

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Research

The Midnight Library really attracts a lot of attention from fans of fiction. The novel also become a hot topic discussion and recommendation in TikTok. The large number of fans of this novel has also resulted in its being translated into several languages, including Indonesian. Apart from the language translation of this novel, since the beginning of the novel's release there have been discussions about adapting this novel into a film which will be carried out by Blueprint and StudioCanal. Studio Canal also officially announce the production of *How To Stop Time* adaptation to TV series. *How To Stop Time* is the bestselling Haig's novel. This novel also succeed to attract the attention of literary critics and received several awards. Gabby on the Goodreads page gave her review of this novel. She said that this novel provides an interesting view of how we interpret life and our life choices. Also from Goodreads, this novel has won the Goodreads Choice Award in the Best Fiction category in 2020 and was nominated for the Audie Award for Fiction in 2021.

The Midnight library tells the life journey of a woman named Nora as the main character. Nora's life is filled with regret because she feels unable to achieve her expectations and potential. Then Nora chose to commit suicide, and finally she was trapped in 'the midnight library'. 'The midnight library' can be described as a phase before someone dies, or can be called 'between life'. Here she has the opportunity to choose the life she wants through the books available on the library shelves. Nora goes to the life she wanted to live and returns "the midnight library". This happened over and over again until he finally found the meaning of life for her.

The novel displays Nora's journey of finding herself through Nora overcoming her regret by looking back to the events and her regrets in the past and living her future alternative life. Nora's journey through many episodes of depression throughout her past life, and also her alternative future. This depressive situation becomes the main storyline in this novel for Nora to find her identity. Matt Haig, the author of this novel, raised depression as the dominant point in this book for adults who feel depressed. He is an empathetic novelist who shows the light and dark of real life to looking for happiness (self-actualization) (Kusumaningrum, 2021 p. 2)

Regret as the main issue is shown through symbolism that we can find in this novel. The symbols presented by Haig carry a meaning that can be immediately understood, and there is also a deeper meaning that gives more beauty to this novel. When Nora decides to attempt suicide, she enters a room that is later called the 'midnight library'. Haig describes well the look and what is inside this room. However, the writer in this study found something interesting about this library. This library is not an ordinary library, the writer found an ambiguity in this library. The purpose of this library is an ambiguity between a place for Nora to redeem for all her mistakes or a place for her to reflect on the meaning of life that she wants. Nora can get the chance to atone for her mistakes so far and choose the alternative life that she wants. However, until the end of the story Nora was unable to find the form of life that she wanted. Nora even realized that her real life was what she really wanted at that time.

The narrative structure of this novel also provides interesting attention for readers of this novel. The interesting thing about the structure in this novel is that Nora repeatedly enters various alternative lives. There are alternative lives that only last for hours and there are also those that last for weeks. These alternative lives come from Nora's desires in the past, but none of them meet her expectations. This repetitive pattern becomes something that helps Nora find what she wants.

The writer in the research saw many readers and other critics who focused on what happened to Nora and saw extrinsic elements in this novel. Meanwhile, the writer believes that the story presented by Matt Haig is a well-crafted work of art and full of the elements that make it up. The writer discovered the issue of regret in *The Midnight Library*. This issue is displayed in the elements that form the novel. The writer is interested in looking deeper into the formal elements in this novel. It is believed that the existence of these formal elements forms the novel *The Midnight Library*.

1.2. Identification of the Problem

The Midnight Library is a novel that has been widely discussed by other literary critics. The writer here observes that most of these critics discuss the extrinsic elements of this novel. The writer does not find a more in-depth discussion of the structure or intrinsic elements of this novel. Meanwhile, this novel has strong formal elements in building the theme of the novel. To conduct this research, the writer will discuss the formal elements of this novel. This research will examine the main elements of this novel, namely the symbolism and narrative structure. The writer believes these two elements are able to build the main theme of *The Midnight Library*. Then, these elements will be analyzed and explained according to the theory of new criticism and how these elements build the organic unity of the novel.

