

Self-Discovery and Individuation Process in Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library*

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INFO ARTIKEL

Diterima :

10 Februari 2025

Disetujui :

1 Maret 2025

Dipublikasikan :

20 Maret 2025

Abstract:

This research aims to analyze the process of self-discovery and individuation of the main character in Matt Haig's novel "The Midnight Library" using Carl Jung's analytical psychology. The background of this research is based on issues of depression, regret, and the search for the meaning of life, which are the core conflicts of the main character, Nora Seed. This research employs a context-oriented approach with close reading techniques of narrative and conversation in the novel. The results show that Nora's self-discovery process begins with awareness of her shadow, including guilt, trauma, and past regrets. This process develops into individuation as Nora accepts these aspects and integrates the conscious and unconscious parts of herself. Nora's final decision to return to living life as it is marks her success in achieving wholeness, which also improves her mental health and emotional well-being.

Abstrak:

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis proses pencarian jati diri dan individuasi tokoh utama dalam novel *The Midnight Library* karya Matt Haig, dengan menggunakan pendekatan psikologi analitik Carl Jung. Latar belakang penelitian ini berangkat dari isu depresi, penyesalan, dan pencarian makna hidup yang menjadi inti konflik karakter utama, Nora Seed. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode context-oriented approach teknik analisis teks berupa membaca secara mendalam terhadap narasi dan percakapan dalam novel. Data diklasifikasikan berdasarkan teori Jung kesadaran dan ketidaksadaran. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa proses pencarian jati diri Nora dimulai dari kesadaran akan sisi gelap, berupa rasa bersalah, trauma, dan penyesalan masa lalu. Proses ini berkembang menjadi individuasi saat Nora mulai menerima sisi-sisi tersebut, memperoleh bimbingan dari tokoh arketipal, dan mengintegrasikan aspek sadar serta tidak sadar dalam dirinya. Keputusan akhir Nora untuk kembali menjalani hidup apa adanya menandai keberhasilannya mencapai keutuhan diri, yang juga berdampak pada peningkatan kesehatan mental dan kesejahteraan emosionalnya.*

Kata Kunci:

Self-discovery,
Individuation, Matt
Haig, *The Midnight
Library*

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Adolescent mental health is a major concern in many countries due to identity crises, social media pressure, and family problems that often contribute to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. According to Nanwawi (2021), meditation can help adolescents understand themselves and form better mental health through calmness and peace of mind.

The individuation process, as stated by Suprpto (2016), helps individuals recognize themselves and achieve a balance of self-needs. Individuals who have gone through the individuation process can build a stronger foundation of mental health by controlling their emotions (Bleidorn et al., 2020). However, stressful and dysfunctional childhood experiences can have a long-term impact on a person's mental health (Negriff, 2020).

The novel *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig can be an example of how the individuation process can help individuals achieve a balance of self-needs and strengthen mental health. According to Klarer (2004), literature can provide a space for readers to connect with stories and characters relevant to their lives.

Through the analysis of this novel with Carl Jung's individuation theory, this research aims to understand the self-discovery and individuation process experienced by the character Nora Seed and how literature can be a tool for understanding the complexity of human experience (Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015). This research is expected to provide insights into the importance of self-understanding in the context of mental health.

METHOD

In actuality, psychology and literature are closely related. The scientific study of behavior and mental processes is known as psychology. Aras (2015) asserts that psychology serves solely as a prelude to the act of production and inside the actual work. Thus, the relationship between psychology and literature is that the reader may categorize certain literary issues with the aid of psychology's insights into literature. This research employs a context-oriented approach to examine the process of self-discovery and individuation of the main character, Nora Seed, in Matt Haig's novel *"The Midnight Library"*. According to Klarer (2004), contextual approaches attempt to place literary texts against the backdrop of historical, social, or political developments. This approach allows researchers to gain deeper insights into the themes and meanings of the text.

