

Ego and Emotion in the Characters of Father and Son in the Novel *Seribu Wajah Ayah* by Nurun Ala: A Literary Psychological Perspective

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Abstract: *This study investigates the dynamics of ego and emotion in the father and son characters within the novel Seribu Wajah Ayah by Azhar Nurun Ala. The primary aim is to describe the psychological conflicts of these characters through the lens of ego and emotional expression. To support the analysis, this research employs Sigmund Freud's literary psychological theory, particularly focusing on the structure of personality and the classification of emotions. Freud categorizes personality structure into the id, ego, and superego. He conceptualizes the psyche as driven by internal desires. The id seeks pleasure and avoids discomfort, the ego mediates between the id and the superego, and the superego weighs moral values in determining the appropriateness of an action. The interactions within these personality structures shape Freud's classification of emotions. In this context, emotional experiences such as guilt, shame, sadness, hatred, and love are identified within both the father and the "You" character in the novel.*

Key words: *Literary Psychology, Seribu Wajah Ayah, Psychoanalysis, Personality Structure, Emotion Classification, Azhar Nurun Ala*

Introduction

Literature functions as a window to the soul, offering a medium through which human desires and actions are represented. Literary works are often rich with psychological dimensions, as psychological conflicts typically arise from social factors. Hence, examining the psychological traits of characters becomes essential in literary analysis. This interconnection affirms the relevance of psychological inquiry in literature and vice versa (Ahmadi, 2015: 2).

Psychology is the scientific study of human behavior and mental life. Initially tied to philosophy and later influenced by natural sciences, psychology eventually emerged as an autonomous discipline (Kartini Kartono, 1984: 1). According to Endraswara (in Minderop, 2011: 2), literary psychology is a crucial field of study for several reasons: it enables a deeper exploration of character traits; it offers researchers feedback in developing character analysis; and it facilitates the examination of

literary works with strong psychological content. Freud (Minderop, 2011, p. 17) posited that literature originates from dreams and fantasies, often observed in his patients. These imaginative expressions are intimately linked to human needs and desires. Freud believed that dreams influence behavior, as they are manifestations of repressed desires.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, literary creation stems from the author's subconscious desires, which are made conscious through writing. Psychoanalysts emphasize the subconscious, suggesting that emotional states heavily influence thought processes. Emotions manifest through fluctuations in feelings and can be described as automatic, mutable, and consciously evolving experiences involving physical, cognitive, and affective components (Agus Santoso, 2021: 3–4). In contrast, ego relates to decision-making and reflects an individual's self-conception, which informs their actions. A person with a strong ego is perceived to have a commanding presence. The ego plays a dominant role in human psychology and is the sole element possessing willpower—ranging from simple, immediate desires to long-term life goals that drive motivation (Rachmantio, 2018, pp. 27–28).

The novel holds a significant place among various literary forms,

especially those within the family-life genre, which enjoys widespread popularity.

Family-centered narratives resonate with readers due to their depiction of warmth, harmony, and relatable conflicts, making them accessible across age groups. *Seribu Wajah Ayah* is one such novel. It presents a familial conflict between a father and his son, written by Nurun Ala and published by PT Gramedia Widiasarana Indonesia in 2020.

The narrative of *Seribu Wajah Ayah* (2020) portrays a son's emotional and egocentric struggle—referred to as "You"—toward his father. After losing his mother during childbirth, the son is raised lovingly by his father, an elementary school teacher in their rural village. Despite their modest lifestyle, the father supports his son's education, eventually enabling him to attend a prestigious university in the city. The son is brilliant and secured a scholarship to pursue a master's degree in the UK. However, this plan meets resistance from the father, who wishes for his son to return home and live with him. The son insists on completing his studies before returning. This disagreement leads to conflict, and ultimately, the son departs for the UK, leaving his father behind.

Years pass without communication until the son receives news of his father's death. This revelation is accompanied by a

deep regret rooted in his ego and emotional detachment.