1.3. Review of Related Literature

The Midnight of Library tells a story about the regrets of the main character, Nora. There is a tendency to feel regret over and over as she experiences her lifetime until she gets the chance to go back to her life again. In this research, the writer seeks several sources that also discuss the topic of *The Midnight Library* and the New Criticism theory

One significant study by Rehan and Zahra (2021) in their article *Philosophical Exploration of Existentialism and Absurdism in Matt Haig's The Midnight Library* explores

existentialism and absurdism in Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library*, using Albert Camus's theories to argue that the novel reflects human efforts to find meaning amid life's inherent chaos, contrasting with absurdism's view of meaninglessness. Their qualitative analysis highlights how these philosophical elements are embedded in the text, suggesting future studies consider magical realism and psychoanalysis to broaden the interpretive scope. This work lays a foundation for understanding the novel's philosophical depth and its engagement with human agency.

Building on this, the current research adopts New Criticism to analyze *The Midnight Library*, focusing on intrinsic elements like symbolism and narrative structure. Symbolism, such as the infinite library representing alternate lives and clocks signifying time and regret, is examined to reveal insights into choice and identity. The non-linear narrative structure, with Nora Seed's journeys through parallel lives, is explored to show how it mirrors existential themes through fragmentation and unity. This approach complements Rehan and Zahra's study by emphasizing textual autonomy, offering a fresh perspective on how Haig's formal techniques reinforce the novel's exploration of self-determined meaning.

An insightful study by Pangestina and Pratiwy (2022) in an *article Regret in The Novel Nicholas Sparks The Best of Me* investigates the theme of regret in Nicholas Sparks' *The Best of Me*, employing regret theory by Zeelenberg and Pieters R. A. to analyze its impact on the protagonist, Dawson Cole. Through a qualitative approach, the research identifies two distinct types of regret within the novel, illustrating how Cole's lifelong avoidance of Amanda, coupled with his persistent feelings of inferiority and worthlessness in her presence, shaped his emotional landscape. The study reveals that this regret led Cole to suppress his true feelings, resulting in a life of solitude and singleness. This analysis provides a valuable perspective on how regret is depicted and influences the main character's decisions, offering a foundation for understanding emotional complexities in literary narratives.

This research complements the current study, which examines Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* through the lens of New Criticism, focusing on symbolism and narrative structure. While Pangestina and Pratiwy (2022) explore regret as an emotional and psychological force driving character behavior, the present research shifts to how symbolic elements—like the infinite library representing life choices—and the non-linear narrative structure reflect themes of regret and redemption in Nora Seed's journey. By analyzing these formal aspects, the study bridges the emotional insights from *The Best of Me* with Haig's structural innovations, suggesting that regret serves as a universal motif that can be interpreted through both character psychology and textual design, enriching the comparative analysis of contemporary novels.

The next relevant study of an undergraduate thesis titled *The depression of Nora Seed as reflected in Matt Haig's The Midnight Library* by Ulfah Drifiliani Kusumaningrum (2021) examines the symptoms and representation of depression experienced by the main character, Nora Seed, in *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig. This research employs a psychological approach, using the theory of depression by Aaron T. Beck and Brad A. Alford as its foundation. Through qualitative analysis of sentence structures, conversation, and narration within the novel, the study aims to identify both the manifestations of depression and how Nora confronts and navigates these symptoms throughout the narrative. The analysis focuses on internal psychological struggles reflected through Nora's behavior, thoughts, and emotional responses.

The results indicate that Nora experiences various symptoms of depression such as self-blame, guilt, worthlessness, loss of interest, emotional numbness, indecisiveness, avoidance, sleep disturbances, and hallucinations. The study also explores how Nora confronts these symptoms through introspection, interactions with others, and revisiting life choices in the

metaphorical space of the Midnight Library. Ultimately, the findings emphasize that Nora's journey is marked by a psychological shift—from perceiving herself as a failure to rediscovering meaning, hope, and the desire to live. This study serves as a significant contribution to understanding how literary texts can embody complex psychological conditions and represent pathways toward healing and acceptance.

