

Alan Parker's Anxiety in Stephen King's *Riding the Bullet*

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Abstract:

This study explores the anxiety experienced by the main character in Stephen King's short story *Riding the Bullet*, Alan Parker. The objective of this research is to describe the anxiety experienced by the main character using psychoanalysis theory. The researcher uses a qualitative approach, focusing on close textual analysis of key literary works. This study applied psychoanalysis theory developed by Sigmund Freud. The analysis revealed psychological insight into the character's motivation and conflicts in the literary works studied. The result of this study is the main character in Stephen King's short story Alan Parker experiences two types of anxiety, dream anxiety, and real-life anxiety.

Keywords: literature; psychoanalysis; anxiety; character; experiences

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini membahas tentang kecemasan yang dialami oleh karakter utama dalam cerita pendek karya Stephen King yang berjudul *Riding the Bullet*, Alan Parker. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mendeskripsikan kecemasan yang dialami oleh karakter utama dengan menggunakan teori psikoanalisis. Peneliti menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, dengan fokus pada analisis tekstual yang mendalam terhadap karya sastra utama. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori psikoanalisis yang dikembangkan oleh Sigmund Freud. Analisis ini mengungkapkan wawasan psikologis tentang motivasi dan konflik karakter dalam karya sastra yang diteliti. Hasil dari penelitian ini adalah karakter utama dalam cerita pendek Stephen King, Alan Parker, mengalami dua jenis kecemasan, yaitu kecemasan dalam mimpi dan kecemasan dalam kehidupan nyata.

Kata kunci: sastra; psikoanalisis; kecemasan; karakter; pengalaman

INTRODUCTION

The main character of the story "Riding the Bullet", Alan Parker, experiences anxiety in the story. People all over the world have certainly experienced anxiety whether it's when they take a long time to reply, forget to take the clothes horse, or the task is approaching the deadline. A problem then comes up is that our anxiety is increasing without knowing the solution for ourselves. By knowing the cause and the effect of anxiety, this study is hoped to be useful for the next research relating to psychoanalysis



theory. Hopefully, this study will be useful and give readers many benefits and suggestions about psychological events or conditions in real life.

For many years, literature has been a reflection of human real life. Literature captures many phenomena that human beings experience, including human emotions, happiness, anger, sadness, fear, disappointment, pride, etc. Literature becomes a tool for expressing human emotions. When humans experience falling in love, they write romances, when humans experience disappointment, they write drama, and when humans experience fear, they write horror. In the horror theme, humans try to capture an experience that makes them uneasy or beyond their understanding, creating stories about ghosts, aliens, monsters, or characters such as Frankenstein, Dracula, Werewolf, and perhaps Pennywise. Those characters are famous in the horror genre of literary works famous authors created them, Mary Shelley created Frankenstein's character in 1818, and Bram Stoker created Dracula's character in 1897.

In the modern era, people know Stephen King. American writer Stephen King is well-known for his numerous works in the horror, suspense, fantasy, and supernatural fiction genres. On September 21, 1947, he was born in Portland, Maine, in the United States. Throughout his several decades-long writing career, King has established himself as one of the modern era's most popular and significant writers. King's writing frequently explores fear, the paranormal, and the macabre, delving into the darker sides of human nature. He possesses a special talent for crafting intricate, compelling plots and well-rounded characters. In 2002, Stephen King published a novella entitled *Everything's Eventual*, the book consists of 14 short stories one of which is a short story entitled *Riding the Bullet*. The story of "Riding the Bullet" explores various themes including mortality, overcoming fear, relationship complexity, and the indistinct boundaries between the supernatural and reality. It explores the emotional and psychological difficulties of facing our mortality and overcoming fear.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As explained in the previous chapter, this study will explore the anxiety of the main character, Alan Parker. Anxiety is a normal condition where one feels something is bothering them in the past, present, or five minutes later. Anxiety, according to some psychologists provides us a benefit. As stated by Swift et al., (2014) in Mental Health



Awareness “Among the range of emotions, anxiety has the beneficial purpose of warning us about things that we may need to be concerned about—things that could be dangerous.” So, it can be concluded that anxiety is a positive condition but many people misjudged it. In the psychoanalysis that was first introduced by Sigmund Freud, Freud explains the general condition of anxiety. According to Freud (1917) stated that “A general sense of anxiety, a form of floating fear, is willing to latch onto any suitable notion, influence perception, create anticipations, and, in essence, take advantage of any chance to assert itself.” There is also one kind of anxiety called The Anxiety Dream, at least that’s what Sigmund Freud mentions. According to Freud (1917), In anxiety dreams, the dreamer frequently encounters situations that cause them to feel fear, anxiety, or distress. These dreams are believed to be the result of suppressed feelings or unresolved conflicts from the person's waking life. According to Freud, having anxiety dreams may be a way for the unconscious mind to covertly express and address suppressed emotions or worries. These dreams frequently feature threatening or upsetting scenarios, such as being pursued, falling, or being unable to flee danger.

