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A PSYCHOANALYTIC ANALYSIS OF RODERICK USHER'S MENTAL DETERIORATION

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the mental deterioration of the character Roderick in Edgar Allan Poe's short story *The Fall of the House of Usher* using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. The study employs a qualitative descriptive method using content analysis. The results indicate that Roderick's mental deterioration is caused by an imbalance between the id, ego, and superego. The dominance of the id is evident through the emergence of irrational fears and anxieties, while the ego fails to fulfill its function as a mediator between unconscious drives and reality. On the other hand, the superego intensifies the inner conflict through feelings of guilt and moral pressure, which further worsen his psychological condition. The interaction of these three aspects of personality causes Roderick to lose his mental stability, ultimately leading to psychological collapse by the end of the short story. Therefore, this study demonstrates that Freud's psychoanalytic theory provides a comprehensive understanding of the personality conflict that is the primary cause of Roderick's mental decline in the short story *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

Keywords: psychoanalysis, mental deterioration, short story

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kemunduran mental tokoh Roderick dalam cerpen *The Fall of the House of Usher* karya Edgar Allan Poe menggunakan teori psikoanalisis Sigmund Freud. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik content analysis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kemunduran mental Roderick disebabkan oleh ketidakseimbangan antara id, ego, dan superego. Dominasi id terlihat melalui munculnya ketakutan dan kecemasan yang irasional, sementara ego gagal menjalankan fungsinya sebagai penengah antara dorongan bawah sadar dan realitas. Di sisi lain, superego memperkuat konflik batin melalui rasa bersalah dan tekanan moral yang semakin memperburuk kondisi psikologisnya. Interaksi ketiga aspek kepribadian tersebut menyebabkan Roderick kehilangan stabilitas mental hingga akhirnya mengalami kehancuran psikologis pada akhir cerita. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa teori psikoanalisis Freud mampu memberikan pemahaman yang komprehensif mengenai konflik kepribadian yang menjadi penyebab utama kemunduran mental Roderick dalam cerpen *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

Kata kunci: psikoanalisis, kemunduran mental, cerpen.

INTRODUCTION

Literature is an expression of human experiences, thoughts, feelings, and imagination conveyed through language that is aesthetic, imaginative, and meaningful. Literature serves not

only as entertainment but also as a medium for representing human life, cultural values, and various social and psychological phenomena. According to (Mua'in, 2017), literature is a kind of the artwork which uses a language as a medium. Through literary works,

authors are able to communicate their ideas, emotions, perspectives, and interpretations of the world around them. As a result, literature provides readers with opportunities to understand different aspects of human life and gain deeper insights into human behavior, relationships, and experiences. Furthermore, literature psychology is analysis to literature by considering aspects psychology and psychiatric which consist of its (Boyd, 2014). One of the approaches within literary psychology is psychoanalytic criticism, which is derived from Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis. This approach emphasizes the importance of the unconscious mind in influencing human thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. According to Freud, many aspects of human behavior are shaped by unconscious desires, repressed memories, internal conflicts, and emotional experiences that individuals may not fully recognize. These hidden psychological elements often affect how people think, feel, and act in their daily lives.

In literary studies, psychoanalytic criticism provides a useful framework for examining the psychological depth of literary characters. Through this approach, researchers can explore various aspects of a character's mental and emotional state, such as their motivations, fears, anxieties, desires, and unresolved conflicts. Psychoanalytic criticism also helps reveal how past experiences and

unconscious impulses influence a character's decisions and behavior throughout the story. According to Sigmund Freud, human personality consists of three main components: the id, the ego, and the superego. These elements work together and influence an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behavior. The id is the instinctive part of personality that seeks immediate satisfaction of desires and needs. It operates according to the pleasure principle and does not consider moral values or reality. In contrast, the ego functions as a mediator between the id and the external world. Guided by the reality principle, the ego helps individuals make rational decisions and satisfy their desires in realistic and socially acceptable ways. Meanwhile, the superego represents moral values and social standards that individuals acquire from their environment. It serves as an internal guide that distinguishes right from wrong and influences feelings of guilt, responsibility, and self-control. Freud argued that human behavior is shaped by the interaction of these three personality structures. Therefore, the concepts of id, ego, and superego are useful in literary analysis because they help explain the motivations, conflicts, and psychological conditions of literary characters. Furthermore, this approach enables readers to gain a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between the human mind and literary representation. Literary characters often reflect real