The next previous research titled *The influence of society in committing suicide in The Midnight Library novel by Matt Haig* by Novi Fatati Syihamun Nahdiyah (2022) explores the theme of suicide in *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig through the lens of Emile Durkheim's sociological theory of suicide. Unlike the common view that attributes suicide solely to individual mental disorders, this research applies Durkheim's perspective that social factors significantly contribute to suicidal behavior. Using a descriptive analysis method, the researcher identifies how societal influences shape the protagonist Nora's decision to end her life. The study highlights Durkheim's two suicide types, egoistic and fatalistic, as particularly relevant in explaining Nora's condition.

The findings show that Nora's sense of isolation from those around her, such as family, friends, and her partner, reflects egoistic suicide, which arises when social bonds are weak. Meanwhile, fatalistic suicide is illustrated through the societal pressures and rigid expectations placed on her, which limit her sense of autonomy and increase emotional distress. The study provides valuable insight into how external social structures and a lack of meaningful personal connections can lead to suicidal thoughts, enriching the discussion on suicide in literature by expanding it beyond psychological causes to include sociological dimensions as well.

Another relevant previous study entitled *The Potrayal of Regret as Seen in Adele's Hello: A new Critic reading* by Fauziah (2017) analyzed the theme of regret in Adele's song *Hello* using the New Criticism approach. The research applied a qualitative descriptive method and used the close reading technique to examine the song's lyrics. By focusing on the intrinsic

elements of the text—such as ambiguity, paradox, irony, and tension—the study aimed to explore how regret is portrayed within the language and structure of the song. The research interpreted the lyrics objectively, without involving the author’s background or external context, in line with New Criticism principles.

The results showed that regret in *Hello* is reflected through emotional expressions such as guilt, disappointment, self-blame, and other unpleasant feelings. These emotions are interpreted as forming a psychological portrait of regret that influences not only the inner state of the speaker but also their social environment. This study demonstrates how a literary work, even in the form of song lyrics, can meaningfully express complex emotional experiences through its formal and linguistic features. The analysis serves as a useful reference for literary studies focusing on intrinsic meaning and emotional depth, especially when discussing the theme of regret in other works, such as *The Midnight Library*.

A relevant undergraduate thesis titled *Regret of Love Tony Webster Experiences in The Sense of an Ending by Julian Barnes: A New Criticism Study* (2020) by Esti Sri Wulandari explores the theme of romantic regret in the life of Tony Webster. The study analyzes how Tony, the main character, experiences regret stemming from a failed romantic relationship in his youth. By using the New Criticism approach, the research focuses on the formal elements within the novel—such as setting, conflict, symbolism, and character—to reveal how these aspects reflect Tony’s inner emotional state and the broader theme of love-based regret. The analysis also emphasizes how these elements form a unified structure that expresses the psychological burden carried by Tony throughout his life.

The study concludes that Tony Webster does not experience happiness in his old age due to unresolved emotional regrets from his past. Despite maintaining cordial relationships and appearing to live a stable life, his internal struggle remains hidden until later in life. The research finds that the regret he feels is not just tied to lost love, but also to his failure to fully

grasp the meaning of life and connection. This emotional realization, arriving unexpectedly in his later years, causes deep sorrow and a sense of meaninglessness. The thesis demonstrates how regret can shape one's perception of life and emotional fulfillment, making it a valuable contribution to the study of intrinsic literary analysis on psychological themes.

1.4. Research Questions

The writer needs to assemble several questions to conduct the research. The writer has two questions related to the topic

1. How does Matt Haig employ the symbols in *The Midnight Library*?
2. How does the narrative structure play in developing the central theme?

1.5. Scope of the Research

This study uses the New Criticism to analyze the formal elements in *The Midnight Library*. The writer focuses on the formal elements that show regret as the theme in the novel. The formal elements that will be the focus of analysis in this research are symbolism and narrative structure. The narrative structure used in this novel is a non-linear narrative structure. This structure can deliver the deeper understanding of the story to the reader. The other element that is the focus point of this research is the symbolism. This research discusses textual elements according to the focus that has been explained earlier. All elements will be reviewed with the theory of the new criticism approach.

1.6. Objectives of the Study

The objective of this research is to answer the questions mentioned in the research questions. The answer will come out in two points;

1. To describe the symbolism in *The Midnight Library* play a role in shaping the theme.

2. To describe the narrative structure that develops the central theme of *The Midnight Library*.