The object of this research is Matt Haig's novel *"The Midnight Library"*, which depicts life experiences and explores themes of self-discovery and individuation. The main character, Nora Seed, undergoes a journey of self-discovery through the book of life in the mysterious library, making this novel relevant to analyses of psychological theories, particularly Carl Jung's notion of individuation.

Carl Jung's psychoanalytic theory is used to analyze Nora Seed's character development and individuation process. According to Jung (1940), individuation is a psychological process in which a person endeavors to integrate their conscious and unconscious selves to achieve perfection and greater awareness of themselves. This theory is applied to examine Nora's journey towards achieving wholeness and balance in her life.

As Dewi (2019) stated that research of literary work has distinction method than the other research studies, due to in literary research the theory becomes method in conducting study. Through this research, the context-oriented approach and Carl Jung's psychoanalytic theory are used to analyze the themes of self-discovery and individuation in *"The Midnight Library"*. The researcher endeavors to find, discuss, and present the social context in accordance with modern social phenomena, and to describe the psychological conflicts that appear in the novel based on social context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the previous chapter, this part will explore Nora Seed's self-discovery and individuation process in Matt Haig's "The Midnight Library", examining how her experiences in the library shape her understanding of herself and contribute to her personal growth and self-awareness through the lens of Carl Jung's individuation theory. In analyzing this phenomenon, the researcher identified three sub-themes related to the process of self-discovery and four sub-themes related to the process of individuation.

I. A Journey Through Possibilities Toward New Perspectives

In line with the story about self-discovery is a transformative process that emerges in times of deep despair. In *The Midnight Library*, Nora Seed is a 35-year-old woman whose life is full of failures and regrets. Nora Seed thinks suicide is the right solution in her life, but when her life is on the verge of death suddenly there is a midnight library in which there are various alternative lives. From here, Nora Seed began a journey through the alternative lives of her life. This journey is not about simply experiencing another life, but describes how to understand the meaning of life starting from self-understanding, regret, fear of life and desire.

The meaning of self-discovery is a change in perspective on life, from fear of life or being trapped in life to an awareness of life so that individuals have control over their lives. Before entering *The Midnight Library*, Nora was haunted by feelings of failure in facing life because every decision she made always ended in disappointment. However, when she entered *The Midnight Library*, Nora explored a variety of alternative lives found in every book she picked up. From there, the beginning of self-awareness began when she found self-understanding that suffering arises because of the way she views life. One of the key moments that marked the beginning of her self-discovery as this evidence:

“Twenty-**seven** hours before she decided to die, Nora Seed sat on her dilapidated sofa **scrolling through other people’s happy lives**, waiting for something to happen”. (Haig, 2020:4)

The narration above describes the initial state of Nora Seed, a 35-year-old woman who feels her life is full of disappointments. In line with the phrase “**scrolling through other people’s happy lives**”, it shows that the self is based on external validation, indicating a sense of helplessness towards life. In Carl Jung's perspective, Nora's self-discovery is related to the individuation process, which is the integration of various aspects of the self to achieve wholeness.

At this stage, Nora is still trapped in a **persona** or what is commonly called a social mask which shows the state of self in a feeling of failure because it has not fulfilled the expectations of society. Carl Jung also emphasized the **shadow**, the dark side of the self that contains hidden fears and desires. Nora's interest in other people's lives and sense of hopelessness show that the self has not yet faced the shadow. After drowning in the thought that life is full of disappointment and hopelessness, Nora arrives at a pivotal moment when she enters the space between life and death, *The Midnight Library*. This is where her journey of active self-discovery begins. This is signaled by the following narrative narration:

“Between life and death there is a library. And within that library, **the shelves go on forever.**” (Haig, 2020:26)

The sentence describes an open inner space for Nora to explore the possibilities of a life that has never been lived. Based on meaning, *The Midnight Library* is a manifestation of Nora's subconscious where life begins to be accessible to various sides of the hidden self. In Carl Jung's

theory, this is part of individuation, which is the search for one's true self where one begins to realize and unite the aspects of the self, both the light (ego and consciousness) and the dark (shadow and unconsciousness).

