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## Nora's Character Development After Apparent Death in Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library*

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the development of the main character, Nora, in Matt Haig's *the Midnight Library*. The development of Nora's character begins to look after she experiences the apparent death when she is between life and death. Apparent death is an experience where someone is transferred into another life. The writer uses a descriptive qualitative method and an intrinsic approach to analyze Nora's character development which is influenced by the conditions and circumstances experienced by Nora. The data of this study is taken from the words and dialogues in Matt Haig's *the Midnight Library* which shows the characters and character development of the main character, Nora. In analyzing the data, the writer uses the theory of character development by Perrine (2018). The analysis reveals that the apparent death has influenced the development of Nora's character. At the beginning of the story, the writer finds out that Nora is a dispirited, petty-minded, pessimistic, ungrateful, and self-blameful person. After she experiences apparent death, she begins to realize the true meaning of her life. And then she becomes an open-minded, optimistic, grateful, and happier person after she experiences something big in her life which is when she is between life and death.

**Keywords:** character development, apparent death, character

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

In life, human certainly has a purpose in their lives to win or achieve. But, in the process of achieving the purpose in life, the human journey is not always easy and smooth. They are often confronted by many challenges, obstacles, and even persistent problems that can cause stress, pain, and depression. According to Mienaltowski (2011), problems and obstacles come to every human's life every day which makes life really difficult to live. If someone gives up in the middle of their life because they have to face the problems and challenges in life, then they will lose and get nothing so that they can even think to end their own life. Therefore, they should try to solve their problems or try to get out of the way when they can.

People who have overcome obstacles and survived their life problems will be the stronger and better version of themselves because they have learned from their previous experiences. According to Hurlock (1974), no one is born with a definite character as a person in this world. It is because human character can be influenced by some factors and also can improve or develop

over time by being influenced by social life, social conditions, environments, and social activities around them in their early lives. So, the human character can develop over time over life.

Character development can also be found in any human figure in a novel because the human figures in the novel represent the real life of humans. According to Kennedy (1983), the character in a literary work is an imaginary person of the writer in a story. Characters in novels also experience things that make their character grow and develop. It is influenced by events and times experienced by the characters.

In Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library*, the main character, Nora, also experiences character development after she experiences apparent death in the Midnight Library. Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* tells about the main character, Nora, who lives with disappointment and regret. She always worries about her life and always thinks that her life is a mess. When things do not go as she plans, she gets mad at herself and feels desperate. She thinks that everything she does always fails and goes wrong, her moves feel like a mistake and she thinks that it is her fault. One time, she wants to end her life because she feels that she no longer has any goals to achieve in life, even a small goal has gone. She feels that no one needs her or her help anymore. Finally, she decides to kill herself to put an end to all the worries and regrets in her life. But, Nora wakes up in a slightly odd library with an awful lot of green books, from dark to clear green. In the library, Nora meets Mrs. Elm, an old woman librarian from her past school. Mrs. Elm explains to Nora that they are in the Midnight Library which is between life and death.

There are several previous studies about character development that have also been discussed. For example, the study entitled *the Role of the Environment Towards Character Development in Jenoyne Adam's Resurrecting Mingus* (Esnaeni, 2010). In this previous study, the writer analyzes the character development of Mingus in *Adam's Resurrecting Mingus*. This study more focuses on Mingus' character and the setting of the story. The other previous study that also discusses character development is "the Magic of Howl's Moving Castle: An Analysis of Character Development in a Fantasy Novel", (Utami, 2018). This study aims to analyze how the magical incidents in Diana Wynne Jones' *Howl's Moving Castle* affect the development of the character. In this previous study, the writer paid a lot of attention to the magical events that influenced the character development. The writer also uses the qualitative approach, Nikolajeva's magic rules, and also the function of fantasy by Tolkien to analyze the data. The data has been taken from the words, phrases, and sentences that represent situations involving magical occurrences in Diana Wynne Jones' *Howl's Moving Castle*.

In this study, the writer is also interested in analyzing character development of the main character in Matt Haig's *the Midnight Library* novel because of how the development of Nora's character happens in her life after she experiences apparent death. The development of Nora's character is influenced by the experiences and events that she has experienced in the midnight library while she is between life and death. It is very interesting to discuss, therefore the writer wants to analyze Nora's character.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Definition of Character

According to Kamisa (in Kasandra et al., 2019), people's character is the behavior, mental, and attitudes that are formed by their life process that is not the same for every person. Every people in this world are experiencing different life experiences in their life which make them behave, move and respond in different ways too. So that makes people have a different character from one another that makes them unique and different.

