

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background of the Research

Since it was published in 2020, the novel entitled *The Midnight Library* has been receiving a positive responses from the public. This novel won the Goodreads Choice Award for Best Fiction and got second place in the Amazon Chart This Week in the same year. Gramedia, a major publisher in Indonesia, commented that the story of the novel was interesting, full of meaningful messages, and was written beautifully (Nandy, 2022). Penguin Random House also added two comments from two newspapers about the novel; *The Washington Post* also commented that *The Midnight Library* was "a feel-good book guaranteed to lift your spirits", while the *Daily Mail* responded that the novel was "a brilliant premise and great fun". Matt Haig himself is well-known as the British author of both fiction and nonfiction books for children and adults. Besides *The Midnight Library*, he also writes several books, such as *Reason to Stay Alive*, *The Humans*, *How to Stop Time*, *Dead Fathers Club*, and *The Forest Shadow*.

*The Midnight Library* narrates about a 35-year-old single woman named Nora Seed with an education background in a philosophy. In this novel, Nora idolized an American philosopher named Henry David Thoreau and always cited his words. During her life, Nora felt a failure in everything. In her teenage years she was an accomplished swimming athlete who was predicted to win the Olympics. However, she quit because she felt that it was not her dream but her father's. Then she studied philosophy on her campus, but instead of learning it seriously, she worked as an

employee in a music instrument store and as a private piano teacher. She also failed to get married since she felt uncertain that she could live in marriage. On the day her cat was dead, she was also fired from her job, both as an employee and as a piano teacher. Even her neighbor, an Indian descendant who always asked her for help taking his medicine, did not need her anymore. These in-between events made her depressed, and she decided to commit suicide. However, she did not fully die. In her agony, she was cast into a place called the midnight library. There she met her high school librarian, Mrs. Elm. Through the books containing her life in different versions, Nora was given a chance to choose, went through the possibilities of her life, and decided which was best for her. When she finally found her dream life, she realized that she had to return to her original life in order to have that life.

Nora's life as the main character in this novel is a depiction of the life of society today. Every human being experiences changes in life, regardless of whether it is good or bad. The responses received also vary, some accept it with an open heart, some are afraid and hesitant. This is due to anxiety and uncertainty in making decisions for the future (Hasyim et al., 2024, p. 1). As a result, humans live without knowing the purpose of life and just go with the flow, even no longer having dreams and hopes. This is the reason for the writer to conduct research on the novel.

Aristotle asserts that character is the most important thing in literature, and her or his characteristics will be discovered through her or his thoughts and actions (Barry, 1995, p. 25). The person's thoughts and actions are influenced by education and experience, along with the environment. The philosophy is chosen as the educational background in the novel, which, of course, becomes the distinctive attraction to be paid attention to. According to Gibson (2018), philosophy is considered as the "study of reasoning for an opinion" (p.9). Philosophy also becomes a way to understand the

reality and human's life by studying the main ideas in their mind, to get a description based on good reasoning (Gibson, 2018, p.11).

Since the main character was a bachelor of philosophy, the quotations of the famous philosophers spread in the novel. However, the philosopher that Nora idolized was Henry David Thoreau, the American philosopher. Thoreau, who lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was strongly influenced by his mentor, Ralph Waldo Emerson, a transcendentalist philosopher (Tessitore, 1995, p. 63). Thoreau wrote many essays and poems. His writing came from his thought of living a free and harmonious life with nature, arousing an individual power and independence, and resisting the government. His famous works are *Walden, or, Life in the Woods* and *Civil Disobedience*. Thoreau did not only write his thoughts about living harmoniously with nature and being independent, but also lived that life directly. It can be seen through his book *Walden, or, Life in the Woods*, about his life and experience for two years in Walden Pond. Because of that, the experts called him a natural philosopher. In that case, Thoreau can be categorized as a Stoic philosopher, a person who takes philosophy as a daily application to achieve happiness.

In *The Midnight Library*, Haig includes a lot of philosophers' names; considering that the main character has a philosophy degree. However, the name that was most included is Henry David Thoreau. Not only was his name, his thoughts were also included in the novel. That makes the writer assume that there is an indication of Thoreau's thought that influences the novel.

## **1.2. Identification of the Problem**

Human cannot appreciate the literary works if they cannot understand the philosophical essence in it. Thoreau not only wrote down his thoughts about living in

harmony with nature and independently, but also lived the life he intended. Therefore, experts call him a natural philosopher.

In *The Midnight Library*, Nora was in a moment where she did not know how to live her life anymore; her life was completely in uncertainty. Though she had studied philosophy and idolized Henry David Thoreau, an American philosopher, she doubted the relevancy and application of his thought to the modern life. In this research, the writer takes the Thoreau's thoughts and its influences on the main character as the main focus of the research.

