

Research Article

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**Psychoanalytical Conflict, Anxiety, and Ego Defense Mechanism of
Aza Holmes in John Green's *Turtles All the Way Down***

Yunindya Palarani^a, Hadiyanto^b

^aEnglish Department, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University, Semarang, 50274, Indonesia

^aEnglish Department, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University, Semarang, 50274, Indonesia

yunindyapal@gmail.com

Abstract

This research aims to explain the psychoanalytical conflict, anxiety, and the ego defense mechanism of Aza Holmes by using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis theory. The method of approach used in this research is the Psychology of Literature approach, while the method of collecting the data is library research. The primary data comes from the novel *Turtles All the Way Down* written by John Green and the secondary data comes from other text-based sources related to Freud's Psychoanalysis theory. Furthermore, this research suggests that Aza Holmes' ego is weak which causes her to conflict with her own self and other people around her. This conflict leads to the rising of her neurotic and moral anxieties. To relieve the tension of her anxiety, Aza Holmes performs some ego defense mechanisms such as projection, fixation, and displacement.

Keywords: personality structure; psychoanalytical conflict; anxiety; ego defense mechanism; Freudian psychanalysis

1. Introduction

As a piece of literature, novel is a suitable object to be studied through psychology because it reflects human's psyche. The psychological perspective can be used to study literature because of two significant reasons namely, the first reason is that the characters analyzed in a novel are not real people. However, they still represent the psychological behavior of human beings in general. The second reason is that psychoanalysis is as legitimate as any other critical theory that is used to analyze human behavior in real life [1].

One of the most significant human behaviors in the world is the struggle of having mental illnesses. There are many people who suffer from mental illnesses in life. However, battling with it alone make them unaware of the initial problem that induces their psychological conditions. Their personality brings up values which later decides what they generally like and dislike. Thus, some of their decisions can conflict with others which later develop signs of anxiety. To release the tension of this anxiety, some people comfort themselves by doing ego defense mechanism. These psychological phenomena perception can as well be found in the psychological novel entitled *Turtles All the Way Down* written by John Green.

The Novel *Turtles All the Way Down* was written by John Green in 2017. It tells about the story of Aza Holmes who suffers from mental illnesses such as Anxiety and *Obsessive-Compulsive* disorder. The Novel immediately gets a vast attention from the public as it is based on the experience of the author who lives with the same mental condition. This novel is an interesting piece to be

analyzed through the perspective of Psychology, especially using Freud's Psychoanalysis theory because it provides a profound description of how human behaves in real life.

2. Methods

the writer uses psychology of literature approach in writing this thesis. Psychology of literature may use the Psychoanalysis theory of Sigmund Freud to reveal the personality of the individual involved in a literary work.

In this case, the humanity aspects that the characters have are the primary object of psychology of literature study because within the human characters, the psychology aspect of humans are invested and grafted [2].

In writing this thesis, library research method is used to get the data in connection with psychological phenomena in John Green's *Turtles All the Way Down*. According to Zed, library research is a manner of research which constructing data based on text material sources [3]. The primary data comes from the novel itself, *Turtles All the Way Down* written by John Green. Moreover, the secondary data comes from other text-based sources that supports the study, such as books, magazine, journal, etc.

3. Result and Discussion

This section is divided into two subsections: Intrinsic Element and Extrinsic Element. The intrinsic element explains the characteristics of Aza Holmes by showing her prominent traits in the novel. Whereas the extrinsic element serves the analytical interpretation of Aza Holmes Psychological condition using the psychoanalysis theory of Sigmund Freud.

3.1. Intrinsic Element

3.1.1. Character Analysis of Aza Holmes

Aza Holmes is the main character of the Novel *Turtles All the Way Down*. Aza Holmes is a round and dynamic character because she goes through a various of events that changes her way of thinking over time. Aza Holmes is portrayed as a girl who suffers from mental illnesses such as Anxiety and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.

She is described as a cowardly person since she has many things that she fears. One of her fears is related to the bacteria called *Clostridium Difficile* which she believes might infect her someday. Her fears are also mentioned by her bestfriend, Daisy Ramirez, as quoted, "“You sure you don't want to pet her?” Malik asked. “I'm also afraid of dinosaurs,” I explained. “Holmesy has most of the major fears,” Daisy Ramirez said as she petted Tua” [4, p.36].

Other than that, Aza Holmes is also portrayed as an evasive person. She avoids revealing the facts about herself and tends to respond with unnecessary explanations when being asked. “Has there been an upstick in your rumination or intrusive thoughts?” “I don't know. They continue to intrude.” “When did you put that Band-Aid on?” “I don't know,” I lied. She Stared at me, unblinking. “After lunch” [4, p.86). When being asked by her therapist, Aza Holmes avoids the question and replies to it ineffectively. This is because Aza Holmes does not like to seem vulnerable.