The library in this analysis can be summed up as a symbol of a **collective unconscious** full of unrealized potential and living memory. The sentence “**the shelves go on for ever**” represents an infinite possibility or opportunity of identity and life that can be formed if one dives into oneself. At this point, Nora is no longer trapped in a social persona, but begins to actively explore herself through each book she reads and lives. While at *The Midnight Library*, Nora is introduced to the concept that all of life's regrets are stored in one place, as a reflection of the various paths not taken.

In the following conversations, Mrs. Elm not only becomes the guardian of Nora's subconscious space but also guides and encourages her to continue exploring alternative lives. In this, Mrs. Elm manifests two Jungian archetypes at once: First, she plays the role of the **Wise Old Woman**, an archetype that brings wisdom, calm, and direction to the process of individuation. As a librarian, she does not immediately give definitive answers, but rather guides Nora to find meaning through the choices she makes herself.

Second, Mrs. Elm can also be interpreted as the **Great Mother**, because she provides a safe psychological space and protects Nora from inner destruction. The role of the Great Mother is seen in the way Mrs. Elm remains present, patient, and empathetic in accompanying Nora's inner journey. Thus, Mrs. Elm is a bridge between Nora's conscious and subconscious worlds, whose role is active according to Nora's needs in the process of transformation towards self-wholeness. This strengthens Jung's idea that archetypes are not fixed figures, but psychic energies that can change function according to the individual's developmental phase.

II. Learning from Alternative Lives: The Journey of Self-Realization

Through her experiences in the library, Nora begins to learn from alternative lives and realize the importance of self-acceptance. She understands that regret and sadness lie in unresolved internal conflicts, and that accepting herself completely is the key to freedom. This journey of self-realization is reflected in her statement, “She won races in local and then national competitions, but as she reached fifteen it became too much. The daily swims, length after length after length.

‘I had to quit’.” (Haig, 2020:75)

In this statement, Nora sees herself as a successful swimming athlete, but she still feels burdened and unhappy, in line with the statement ‘**I had to quit**’ showing that even a decision that she once regretted, turned out to be the right decision for her. In the context of Jung's individuation theory, this is the phase of **integrating the shadow**. Nora's shadow contains guilt for not being able to fulfil the ambitions set by herself and her surroundings. When Nora witnesses a career-successful version of herself who is also unhappy, Nora begins to accept that self-worth cannot be measured by achievements alone.

III. Acceptance and The Final Decision

Nora's journey culminates in acceptance and a final decision to live her life with purpose and meaning. She realizes that happiness is not about achieving perfection, but about accepting and living with imperfections. This acceptance is reflected in her statement, “It is easy to mourn the lives we aren't living. But it is not the lives we regret not living that are the real problem.” (Haig, 2020:238)

In this moment of reflection, Nora realized that she had been living her life too focused on the possibilities of a life not lived as a swimmer, wife, musician or otherwise. However, Nora began to understand that the main problem was not in these alternative lives, but in the inability to accept and live the life that was being fully owned. In Carl Jung's theoretical framework, the Nora's perspective falls under ego vs self. At this stage, Nora no longer allows her ego to be controlled by regret or the desire for an idealized version of herself. Nora begins to approach the Self, which is the center of psychological wholeness according to Jung, by recognizing that accepting reality is the key to releasing suffering.

Through this reflection, Nora realized that the path to wholeness is not by wishing to be someone else, but by understanding and accepting where she is today. This thought is a transformative moment from escape to acceptance, from regret to realization, from search to self-recognition. Alternative life provides a variety of experiences and helps Nora reflect on the meaning of life's regrets and self-perception.