psychological struggles experienced by individuals in society, making psychoanalysis a valuable tool for interpreting their actions and emotional responses. By applying psychoanalytic theory, researchers can uncover meanings that may not be immediately visible on the surface of the text and provide a more comprehensive interpretation of the psychological dimensions presented in a literary work.

A short story is one of the most popular forms of literary fiction that presents a narrative in a relatively brief and concise format. Unlike novels, which often contain multiple plotlines and extensive character development, short stories typically focus on a single event, conflict, or theme and involve a limited number of characters. According to Poe (1842), a short story should be short enough to be read in a single sitting and structured to create a unified emotional effect on the reader. Due to its concise nature, every element in a short story, including characterization, setting, and plot, contributes significantly to the overall meaning and impact of the narrative. Despite its brevity, a short story is capable of presenting complex themes and profound psychological experiences, making it a valuable subject for literary analysis. The psychoanalytic approach is highly relevant to the analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* because the story explores the psychological condition of its main

character, Roderick Usher. Throughout the narrative, Roderick exhibits intense fear, anxiety, and emotional distress, which gradually lead to the deterioration of his mental state. These psychological struggles play a significant role in shaping both his behavior and the overall development of the story. Therefore, Freud's psychoanalytic theory provides an appropriate framework for examining the underlying psychological factors that influence Roderick's thoughts and actions. By applying this approach, the study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the character's internal conflicts and reveal how his psychological condition contributes to the tragic events portrayed in the story.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative descriptive method with content analysis. According to Sugiyono (2018), a descriptive qualitative method is a method that is used to analyze a phenomenon, but does not attempt to identify a cause-and-effect relationship. The data of this research are in the form of words, phrases, sentences, and narrative descriptions that reflect Roderick Usher's psychological condition and reveal the operation of the id, ego, and superego based on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. This method is chosen because the research focuses on the interpretation of the psychological condition of characters in literary

works.

The data sources for this study is the short story *The Fall of the House of Usher*. The research data consist of words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, and narratives that describe the psychological state of the character Roderick Usher. This study uses Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory which includes the concept of idea, ego and superego to analyze the mental decline experience by the character. Data collection was conducted using the read-and-record technique. The researcher read the short story repeatedly to understand its content, the identified and recorded passages the indicate psychological conflict and symptoms of mental decline experienced by Roderick Usher. The collected data was then analyzed using content analysis. The data was classified based on the id, ego and superego

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In the short story *The Fall of the House of the Usher*, Edgar Allan Poe portrays Roderick Usher as a characters who experiences a gradual mental decline until he ultimately loses control of himself. When analyzed using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, this condition can be understood through the interaction of the three structures of the personality: the id, the ego and the superego. These three aspects are no longer functioning in balance, thereby affecting the way Roderick thinks, feel and acts.

The Dominance of the Id through Irrational Fear

According to Sigmund Freud, id is the instinctual aspect of the personality and has existed since birth. The id operates according to the *pleasure principle*, which is the drive to immediately satisfy needs or avoid pain without regard for reality or moral values. The id contains instincts, desires, and subconscious impulses that control a person's behavior.

In the character of Roderick Usher, the dominance of the id is evident in the excessive fear that consumes him. Roderick admits that he lives in constant anxiety and fears things that have not even happened yet. This is evident in his statement:

"I dread the events of the future, not in themselves, but in their results." (Poe, 1839)

This quote shows that Roderick's fear does not stem from a real threat, but rather from the specter of potential disasters that might occur. This excessive fear is an emotional impulse arising from the unconscious, thus reflecting the dominance of the id. Instead of facing reality rationally, Roderick is instead overcome by a fear that has no clear basis.

