig, 2020, p. 95), is a

depiction of the very moment of psychological trauma of Nora when she identifies her father's voice in a reality that is strange to her. The quotation illustrates how the sudden confrontation with an alternative version of the past overwhelms her sense of reality.

Her reaction to realizing that her father is alive demonstrates denial at work when she becomes emotionally overwhelmed by the situation. Her being frozen and forgetting who she is are signs of an ego response that postpones the full realization of the situation. Thus, it is still possible for her to escape momentarily the confrontation with the loss that has not been resolved. By this depiction, Haigwha reveals that denial is the first line of defense of the psyche, but keeps in the foreground the struggle of Nora in coming to terms with the past grief and the present changed state.

3.2.3.3 Potential for Transformation through Insight

Nora's voyage is an allegory of transformation, which becomes possible when she begins to confront the realities she has long denied. Rather than fleeing to alternative existences, she dealt with the heartbreak and regret that had been her reason for vanishing. Haig employs this change of direction to demonstrate how acceptance is the way to mental healing: "She didn't want to die. And she didn't want to live any other life than the one that was hers" (Haig, 2020, p. 269). The quotation marks a turning point in Nora's journey, showing her movement from defensive denial toward genuine understanding and acceptance of her life.

Her recognition of her flawed reality, despite its imperfections, signals the return of feelings that had previously been pushed aside. This transformation closely reflects Anna Freud's idea that growth becomes possible when denial is no longer needed as a defense against emotional pain. By choosing the life that is truly hers, Nora achieves a greater sense of emotional balance and self-awareness. Consequently, denial no longer functions as a means of escape but becomes a stage in her journey toward self-acceptance and inner strength.

Within the impact of denial, one important outcome is the potential for transformation through insight. Nora's experiences in the Midnight Library gradually challenge her belief that success and fulfillment are defined by external achievements. This realization is reflected in Haig's statement, "When really success isn't something you measure, and life isn't a race you can win" (Haig, 2020, p. 112). During her TED Talk performance, Nora becomes aware that public recognition and professional success do not guarantee inner satisfaction, marking a shift in her understanding of what gives life meaning.

The realization during her TED Talk performance shows denial as a protective mechanism at first, but later allows insight and personal growth. The fact that Nora had been in denial, coming from dissatisfaction, pushed her to try different versions of success, but her journey through the Midnight Library reveals the shortcomings of such illusions. During the TED Talk, her recognition is a pinpoint where denial begins to fade away, and her acceptance of life appears. Because of that, Nora realizes that growth is from acceptance of her own life decision, not from comparison or competition. So, denial in this situation is not

simply avoidance, but a phase that permits Nora's psychological change and emotional maturity.

Nora's denial starts to weaken when she is in the Arctic, where she lives an alternate life as a glaciologist. It becomes a pivotal moment that she suppressed before toward her parents comes into consciousness. As stated in the novel, "She had loved her parents more than she ever knew, and right then, she forgave them completely" (Haig, 2020, p. 138). The remote setting makes Nora confront the true emotion that she had long denied, shifting from psychological defense toward insight. This realization is like a breakthrough and shows that transformation through insight is one of the possible results of denial.

One of the ways Nora has been denying is by suppressing the emotional impact of her family's high expectations. That life always ends up disappointing her is a way of her denying, without being conscious, the hurt she has received from the pressure to succeed, not the failure itself. Nora sees her parents' dissatisfaction not as a result of their children's lack of achievements but rather of their having set the bar too high for them. This discovery is a major moment in which denial, previously used as a means of escape, allows one to be more in harmony with oneself.

Finally, after deleting her suicidal social media post, Nora writes "A Thing I Have Learned," stating, "But do I want to live? Yes. Yes. A thousand times, yes" (Haig, 2020, p. 278). The quotation marks a significant turning point in Nora's psychological journey. At first, her denial functioned as a strategy to keep herself

emotionally separated from the regret and despair that overwhelmed her almost to suffocation. However, such escapism only caused her feelings to become increasingly trapped in a cycle of hopelessness and emotional stagnation.

Through reflection and self-understanding, denial gradually transforms into acceptance and enables Nora to regain control of her life. When she says that she wants to live, it does not mean that her distress has completely disappeared. Rather, it indicates her willingness to continue living despite the difficulties she still faces. In this way, Haig depicts denial not only as a protective wall but also as a psychological mechanism that, once confronted and understood, can lead to personal growth and renewed purpose. The change highlights insight as the key factor that allows denial to shift from merely protecting the self to helping the individual achieve greater self-awareness.