IV. Integrating the Shadow: Facing Past Regrets

Through her experiences in the library, Nora confronts her shadow self, facing past regrets and fears. She realizes that her shadow contains guilt for not being able to fulfill the ambitions set by herself and her surroundings. By facing her shadow, Nora begins to integrate her opposites, leading to a sense of wholeness and acceptance. "Every regret you have ever had, since the day you were born, is recorded in here". (Haig, 2020:31)

In line with the process of finding identity, in the individuation of Mrs. Elm, it is conveyed that every regret in life is recorded in the library so that Nora begins to realize how much influence regret has on the way she interprets life. The following sentences also strengthen the narrative of Nora's regrets in life,

"Regrets ignore chronology. They flat around"

"She quickly realized they ranged from the minor and quotidian ('I regret not doing any exercise today') to the substantial."

"There were continual, background regrets, which repeated on multiple pages." (Haig, 2020:31)

This list of regrets shows that Nora does not have just one or two moments that she regrets, but thousands of small and big decisions that continue to shape her mind, creating shadows of the past that are not finished. These regrets are rooted in guilt, dissatisfaction, loss, and a sense of failure, including in family relationships, career, and life choices in general.

In Jungian theory, the process of individuation begins with integrating the shadow, a hidden aspect of the self that is usually repressed or ignored. The shadow represents a person's dark side, such as regret, guilt, fear, or unacknowledged desires. In Nora's case, the library itself is a concrete representation of the subconscious where the shadow resides. Mrs. Elm's statement that "every regret is recorded here" is describe of how Nora begins to confront her own dark side. She is forced to explore and understand the regrets she has avoided, a crucial process in self-integration. When reading the books and living the alternate lives they contain, Nora not only sees what "could have been," but also begins to understand and forgive herself'. This reflects the early stages of individuation in which one acknowledges and confronts the shadows, not to erase them, but to integrate them into a more complete understanding of oneself.

V. Integrating the Self: Reconciling Shadow and True Identity

Nora's journey reflects the integration of her shadow and true identity, leading to a sense of wholeness and acceptance. She realizes that accepting herself completely is the key to freedom and happiness. This integration is reflected in her statement, "She imagined, now, what it would be like to accept herself completely. And in doing so, she imagined what it was like to be free." At a crucial point in her inner journey, Nora begins to imagine the possibility of coming to terms with herself completely. No longer trying to be the best version of herself according to other people's expectations, or living in the shadow of regret for choices not made. This imagination of self-acceptance opens up a space of psychological freedom, a point where Nora no longer fights life but makes peace with it.

This statement comes after Nora experiences various life possibilities through the library which shows that no "perfect" life can erase her inner dissatisfaction. The process slowly leads her to accept that the essence of happiness is not about which life is chosen, but how far she is able to accept who she is in that life.

According to Carl Jung, the stages of individuation involve not only confronting the shadow, but also integrating aspects of the personality into a whole and true self. In this context, Nora begins to experience the process of self-realization when she stops condemning her shortcomings and begins to accept her complexity. The imagination of self-acceptance marks the beginning of the formation of the Jungian Self, which is the center of a person's psychic integrity. In other words, Nora no longer forms an identity based on social demands or feelings of guilt, but from an awareness of who she really is.

After going through the dark phase of confronting the shadow self and starting to reunite the fragments of her identity, Nora begins to show signs of renewal. The individuation process, which was initially filled with rejection, fear, and alienation, now shifts towards integration and self-awareness. From here, Nora's transformation as a whole and free person begins to form.

VI. Transformation and Wholeness

Through her journey, Nora undergoes a transformation, achieving wholeness and acceptance. She realizes that happiness is not about achieving perfection, but about accepting and living with imperfections. This transformation is reflected in her statement, "You don't have to understand life. You just have to live it." (Haig, 2020:242)

Reaching the final stage of transformation and wholeness, in a pivotal moment like the dialogue above, Nora begins to accept the fact that life does not always have to be understood or analyzed deeply to be enjoyed. In her experience, there is a life lesson to realize that even though she does not always know what the purpose of each step in her life is, the most important thing is the courage to continue living, to feel every second of the meaning of life. In other words, life is a journey that must be lived without having to be burdened with the search for perfect meaning at every step.