Salsabyla (2021) in their research argued that “Natural fear has a pathological counterpart in anxiety, which is characterized by problems in mood, thought, behavior, and biological activity.” Their research intended to analyze the causes of Beverly Marsh's anxiety, the type of anxiety she experienced, and the defense mechanisms she used to alleviate her anxiety in the novel IT by Stephen King. The findings of the study indicate that the cause of anxiety felt by Beverly Marsh in the novel IT is explored. However, specific details about the results are not mentioned in the provided sources.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study is conducted by qualitative method that can help the author to describe and give understanding with narrative analysis. Qualitative research methods are strategies that investigate people's experiences, motives, and reactions using non-numerical data. According to Creswell (2009) stated that “Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.” To analyze this study the author also uses the psychoanalysis approach by Sigmund Freud. The foundation of Psychoanalytic theory by Sigmund Freud is the

notion that individuals can be treated by bringing their unconscious drives and thoughts into awareness.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Riding the Bullet (King, 2002), The narrative takes place in 1969 and centers on a college student named Alan Parker who gets a call informing him that his mother had a stroke and is currently receiving treatment. To be with his mother at the hospital in Lewiston, Alan decides to hitchhike from the University of Maine. Alan encounters several strange and unsettling characters along the highway as he hitchhikes, each with their unsettling tales. He struggles with his anxieties and insecurities while thinking back on his troubled mother-son relationship and his regrets from the past. The themes of life, death, fear, and the decisions we make are explored in the novella. As Alan's journey takes a dark turn and he encounters a malevolent presence that imperils his life and sanity, supernatural elements are brought into play. The story's title, "Riding the Bullet," is a metaphor for facing one's fears and confronting the inevitable journey toward death.

The Anxiety Experienced by Alan Parker

The biggest anxiety that Alan has at the beginning of the story is about his mother, Jean Parker. Alan received a call from his neighbor, Mrs. McCurdy, she told Alan that his mother was taken to the hospital while she was working in a restaurant, doctor said it was a stroke. It was a lightning strike in the afternoon for Alan; Alan can't believe that his beloved mother got a stroke.

“Yeah, but is she making sense?” I asked. I was trying to sound calm, even amused, but my heart was beating fast and the living room suddenly felt too warm. – Everything's Eventual: 14 Dark Tales p.406

Given the closeness of Alan Parker and his mother's relationship and the suddenness of the news, Alan Parker's concern upon learning of his mother's stroke seems very normal. It is evident throughout *Riding the Bullet* that Alan Parker's mother is the most significant individual in Alan Parker's life. Alan Parker and his mother have a deep relationship, and she has raised him alone and been his only reliable source of support. Because of this connection, Alan is overcome with anxiety when he learns that she is in the hospital, not only out of concern for her health but also out of unresolved guilt and dread of losing her.

Alan Parker's anxiety escalates since he already feels guilty about the way he has treated his mother in the past. He has ignored her in college, putting his interests and life above staying in touch or supporting her. That guilt is increased by knowing that she is in grave danger. Memories of their arguments and times when he took her for granted haunt him. He feels anxiety and a need to put things right after learning of her stroke, which goes beyond simply being a medical issue. It serves as a sobering reminder of life's frailty and his bond with his mother.

The Anxiety Dream Experienced by Alan Parker

Alan met the person he saw on the tombstone at the cemetery earlier. The man introduced himself as George Staub. To Alan the person looked alive, very alive in fact. However, Alan in a situation like this couldn't believe what he had just experienced.

“Nice to meet you, Hector,” he said. “I’m George Staub.” My hand seemed to float out like a hand in a dream. I wish that it had been a dream, but it wasn’t; it had all the sharp edges of reality. The smell on top was pine. The smell underneath was some chemical, probably formaldehyde. I was riding with a dead man.- Everything’s Eventual: 14 Dark Tales p. 419

Alan Parker's anxiety when he meets George Staub is deeply understandable, given both the eerie circumstances of their meeting and Alan’s vulnerable state of mind. Alan is already under immense emotional strain from his mother’s illness, and he’s exhausted, anxious, and alone on the side of a dark road at night when George offers him a ride. This situation would naturally set anyone on edge, but for Alan, who is already on a journey fueled by dread, it’s the perfect storm for an anxious response.

Adding to the tension is George’s unsettling demeanor and appearance. He has an unnatural pallor and an inexplicably “off” vibe, and there are strange details about his car and behavior that make Alan uneasy, almost as if something isn’t quite real about this stranger. These oddities tap into a primal fear that Alan can’t easily dismiss, pushing his anxiety into overdrive as he sits in the car. King amplifies this anxiety by revealing George’s identity gradually: Alan realizes that George is not just strange but dead—he has died in a car accident, and now Alan is face-to-face with something supernatural. Alan's perception of reality is completely upended by this terrifying knowledge, which causes him to panic. He is actually in the presence of death, personified in George Staub, which awakens all of his long-suppressed anxieties about life, death, and his own mortality.

As the trip goes on, Alan's anxiousness reaches a breaking point as George makes him make the horrifying decision to choose between his mother's life and his own. Alan's sense of control is undermined by George's inquiries and recommendations, which cause him to consider what he is prepared to give up. Alan's anxiousness becomes uncontrollable because to the psychological strain of the encounter—a supernatural entity urging him to make a life-or-death decision. For Alan, seeing George Staub is more than simply an odd meeting; it's a terrible, existential encounter that sends him into a state of anxiety that few other events in life could match.

CONCLUSION(S)

The analysis of this research focuses on the anxiety and the anxiety dream experienced by the main character in Stephen King's short story *Riding the Bullet*, Alan Parker. After analyzing the short story, it is concluded that Alan experienced the anxiety and The Anxiety Dream. In the wake-ling, Alan feel anxious about his mother who went to hospital because of stroke. In the dream, Alan met the guy who should be dead, George Staub, Alan feel anxious in near him.

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