### 1.3. Review of the Related Study

The research on the novel *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig is conducted by many researchers with various approaches and theories. Because this novel tends to tackle the issue of mental health and suicide, many researchers discuss it with a psychological approach. Among these research articles from various journals, Pingkan Imansari, for example, writes "Nora Seed's Will to Survive in Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library*" with the *Survival Clubs* theory by Ben Sherwood in 2023. The purpose of the research is that the main character, after doing the trial commits suicide in *The Midnight Library*. This research proves that the success of the main character survived after going through a mental struggle needed endurance, perseverance, hope, purpose, love, instinct, intelligence, and empathy (Imasansari, 2023, p. 13).

There is also an article entitled "The Impact of Post-Trauma on the Personality Development in Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library*: A Psychoanalytical Study of Character". The article was written by Farhan Rozadi and published in 2022. The purpose of the research is to analyze the trauma and alienation that the main character has experienced in the past and its effects in the future (Rozadi, 2022, p. 102). In order

to do the research, the writer uses Sigmund Freud psychoanalytical theory. From the research, Rozadi (2022) proves that past trauma and alienation can affect a human's life, especially the future, and it is reflected in how they make decisions and determine their lives (p. 106).

Novi Fatati Syihamun Nahdiyah, a student from Universitas Gadjah Mada, conducted research on the novel and wrote a novel entitled "The Influence of Society in Committing Suicide in *The Midnight Library* Novel by Matt Haig". This article was published in *Lakon: Jurnal Kajian Sastra dan Budaya* in 2022. The purpose of research is to identify the social factors that affect someone's decision to commit suicide (Nahdiyah, 2022, p. 122). In order to do the research, the writer used the theory of suicide from Emile Durkheim, taken from Durkheim's book *Suicide*. Through the research, Nahdiyah (2022) found that there are two factors that affect Nora Seed's decision to commit suicide: "egoistic suicide and fatalistic suicide" (p. 129). Egoistic is related to the estrange social relationship (Nahdiyah, 2022, p. 126), while fatalistic is related to the high standard or expectation (Nahdiyah, 2022, p. 127). From these factors, the writer concluded that Nora's decision to commit suicide was because of people around her, for she cannot socialize and also cannot fulfill others' expectations.

Some researchers used a moral-philosophical approach to this novel; one of them is the collaboration between Muhammad Rehan and Gul E. Zahra. They wrote the article entitled "Philosophical Exploration of Existentialism and Absurdism in Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library*" in 2021. The purpose of the research is to explore the themes of existentialism and absurdism in *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig. The theory they used is existentialism and absurdism by Albert Camus. Existentialism is the idea that humans can decide the meaning of life by themselves based on their consciousness (Rehan & Zahra, 2021, p. 451). While absurdism is the opposite, that



life is meaningless and useless and leads to the ending of life. Their analysis discovers that existentialism and absurdism strongly fill the novel.

The next research is conducted by Narjess Jafari Langroudi, who approached the novel with a moral-philosophical approach and Nietzsche's theory in "Epiphanous Moment in a Sein-Zum-Tode Trajectory in Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library*". This research highlights the limitations of humans in life that will give them a meaningful life. According to Nietzsche (as cited in Langroudi, 2023, p. 149), a human must accept their life, and both happiness and suffering emerge. In his writing, Langroudi (2023) stated that sein-zum-tode means "near to death" (p. 156), or it can be considered the effort to commit suicide. When Nora was dying, she experienced enlightenment through living the various lives that she had chosen. In the end, she realized that her original and real life was her true happiness.

Based on previous studies, the author tries to conduct a different study on *The Midnight Library*. In this thesis, the writer will focus on the thoughts of Henry David Thoreau, an American philosopher, and the influence of these thoughts on the main character in the novel, Nora Seed. The writer also analysed how the main character applied Thoreau's thought after her adventure in the Midnight Library.

#### **1.4. Research Questions**

To analyze the novel, the writer has provided some questions to be answered:

- 1.4.1. What are Thoreau's thoughts reflected in the novel?
- 1.4.2. How are Thoreau's thoughts applied by the main character in navigating her life?

### 1.5. Scope of the Research

This research will focus to the intrinsic aspect in the novel. The intrinsic aspects that will be analyzed are the characters (especially the main characters), theme, setting, and the plot in the *The Midnight Library*.

### 1.6. Objectives of the Research

This research will focus on the influence of Henry David Thoreau's ideas on Nora Seed and how far the ideas are applied by the main character in *The Midnight Library*.

The purpose of the research is to examine the influence of Henry David Thoreau as the philosopher that Nora, the main character, uses as the role model in *The Midnight Library*. Nora was described as dissatisfied and unable accept her life. That is the reason she always felt unhappy. Her idol, Thoreau, appeals to living independence, humility, and harmony with nature. This research is aimed at discovering the reason for presenting Thoreau in the novel.

