

Nasir's Inner Conflict and Moral Struggle for Identity in Hafsah Faizal's *We Hunt the Flame*

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Abstract:

This research explores internal conflict of Nasir, the main character in the novel *We Hunt the Flame* by Hafsah Faizal. This study analyzes how the character's internal conflict occurs using Sigmund Freud's theory of Psychoanalysis, aiming to explore how the id, ego, and superego manifest as a consequence of past trauma. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the narrative texts and dialogues within the novel served as the primary data. Through careful and thorough reading, several narratives and dialogues from Nasir that were deemed to contain these three aspects were collected. This data was then analyzed based on Sigmund Freud's theoretical framework. The findings reveal an internal conflict within Nasir caused by the impact of his past trauma, specifically his search for paternal recognition. His ego emerges to rationalize his harmful actions to satisfy his id, while the appearance of his superego punishes him with overwhelming guilt. By applying Freud's framework, this research fills a gap in the literary analysis of the novel and proves that psychoanalytic theory is a valuable tool for explaining character complexity in fantasy literature.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis; Conflict; Identity; Trauma; Guilt

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi tentang konflik internal Nasir, tokoh utama dalam novel *We Hunt the Flame* karya Hafsah Faizal. Studi ini menganalisis bagaimana konflik internal karakter tersebut terjadi menggunakan teori Psikoanalisis Sigmund Freud, dengan tujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana id, ego, dan superego bermanifestasi sebagai konsekuensi dari trauma masa lalu. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif, teks naratif dan dialog di dalam novel menjadi data utama. Melalui pembacaan yang cermat dan teliti, beberapa narasi dan dialog dari Nasir yang dianggap mengandung ketiga aspek ini dikumpulkan. Data ini kemudian dianalisis berdasarkan kerangka teoretis Sigmund Freud. Hasil penelitian mengungkap adanya konflik internal dalam diri Nasir yang disebabkan oleh dampak trauma masa lalunya, khususnya pencariannya akan pengakuan dari sang ayah. Ego-nya muncul untuk merasionalisasikan tindakan berbahayanya demi memuaskan id-nya, sementara kemunculan superego-nya menghukumnya dengan rasa bersalah yang luar biasa. Dengan menerapkan kerangka Freud, penelitian ini mengisi kesenjangan dalam analisis sastra novel tersebut dan membuktikan bahwa teori psikoanalisis adalah alat yang berharga untuk menjelaskan kompleksitas karakter dalam literatur fantasi.

Kata kunci: Psikoanalisis; Konflik; Identitas; Trauma; Rasa Bersalah

INTRODUCTION

We Hunt the Flame, a contemporary novel by Hafsah Faizal published in 2019, explores themes of identity, power, magic, and sacrifice. This study focuses on one of its main characters, Nasir Ghameq. Known by the epithet “Prince of Death”, Nasir is the son of Sultan Ghameq, the authoritarian ruler of Arawiya. He earned this title for his proficiency in assassinating anyone upon his father’s command. Unsurprisingly, he grew up in a high-pressure environment, primarily under his father’s influence. This context is significant, as a child’s character development is influenced by the environment and the upbringing they receive (Steinberg, 2017).

However, secretly, the character of Nasir holds a significant internal conflict, which is contrary to his cold and cruel appearance. On one side, Nasir is very obedient to his father’s commands that have shaped him into a killer, but on the other side, he has a desire to stop being a killer and to improve himself to become a better person. Therefore, to see this complex characterization, this article used the theoretical framework of Freud’s Psychoanalysis. Specifically, this article researched how the manifestations of the id, ego, and superego in Nasir’s character are displayed in the novel titled *We Hunt the Flame*.

Because the novel *We Hunt the Flame* is a work that was published in 2019, which is still considered new, there is only a limited amount of research that discusses this novel. The researchers who have discussed this novel are Andani & Kristianto (2025), who researched Gender Studies in the novel *We Hunt the Flame*. Specifically, the researchers analyzed how gender identity and social power are used in the novel. However, other researchers have analyzed a literary work using this Psychoanalysis theory. For instance, Mutyarani et al. (2024) analyzed a novel titled *The Tragedy Paper*. The researcher successfully revealed the id, ego, and superego of the characters within that novel.