The novel *Seribu Wajah Ayah* is a compelling subject of study for several reasons: (1) it portrays a seemingly harmonious parent-child relationship that deteriorates under the pressures of modern social influences, resulting in rebellious behavior previously foreign to the son's upbringing; (2) although not a newly published work, the novel has not been widely studied, offering fresh ground for academic exploration; (3) it was selected as one of the "Top 100 Reader's Picks of 2023," and reached its eighth reprint in April 2024; and (4) the narrative focuses on a powerful theme of regret without the opportunity for redemption, offering profound psychological and emotional depth.

This study employs the psychoanalytic method formulated by Sigmund Freud. Freud conceptualized dreams as manifestations of desire. Desire, in turn, plays a pivotal role in shaping the personality structure. Freud categorized the personality structure into three components: the id, the ego, and the superego. He also classified emotions into distinct categories, including guilt, shame, sadness, hatred, and love. However, it's important to note that Freud's theories have been subject to criticism and some of his concepts have limitations. For example, his emphasis on the role of early childhood experiences in

shaping personality has been challenged by more recent research. The **id** represents instinctual desires driven purely by the pursuit of pleasure. Freud likened the id to a king or queen who acts solely based on personal wishes and gratification without regard for consequences. If a person were to be governed exclusively by the id, their personality could become self-destructive. The **ego**, by contrast, is responsible for mediating desires by considering gains and losses. It makes decisions by balancing the id's demands and the superego's constraints. Freud compared the ego to a prime minister—pragmatic, strategic, and grounded in reality. The **superego**, meanwhile, embodies moral conscience and ethical judgment. It evaluates actions based on notions of right and wrong. Freud described the superego as akin to a priest—an internalized moral authority. The emotion of **guilt** arises when a person's behavior conflicts with internalized moral values and ethical standards. **Shame**, although similar, emerges in the absence of actual moral transgression, often tied to societal expectations or personal ideals. **Sadness** is generally triggered by the loss of something deeply valued and loved. **Hatred** stems from anger and a desire to harm or destroy the object of that emotion. Finally, **love** arises from deep

affection and emotional attachment.

Result and Discussion

1. Id, Ego, and Superego

In the early scenes, the father character receives news from the uncle character that his wife has gone into labor and has been rushed to the hospital. However, the mother of the 'You' character dies due to postpartum hemorrhaging. The father, though devastated, exhibits remarkable strength in accepting the reality of his wife's death and deciding to raise his child as a single parent. This decision, a testament to his resilience, reflects the father's implementation of the ego principle, accepting reality and acting rationally despite emotional distress. Simultaneously, this choice also reflects the operation of the id in the father, as he fulfills a deep instinctual drive to protect and care for his child. In raising 'You,' the father is supported by his sister.

The superego, which represents moral conscience and the awareness of ethical values, becomes evident in the father's character when he reflects on the moral implications of love. He expresses the following sentiment:

"Your father believes that sometimes love means letting go. He did not want you to be like a bird trapped in a cage, unable to fly freely. Because

your father truly understood the consequences of genuine love: to love is to nurture and protect without the desire to control. To love sincerely is to give without expecting anything in return. Furthermore, to love means allowing the person you care for to do whatever they wish, even if it leads to future regret."(*Nurun Ala*, 2020: 42).

This quote demonstrates the father's superego at work—his conscious evaluation that love should be a form of liberation, not restriction.

Conflict begins to surface when "You" enters elementary school and is assigned to write a poem commemorating Mother's Day. "You," responds angrily and sorrowfully, lashing out at the father. The dialogue reveals this inner turmoil:

"Why would Allah SWT create someone without a mother? Why me? It should have been those naughty classmates of mine who do not have mothers. Why, Dad? Why did it have to be me?" (*Nurun Ala*, 2020: 57).