The dominance of the id is also evident when Roderick feels unable to control the fear that constantly haunts him. He says:

"I shall perish... I must perish in this deplorable folly." (Poe, 1839)

This statement indicates that Roderick has lost control of his

emotions. He believes he will be destroyed by the fear that continues to weigh him down. His subconscious impulses, anxiety and the instinct to avoid suffering have become stronger than his ability to think logically. As a result, Roderick's psychological state continues to deteriorate, marking the beginning of the mental decline he experiences throughout the story.

A weakened Ego in the Face of Reality

The ego acts as a mediator between the id's impulses, the superego's demands, and reality. The ego helps a person make rational decisions so that they can adapt to their environment.

However, in Roderick's case, his ego was unable to the function properly. He knew that Madeline's condition was getting worse, but he was unable to cope with that reality in a healthy way. Instead, he chose to shut himself away at home and avoid the outside world as described by the narrator.

"He had not ventured forth from the chamber for many years." (Poe, 1839)

When Madeline died, Roderick said to the narrator.

"Let us place her in the vault." (Poe, 1839)

Roderick's decision to bury Madeline before her death was definitively confirmed and also revealed the weakness of his ego. This action was not the result of rational consideration but was influenced by fear and immense emotional pressure. The ego, which should have helped

Roderick face reality, was instead overwhelmed by the emotional impulses of the id.

As a result, Roderick found it increasingly difficult to distinguish between reality and the fears stemming from his own mind. He became more and more anxious, prone to panic, and lost the ability to think objectively.

The Superego and Excessive Guilt

The superego is part of the personality associated with moral values, conscience, and the standards of right and wrong that a person has learned. When someone feels they have made a mistake, the superego can trigger deep feelings of guilt.

In the story, after Madeline is buried, Roderick appears increasingly restless. He often hears strange voices and displays growing fear. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this condition can be understood as the emergence of guilt stemming from the superego.

The superego manifested itself in the form of guilt that continued to haunt him after Madeline was buried. This became apparent when he said:

"Not hear it?—Yes, I hear it, and have heard it. Long—long—long—many minutes, many hours, many days, have I heard it." (Poe, 1839)

That statement suggests that Roderick had long been hearing voices coming from the basement. However, he chose to remain silent because he couldn't face the truth. He continued,

"And now – to night – Ethelred – ha! ha! – the breaking of the hermit's door ...and the cracking...and ripping..." (Poe, 1839)

Roderick associates the sound he hears with the story the narrator is reading. This suggests that his guilt has developed into extreme anxiety that is affecting his perception of reality.

CONCLUSION

This research analyzes the mental deterioration of the character Roderick Usher in Edgar Allan Poe's short story *The Fall of the House of Usher* using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Based on the results of the analysis, it was found that Roderick Usher's psychological condition was influenced by the interaction between the id, ego, and superego. The dominance of the id is evident in the irrational fear, excessive anxiety, and emotional impulses that constantly haunt Roderick. At the same time, Roderick's ego is unable to fulfill its function as a mediator between unconscious impulses and reality. The

ego's failure to cope with reality caused Roderick to withdraw further from his social circle, lose his ability to think objectively, and become increasingly consumed by his own fears. In addition, the superego exacerbated his mental state through feelings of guilt, moral pressure, and inner conflict that grew more intense after Madeline's death.

Therefore, Roderick Usher's mental deterioration was not caused by a single aspect of his personality, but rather by an imbalance between the id, the ego, and the superego. The dominance of unconscious drives, the ego's weak ability to cope with reality, and moral pressure from the superego collectively caused Roderick's psychological condition to continue deteriorating until it reached total collapse by the end of the story. The results of this study indicate that Freud's psychoanalytic theory provides a deep understanding of the character's inner conflicts and the process of mental decline he experiences in this literary work.

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