Moreover, Febrianti et al. (2023) also analyzed a romantic relationship conflict in real life. They analyzed a person named Ibro, in which the id, ego, and superego from Psychoanalysis were used to study him as he navigated his romantic relationship. As a result, they successfully identified Ibro’s use of the id, ego, and superego from Sigmund Freud’s Psychoanalysis. Furthermore, Situmorang & Evyanto (2020) researched Psychoanalysis in a novel. This researcher discussed Psychoanalysis in a character within the novel. However, specifically, this research only focused on the analysis of the id aspect. Nevertheless, the researcher successfully achieved their main objective. They succeeded in finding and analyzing the id of the character in the novel.

Although several studies have been conducted in the past, ranging from research using Psychoanalysis theory to studies on the novel *We Hunt the Flame*, a significant research gap is still found. Among these previous studies, there is little research that uses the Psychoanalysis theory in its entirety; namely the id, ego, and superego. Additionally, no one has yet researched the characters in the novel *We Hunt the Flame* using the Psychoanalysis theory by Sigmund Freud. Previous researchers who studied *We Hunt the Flame* focused more on Gender Studies rather than Psychoanalysis. Conversely, research using Psychoanalysis was found in other objects, such as in other novels or a person's real-life case. Therefore, this research functions to 'fill the gap'. By adding a character analysis using Psychoanalysis theory in the novel *We Hunt the Flame*, the researcher can analyze how the id, ego, and superego play a role in each of Nasir's actions. In addition, this analysis provides a unique perspective, as this research contains the story of Nasir who strives to become better, namely by examining the process of strengthening his ego to achieve balance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this article, the researcher uses the field of Psychoanalysis, which involves searching for the meanings within the text by utilizing the theory of Sigmund Freud. This article refers to a model created by Freud; he reveals that humans have three characters or personalities: namely the id, ego, and superego.

Psychoanalysis Theory

Psychoanalysis theory is a psychological framework conceived by Sigmund Freud, which is used to understand human behavior. Freud (1923) stated that human thoughts, feelings, and actions are influenced by unconscious conflicts.

Id

The Id is a form of human desire or passion. Freud (1923) stated that human instinct is a representation of the Id. It acts on a primary level, seeking to engage in activities that satisfy human needs, and it operates unconsciously. Therefore, it can be said that the Id is the innate way humans express their physical desires.

Ego

The Ego is a mediator or a bridge between the demands of the id and the standards of the superego. As stated by Freud (1923), the Ego uses the 'reality principle' and acts as the 'secondary thought process'. The Ego aims to fulfill the demands of the Id that have been formed, but in a way that is realistic and socially acceptable (Sibi, 2020). Freud



himself compared the relationship between the Id and the Ego to a horse and its rider; the horse provides the power, but the rider directs it (Lapsley & Stey, 2012).

Superego

The Superego is a form of conscience, shaped and developed by one's family, that functions as a person's moral compass. Freud (1923) stated that the superego acts as the human conscience, applying the moral rules of society and creating feelings of guilt when those rules are violated. This is because the superego's responsibility is to uphold an individual's morality and ensure their actions are socially acceptable (Sibi, 2020).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a qualitative descriptive method. The research focused on the selection and interpretation of words within the text's narrative; therefore, the researcher used a qualitative approach. According to Creswell (2014) in his book, the way to apply this qualitative method is by using data in the form of text or images. Therefore, in this study, a qualitative descriptive method was used to collect the required data.

The primary data source in this study was the novel *We Hunt the Flame* by Hafsa Faizal, which was published in 2019. The data used were the narrative texts and Nasir's conversations within the novel. Then, to support this research data, a number of other sources were also added, which were taken from online platforms and scientific literature relevant to the field of Psychoanalysis. These secondary sources included journal articles, books on psychoanalytic theory, and other related articles about the novel and the theory.

In qualitative research, including this study, the main research instrument is the researcher themselves. Therefore, the entire process of data collection and analysis depended on the expertise, sensitivity, and theoretical thinking possessed by the researcher. This meant that the researcher had a direct responsibility and role in selecting the text, interpreting the text, choosing relevant data, and systematically applying the psychoanalytic theoretical framework to this analysis.