In the continuation of the novel, the researcher sees how Nora begins to appreciate the daily life around her more. When she sees the houses around 33A Bancroft Avenue, she feels as if for the first time she realizes the beauty of the world around her.

"Nora looked around at all the terraced houses and all the lampposts and trees under the sky, and she felt her lungs inflate at the wonder of being there, witnessing it all as if for the first time."

Nora sees the beauty of the world that she may have previously ignored, but now experiences with wonder and gratitude. As she looks at Mr. Banerjee smiling at her with affection, Nora feels the importance of living and giving meaning to the little moments in everyday life. As shown by her small act of buying foxgloves for Mr. Banerjee, which she might have previously considered meaningless, now symbolizes a sense of connection and giving in her life. Nora begins to feel how life is precious in every step and encounter.

In the context of Jung's theory of individuation, Nora's statement represents the culmination of her psychological transformation, in which she accepts that life does not need to be understood rationally, but rather lived with full awareness and acceptance. The process of individuation is not only about understanding who we are, but also about accepting our current existence and feeling connected to the world without having to force things that are not necessary to think about.

The statement "You don't have to understand life. You just have to live it" reflects one of Jung's important stages in individuation, which is letting go of the need to control or give meaning to everything and starting to live in a more spontaneous and appreciative existence. Nora no longer seeks to "make sense" of her regretful life, but rather focuses on living and experiencing it with full awareness. This is a step towards inner balance and acceptance of oneself and the outside world.

After going through a long process of self-discovery, facing the shadow, and uniting various versions of herself, Nora Seed finally reaches a completely transformative point, namely total acceptance of herself and the life she has. The final phase in the individuation process according to Carl Jung is when a person no longer tries to escape from suffering or compares himself to other possibilities, but instead makes peace with his existential reality. This is the phase where Nora not only finds herself, but also achieves stable psychological and emotional well-being.

VII. Psychological and Emotional Well-being

Nora's journey ultimately leads to psychological and emotional well-being, as she achieves a sense of wholeness and acceptance. She realizes that accepting herself and living in the present is the key to happiness and fulfillment. This well-being is reflected in her statement, "She didn't want to die. And she didn't want to live any other life than the one that was hers. The one that could be a messy struggle, but it was her messy struggle." (Haig, 2020:231)

At the climax of the novel, Nora is no longer trapped in a vortex of regret or fantasies of alternative lives. She does not want to die, but she also no longer dreams of another life that seems more ideal. She wants to live her own life—with all its messiness, imperfections, and complexities. When she says "*it was her messy struggle*," it is not an expression of resignation, but of complete acceptance of the reality of life. Not only that, the next sentence continues related,

"The one that could be a messy struggle, but it was her messy struggle. A beautiful messy struggle. As she writhed and pushed and resisted the weight on top of her, and as the seconds ticked on, she managed – with a great exertion that burned and stifled her lungs – to get back onto her feet."

Depicting Nora's real struggle and effort to rise back to her life. The symbolism of the weight pressing down, the tightness in her chest, and her burning effort to stand back up are powerful representations of her psychological strength and will to live. She now recognizes life as "a beautiful messy struggle" a sincere recognition of the essence of human life that is imperfect, but still valuable.

In the framework of Carl Jung's analytical psychology, this is a manifestation of the full integration of ego, shadow, persona, and self. Nora finally realizes that happiness does not come from a perfect life, but from wholeness, not perfection. Nora now lives authentically, with full awareness of who she is and that life is not something to be understood absolutely but to be lived.