Aza Holmes is also an empathetic person. This can be seen from the way Aza Holmes gives an inquiry to the Pickett's lawyer about the well-being of the Pickett sons after the missing of their father.

Aza Holmes is described as a self-centered person as well because she will deny any matters unless if it involves herself. This can be seen through the dynamic of her friendship with Daisy Ramirez. Daisy who writes a Star Wars fanfiction based on the people around her makes Aza Holmes uncomfortable due the portrayal that she writes. Aza Holmes claimed that the fanfiction that Daisy Ramirez writes is a way for Daisy to complain about her annoyance towards Aza Holmes. However, Daisy Ramirez does not confirm it, but Aza Holmes remains offended.

Aza Holmes character development is shown as the story goes on. At first, Aza Holmes cannot keep up with her own thoughts due to her illnesses. However, throughout the story, Aza Holmes develops and shows her acceptance on her condition as quoted, “Over the next few months, I kept going. I got better without ever quite getting well” [4, p.281].

3.2. *Extrinsic Element*

3.2.1. Aza Holmes’ Personality Structure

3.2.1.1. Aza Holmes’ Id

Aza Holmes’ id shows up when she meets Davis Pickett. as she keeps in contact with Davis after the first meeting, Aza notices that she starts to grow a romantic feeling towards Davis. “I heard him turn his head toward me and could feel him looking at me. I wondered why I wanted him to kiss me, and how to know why you want to be with someone, how to disentangle the messy knots of wanting” [4, p.103].

Her id works based on the pleasure principle which is to fulfil her sexual drive. Aza Holmes who already bonds with Davis Pickett knows that she wants to take their relationship more seriously and maturely than just being friends.

3.2.1.2. Aza Holmes’ Ego

Aza Holmes’ ego actualize her id’s desire to make love with Davis Pickett by kissing him. However, her superego believes that any acts that involve touching other humans are disgusting. Aza Holmes’ ego also translates her belief of being surrounded with bacteria is threatening.

She begins to deliberate her reality. Then, Aza Holmes starts to form an unhealthy habit of pressing her thumbnail until it bleeds as quoted, “I even told him something I’d never actually said to Daisy Ramirez or Dr. Singh or anybody—that the pressing of my thumbnail against my fingertip had started off as a way of convincing myself that I was real” [4, p.106]. She has done this for so long that it turns into a callus which emerges over her fingerprint. Another reason Aza Holmes does this ritual is to calm her whenever her anxiety attacks. Her ego fails to bring up a way to fulfill her id’s desire and balance the work of her superego and id. This causes her to create an obsessive habit that she cannot control.

3.2.1.3. Aza Holmes’ Superego

Aza Holmes’ superego mostly acts in a social situation where it forces her to be present and involved. Aza Holmes’ superego also pursues the image of a clean and pure person. This image is also related to her belief that ingesting any type of medication to be a normal person is unnatural. Hence, her ego-ideal puts its standard where she should avoid physical contact and refuse to take her medication as quoted, ““The air felt dead in the room. “If taking a pill makes you different, like, if it changes the way-down you . . . that’s just a screwed-up idea” [4, p.88].

Aza Holmes is certain about the idea that taking a medication to be her real self is unacceptable, and thus she points out that the medication does not work even after taking it for years. Her moral standard prohibits her to take the medication because it will punish her with guilt when she denies it.

3.2.2. Aza Holmes’ Psychoanalytical Conflict

3.2.2.1. The Internal Conflict Between Aza Holmes’ Id and Ego

Aza Holmes’ id wants to pursue her sexual drive with Davis Pickett. However, her ego cannot actualize it because the bacteria from having physical contact will contaminate her.

Because her id which functions on the sexual drives cannot be actualized, Aza Holmes easily gets anxious. Aza Holmes states her devastation as quoted, "I'd probably killed myself with sepsis because of some stupid childhood ritual that didn't even prove what I wanted it to prove, because what I wanted to know was unknowable, because there was no way to be sure about anything" [4, p.130].

3.2.2.2. The Internal Conflict Between Aza Holmes' Ego and Superego

Aza Holmes' Ego and Superego conflicts because her superego believes that the notion of ingesting medication is unnatural, and thus human does not need it. Meanwhile, her ego needs to find a way to gratify her needs, which means she must swallow the medicine in order to be better and functional. "Maybe the medicine is working, when from nowhere the thought appeared: The medicine has made you complacent, and you forgot to change the Band-Aid this morning" [4, p.128].

Aza Holmes feels better if she takes her medicine as prescribed. However, it also makes her feel guilty for thinking that she may have let her guard down.