Several stages were carried out by the researcher in conducting this study. Initially, the researcher chose a primary data source to apply the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud, namely the novel *We Hunt the Flame*. Then, after selecting the novel as the primary data source, the researcher proceeded with collecting the data. The researcher read the novel carefully, even re-reading it at times in order to find texts that contained the psychoanalytic theoretical framework.

This was followed by the researcher selecting quotations, narrative descriptions, and also Nasir's dialogues related to his internal conflict. After the required data were obtained, the researcher identified the data carefully to understand and interpret the internal conflict that occurred within Nasir. In the end, the researcher classified the data according to Freud's psychoanalytic theoretical framework; namely the id, ego, and superego.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In these findings, the researcher describes Nasir's personality as seen from the perspective of the concepts of id, ego and superego put forward by Sigmund Freud through the framework of psychoanalysis. The data from this concept will be divided into 3 according to the theory discussed, namely how the depiction of Id, Ego, and Superego is reflected in Nasir's character through the novel *We Hunt the Flame*.

Id Nasir: A Need for Validation

The Id is a part of the psychoanalytic framework by Sigmund Freud. For Nasir's personality, the id relates to the basic desires and instincts that operate based on the "pleasure principle." For Nasir, this pleasure is found and obtained by gaining the approval of his father, the Sultan. This can be seen in Nasir's tendency to accept the title or epithet "Prince of Death." Nasir's primary desire stems from his father's manipulative behavior, as the Sultan never gives affection and only offers praise after Nasir has killed someone. As a father, the Sultan always used insults and curses to belittle Nasir, completely shaping him into an assassin under his command. "You are weak. Pathetic. And until you murder the sickening leniency festering within you, you will never be worthy of being my son." (Faizal, 2019, p. 99). The continuous demeaning behaviour that Nasir received triggered his primary desire to gain validation from his father. This resulted in his desire to kill being linked to his father's commands, as a means to obtain that validation.

Consequently, Nasir's Id drives him to commit murder continuously, not for the sake of cruelty but as the only way to gain recognition from his father. "To see a flicker, a glimmer, a hint of appreciation in his father's eyes - Nasir would do anything." (Faizal, 2019, p. 99). This sentence proves that in Nasir's psyche, gaining his father's approval is the "pleasure" he has been searching for all along. "Even kill without morals. Murder without regret. Become a monster without bounds." (Faizal, 2019, p. 100). From this

narrative, it can be seen that Nasir's intense desire to be acknowledged by his father makes him willing to do anything, even to the point of turning himself into the monster his father wants. Nasir no longer cares about other principles, regardless of whether his actions are right or wrong; he does everything in order to satisfy the needs of his Id.

Ego Nasir: Nasir's Execution of Desire

The Ego operates according to the reality principle, in which it finds a way to fulfill or satisfies the Id's desires. Nasir's Ego understands that to get recognition and praise from his father, he must kill people according to his father's commands. This strategy is reinforced each time Nasir completes a task from his father and receives praise, which slightly satisfies his Id. "You are getting better at this." (Faizal, 2019, p. 44). Nasir eagerly awaits validation from his father every time he completes a task for him, which is to kill people. This satisfaction, mediated by his Ego, makes him crave continuous praise from the Sultan and also makes him want more. "Do you have another?" (Faizal, 2019, p. 44). This sentence, spoken by Nasir, is a direct action of the Ego; he wants to find another opportunity to kill more people in order to satisfy his Id's desire for the Sultan's recognition. With the admission, "I am no hunter. I kill when ordered" (Faizal, 2019, p. 26), Nasir rationalizes his Ego with logic. It shows that his Ego has completely become the Sultan's instrument for achieving his goals.