This phase also shows the achievement of psychological resilience. In addition, Nora also emphasized with the statement "I AM ALIVE" which shows that she has completed her psychological journey. In the framework of Jungian archetypes, it is the climax of The Hero's journey. someone who has gone through darkness, navigated inner challenges, and finally returned with a new awareness. His efforts to rise again illustrate the hero's final test not to run, but to survive.

Carl Jung stated that to achieve wholeness, one must face one's inner darkness, integrate the unconscious and then return to the outside world as a whole self. In this context, Nora has gone through various versions of life, facing regret, despair, and loss of identity. However, once she accepts that life, no matter how "messy" and painful, is still worth fighting for, she becomes her whole self again.

"Life begins, 'Sartre once wrote, 'on the other side of despair.'"

"I don't know. A bit strange. But I don't want to die any more" (Haig, 2020:237)

After all the cross-life experiences and existential struggles in *The Midnight Library*, Nora has finally reached a point where she can admit that her desire to die has faded. Although she may not fully understand or accept Sartre's quote about life beginning after despair, the statement "*But I don't want to die any more*" is a symbolic statement that she has passed the low point. There is now a desire to live starting to grow again from within herself. This is proven by the narrative,

"She was inside and sitting in a hospital bed, feeling a lot better.

"They covered medication, her mother's death, Volts, losing her job, money worries, the diagnosis of situational depression."

Showing that Nora is physically and mentally stable again. Despite facing trauma, loss, and a diagnosis of situational depression, she still shows a willingness to process. She does not deny her suffering, but she also no longer avoids it. Even when talking to health workers, Nora prefers to keep her subconscious experiences to herself as a sign that she is starting to sort out what needs to be shared and what is a development process as a form of self-control and psychological awareness.

Related to Carl Jung's theory one of the important stages in the individuation process is the integration of the shadow and the ego consciousness. The sentence "I don't want to die any more" marks Nora's integration of the dark side of herself, she no longer denies suffering and despair, but acknowledges it as part of herself. In Jungian psychology, this is called "acceptance of the shadow," where one comes to terms with the weakest part of oneself, not to erase it, but to recognize it and embrace it as part of the totality of the self.

The sentence "I don't want to die any more" shows a new urge to live that comes from within herself, not from external influences. This is a form of integration of the animus, where rational power and inner strength begin to play an active role in Nora, encouraging her to no longer be lost in emotional emptiness. She has reached a moment of deep reflection that marks the balance between emotional intuition (anima) and the power of reason and the will to live (animus).

The difference between the two is that self-discovery places more emphasis on the process of getting to know and becoming aware of aspects of oneself (including the shadow), while the individuation process is a journey to unite and harmonize all of these aspects into a whole and conscious self, ready to live life in real terms. To the readers, let Nora's story be a reminder not

to let regret, feelings of failure, or shadows of the past drown out hope. Life is not about finding the most perfect version, but about realizing that the life you have, even though it is messy, still has meaning, as long as the individual is willing to live it. Do not wait until you are on the verge of death to realize that life is worth living.

CONCLUSSION

To sum up, after analyzing the novel *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig, it indicates that Nora Seed's journey reflects the importance of self-discovery and individuation in achieving psychological and emotional well-being. Through her experiences in *The Midnight Library*, Nora confronts her shadow, integrates her opposites, and achieves a sense of wholeness and acceptance. This research shows that self-discovery and individuation are crucial in overcoming regret, fear, and despair, and in finding meaning and purpose in life.

Although this research has its limitations, it provides valuable insights into the human experience and the importance of self-awareness. Therefore, the researcher hopes that this research will inspire further research into the complexities of human psychology and the role of literature in reflecting and shaping our understanding of the human condition. The researcher suggests that future researchers should continue to explore the themes of self-discovery and individuation in literature, and to develop new and innovative approaches to analyzing these themes. By doing so, researchers can contribute to a deeper understanding of the human experience and the role of literature in promoting self-awareness and personal growth.

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