3.2.2.3. The External Conflict Between Aza Holmes' Superego and Daisy Ramirez's Ego

Aza Holmes' superego pushes her to be a social person. It makes Aza Holmes feeling guilty when she gets money from Davis Pickett to keeps her from associating with the government. However, Daisy Ramirez ego pursues material things, so she involuntarily agrees to take the money from Davis Pickett. Their friendship is also almost at stake while Aza Holmes and Daisy Ramirez are having a debate about the character that Daisy Ramirez write in her Star Wars fanfiction which modelled Aza Holmes' personality traits. Aza Holmes takes an offence from Daisy Ramirez's move because it somehow confirms her self-criticism on how she has not been a good friend for Daisy Ramirez.

3.2.2.4. The External Conflict Between Aza Holmes' Ego and Davis Pickett's Id

Aza Holmes' ego conflicts with Davis Pickett' id when she is starting to form a romantic relationship with him. Aza Holmes' ego avoids human's touch because it serves the possibility of her getting infected with malicious bacteria. On the other hand, Davis Pickett' id desires an intimate relationship which requires tactual acts between them. The conflict between them is rooted on the psychological level because Davis Pickett' id wants to have an intimate relationship while Aza Holmes' ego cannot provide it.

3.2.3. Aza Holmes' Anxiety

3.2.3.1. Aza Holmes' Neurotic Anxiety

Aza Holmes anxiety starts to show when her ego fails to gratify her desire to have physical contacts with other humans because of her intense fear of getting killed with deathly bacteria. Her fear dominates her life mostly to the point where she cannot differentiate between reality and a mere thought. "His bacteria would be in me forever, eighty million of them, breeding and growing and joining my bacteria and producing God knows what" [4, p.153].

Aza Holmes gets anxious after kissing Davis Pickett because she is disgusted by the process of exchanging bacteria through saliva. Her disgusts turn into fear instantly. Her anxiety is intrusive and always rise without being able to control it.

3.2.3.2. Aza Holmes' Moral Anxiety

Based on her superego, Aza Holmes should be able to be present in a social situation and not be a burden to the people around her. However, the illness that she suffers from makes her thinks that she is a terrible person who only thinks about herself, and she should feel guilty of it.

“A woman came in and took me away to get a CT scan, and I was sort off relieved to be away from both my mom and Daisy for a while, not to feel the swirl of fear and guilt over being such a failure as a daughter and a friend” [4, p.220]. Aza Holmes feels guilty towards her mom and Daisy Ramirez for the same reason, that is not being able to be a good enough person.

3.2.4. Aza Holmes’ Ego Defense Mechanism

3.2.4.1. Aza Holmes’ Projection

Aza Holmes projects her insecurity and self-doubt to other subjects to disguise the initial stressor of her anxiety. Her anxiety certainly makes her despise herself and keeps on questioning whether she is valid to decide her own life.

Her doubts and self-hatred are projected into one of the characters of Daisy Ramirez’s story and therefore, it hurts her when Daisy Ramirez confirms that she models her character based on the traits of people around. “Ayala, Aza. Beginning of the alphabet to the end and back. Gave her compulsions. Gave her my personality. Anyone reading it would know how you really feel about me. Mychal. Davis. Everyone at school, probably” [4, p.214].

3.2.4.2. Aza Holmes’ Fixation

Aza Holmes becomes extremely fixated to the phase where her father is still alive because it is associated to how she perceives her identity as a human being. When her father died, Aza Holmes’ anxiety grows more intense and frequent because it seems that Aza Holmes has lost a figure that she can rely on. To help her carry on her life, Aza Holmes’ ego shows a mechanism of defense, that is to keep her father’s old car and phone.

3.2.4.3. Aza Holmes Displacement

Aza Holmes displace her anxiety by hurting herself and doing a ritual of changing a Band-Aid on her thumbnail. Aza Holmes’ anxiety is presented through her fear of being killed by malicious bacteria that possibly infect her organs.

To relieve the tension of her anxiety, she displaces her anxiety into a ritual, “You take a Band-Aid from inside your jeans pocket, where there is never a shortage of them, and you carefully reapply the bandage ... you feel the shivering jolt of the tension easing, the relief of giving in to the lesser angels of your nature” [4, p.47].

4. Conclusion

Aza Holmes’ ego is weak as it fails to balance the relationship of Aza Holmes’ id and superego. The psychological problems that occur in the story are the internal conflict between Aza Holmes’ id and ego, the internal conflict between Aza Holmes’ ego and superego, the external conflict between Aza Holmes’ superego and Daisy Ramirez’s ego and the external conflict between Aza Holmes’ ego and Davis Pickett’s id.

The conflicts that Aza Holmes faces are responsible for the neurotic and moral anxieties in her. To help her ego from facing the threat that the anxiety takes along, Aza Holmes shows three types of ego defense mechanisms: projection, fixation, and displacement.

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