This outburst illustrates the internal shift from ego and superego toward the influence of the id. "You" wishes for others to suffer in the way that he has, a projection of his pain that reflects the id's instinct to avoid discomfort and emotional distress.

As 'You' enters adolescence, the id principle becomes more prominent. At fourteen, he celebrates his graduation by joining a street parade and scribbling on his uniform, acts of rebellion typical of teenage expression. Upon returning home, he is scolded by his father for ignoring prior warnings, a clear demonstration of the father's commitment to discipline and moral conduct, driven by his superego. Meanwhile, 'You' exhibits the id principle—seeking personal gratification and social belonging, even when defying parental authority.

Later, "You" leaves for university in the city, pursuing his aspirations and leaving his father behind. After completing his undergraduate degree, he strongly desires to pursue postgraduate studies abroad, driven by his id and its inherent rebelliousness. This ambition is met with opposition from his father, who urges caution and expresses concern.

However, "You" follows his impulses and studies abroad. His time overseas does not go as planned, leading to feelings of guilt and homesickness. He begins to long for the moments spent with his father. Less than two months into his studies in the UK, "You" receives news from his uncle that his father has passed away. The uncle also reveals that the father had been

concealing a terminal illness from "You."

The father's death elicits deep regret in "You." Nevertheless, the influence of the superego—realistic and idealistic—enables him to rise from his grief and find moral clarity. The narrative expresses this transformation through the following passage:

"You should be grateful that you feel regret now. Because if regret comes in the afterlife, nothing can be changed. For now, keep your father in your heart, pray for him after every prayer, and remember the advice he gave you." (*Nurun Ala*, 2020: 129).

This moment of reflection demonstrates that the superego has come to dominate the "You" internal dynamic, guiding him to accept responsibility and transform his remorse into moral resolve. His renewed commitment to his father's values signifies a profound shift from ego-driven choices to superego-centered principles.

2. Emotional Classification of the Father and Child Characters

a. Feelings of Sadness

The father's sorrow is a complex emotion that first surfaces with the loss of his wife. This profound sadness resurfaces when 'You' departs for higher education, leaving him alone. In contrast, 'You'

experiences a different kind of sadness, a deep sense of loss, when the father passes away.

b. Feelings of Guilt

The father experiences profound guilt for delaying the revelation of the truth about the mother's death until the character "You" is ten years old. This guilt, a heavy burden on his conscience, is a clear indication of his emotional turmoil. Meanwhile, the character "You" feels guilty for neglecting the father and prioritizing personal ego over their relationship.

c. Feelings of Shame

The character "You" experiences a deep sense of shame when their message to the father goes unanswered, which leads to a reluctance to send any further messages. This shame, a heavy emotional burden, significantly impacts their relationship with the father.

d. Feelings of Love

The character "You" expresses affection and a desire to make the father proud. The father reciprocates this love to the extent that he neglects his own needs, focusing solely on the happiness of "You." His selfless love, often at the cost of his own well-being, is a testament to the depth of his feelings.

e. Feelings of Hatred

The novel *Seribu Wajah Ayah* by Nurun Ala does not depict any expressions of hatred.

Conclusion

Ego and emotion in *Seribu Wajah Ayah* represent the psychological dynamics between the father and the child ("You"), arising from conflicting desires. Subconscious yearnings shape the psychological development of both characters: the father's unfulfilled desires result in accumulated internal sorrow, while the intense ambitions of the child lead to profound regret.

Through the lens of the author's perspective and analysis of desire, *Seribu Wajah Ayah* underscores the importance of effective communication within the family. The novel suggests that poor communication can lead to significant psychological consequences for individuals with strong egos and emotional impulses. As such, the work functions as a critique of familial communication. This study of *Seribu Wajah Ayah* by Azhar Nurun Ala employs Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, particularly focusing on personality structure and emotional classification. Hopefully, this research may serve as a reference point for future scholars seeking to conduct more in-depth investigations into literary psychology.

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