Besides functioning as a decision-maker, Nasir's Ego also serves the 'executive' responsibility for the tasks given by the Sultan. "His scimitar sang as he pulled it free. Owais exhaled and wound his turban around his head, eyes flashing in the glint of the blade." (Faizal, 2019, p. 28). This narrative shows that he kills without hesitation and without giving his opponents a chance to defend themselves, demonstrating Nasir's skill in carrying out his ego's desires. The cold and brutal execution of his id's impulses leads him to kill more cruelly to earn his father's praise and respect. In his proficient actions, he kills with practiced ease: "Nasir spun in a full circle to avoid the guard's blade and sliced the man's throat." (Faizal, 2019, p. 23). He not only kills but also deftly cleans up the mess he creates, "He dragged the thudding corpse into the dark before smoothing his robes and returning to the alley." (Faizal, 2019, p. 23). His prowess in strategizing is evident as he carries out his tasks according to the Sultan's expectations.

Superego Nasir: The Guilt of a Killer

Nasir's Superego begins to emerge as a strong sense of guilt that he feels after killing. While Nasir desires praise from his father and acts to receive it, he simultaneously realizes



that his actions are wrong. Initially, his Ego successfully fulfilled the Id's desires, but eventually, his Superego appears, making him aware that his actions are a violation of moral values. Nasir's Superego is present and causes an internal conflict because he fully understands that what he is doing is not right. "Every single time a servant associated him with the sultan, he only loathed himself more." (Faizal, 2019, p. 42). In this quote, Nasir clearly shows that he feels ashamed and guilty whenever people connect him to discussions about his father. Because of this, Nasir feels that the shadow of his father's evil is upon him, allowing others to make that association.

Nasir's reaction indicates that his conscience is still present and active. He begins to show remorse for his helplessness and his inability to control or change how others perceive him. This is a clear sign that Nasir is experiencing an internal conflict and his Superego is punishing him with guilt. The novel explains that Nasir continuously feels guilty, even considering himself disgusting. The quote, "He's done being called pathetic." (Faizal, 2019, p. 409), adds to this self-loathing, as it reminds him of his father also calling him pathetic, reinforcing the idea that he constantly revolves around that word. Slowly, Nasir realizes that the murders he has been committing for his father's recognition have, in fact, corrupted him, distancing him from his own moral center. This emerging awareness is a crucial function of the Superego. "He was turning his heart black, no one else." (Faizal, 2019, p. 26). This quote is evidence that Nasir's Superego has emerged, and he realizes his actions are wrong. Subsequently, this awareness marks a significant change. Nasir's inner voice becomes active, pushing him to self-reflect on his guilt, which is a manifestation of the Superego.

The results of these findings showed how an unresolved past could shape a person's identity in their future. In these findings, Nasir's personality was formed by his past trauma. Nasir became an individual whose Id, namely, desiring validation from his father was clearly visible, driving his Ego to do anything to satisfy his Id, including killing people. However, Nasir's actions were immediately judged by his own Superego, which manifested as a guilt that continuously haunted his mind. This guilt made Nasir confused because he had to choose between gaining validation from his father, which made him happy, and the guilt from continuously killing people.

All of these findings were in line with Sigmund Freud's theoretical framework, which states that human personality is influenced by inner conflict formed by what those human experiences. This was also the case for Nasir; it was shown that the conflict he

experienced in the novel *We Hunt the Flame* was not caused by external conflict, but rather originated from within himself. Therefore, this analysis added to the understanding of how the past can influence character development as the story progresses in works of fantasy literature.

CONCLUSION(S)

This psychoanalytic research on the novel *We Hunt the Flame* by Hafsa Faizal provides insight into how its main character, Nasir, struggles with his identity as a result of past trauma. This study focuses on Nasir's struggle in navigating the internal conflict between his id, ego, and superego. It examines how Nasir's Id is influenced by his past trauma, namely the desire to gain recognition from the Sultan. The Ego is then present to rationalize various ways to satisfy the Id. Finally, the Superego emerges as the guilt that punishes him and creates the internal conflict within Nasir.

From this theoretical perspective, the researcher explores how the past trauma inflicted upon the character continuously influences his 'future'. The trauma he experienced in the past influences his unconscious desires, shaping not only a negative identity and distorted thought patterns but also behaviours that ultimately define his true self. By applying Freud's theoretical framework, this research fills a gap that exists in the world of literary analysis. Ultimately, this study explains how past trauma can shape identity in contemporary fantasy literature through the use of psychoanalytic theory.

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