Putri (2018) explains that a character is someone who makes an appearance, someone portrayed by a writer through conversation, action, thought, and emerged with a fictional name

as an identity. In the stories, the character is also shown how they talk and interact with each other and also explain where they come from. So it is easy for readers to better recognize the characters in fiction than recognize people in real life because the characters in the fiction are clearly explained and portrayed.

a. Types of Character

In fiction, there are two types of characters that are found in literature, which are flat characters and round characters (Forster, 1927). The Flat character does not make any change in the story. We can describe the character in just a few sentences. For example, if we know that a certain character is a hero, then at the end of the story he is still a hero who likes to help. Whereas round character has a big role in the story that always make changes and develop the story. So, in the story where the main character usually changes from a bad person into a good person or from a good person into a bad person means they have a round character.

There are also two types of characters that can be classified in fiction, which are static characters and dynamic (developing) characters (Perrine et al., 2018:145). In the story, the static character is the character that does not change at all. The static character is the same person from the beginning of the story until the final story. Unlike the dynamic character, the character can change because of some reasons. The dynamic character has the change of character, personality, and also the outlook of the character. So in short, someone who has a static character will behave the same and will not change, but someone who has a dynamic character will change in the end.

**Apparent Death**

People who experience apparent death as drowning and being taken into spaces that look like a house (Koehler, 2015). Apparent death is an experience where someone is transferred into another life. They appear to be dead, but they are still alive. Every people who experience apparent death will experience a psychological change (Apandi, 2014). Apparent death makes people who have experienced feel better about their life. They will accept their life and themselves because they start to realize that their life and everything they have had is better.

**Epiphany**

Epiphany is often experienced by a character (protagonist) in a story. According to Joyce (in Perrine et al., 2018:145), Epiphany is a sudden realization experience by a character about a deeper understanding of a situation and circumstance in life in a story. Characters begin to recognize their lives and circumstances after they experience character development caused by the crucial situation that occurred in their life. Epiphany shows that the character in the story has learned and noticed something from their previous experiences, thus making them become the better version of themselves than they were before.

Epiphany can be found in any type of dynamic character, a character that can change because of experience and circumstances experienced in the story. According to Perrine (2018:145), the dynamic character can change because of some reasons. The dynamic character has a change in character, personality, and also the outlook of the character.

**Character Development**

In fiction, the character is created by the writer. They play a crucial role in the course of the story. According to Coles (in Utami, 2018:75), all of the intrinsic elements (plots, character structures, backgrounds, themes, etc.) are connected to the character. All of the intrinsic elements would help the character in its development over time in a story. Character development is a process of change or growth that occurs or is experienced by personality and character behavior to identify and describe certain characteristics.

The character in the story can always develop or change. The character change and development in the story can also be affected by some reasons. According to Perrine (2018:146), the change of the character in the story got to qualify some conditions, such as the change of the character must be affected by the conditions and circumstances experienced at the place of the character, and individual characters in the story must consistently follow dramatized stories, and the time given in the story must be sufficient for the change of the character and still reliable.

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## 2. METHOD

In this study, the writer uses descriptive qualitative method to analyze the data. The writer also uses an intrinsic approach to analyze the development of Nora's character in the *Midnight Library*. This intrinsic approach is used because the writer uses the theory of character development, which focuses on the character development of the main character in the story that is influenced by the conditions and circumstances experienced by Nora.

In this study, the writer works as the data collector and data analyzer. The writer collects the data through several steps. The first step is choosing *the Midnight Library* novel as the object analysis. The second step is reading the novel to get a better understanding of the story. In the last step, the writer identifies and classifies the data by taking notes of the words and dialogues of the characters in the story that shows the development of Nora's character. And then, the writer also analyze the data in this study uses several steps. First, the writer analyzes the data that has been identified and classified using the theory of character development. After that, the writer makes a conclusion based on the findings.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the writer analyzed the development of Nora's character in Matt Haig's *the Midnight Library*. The discussions in this study will be divided into three parts. The first part explains how Nora's character is at beginning of the story before she experiences something big in her life, the second part explains how Nora experiences an epiphany after all of her apparent death experience, and the last part explains how the development of Nora's character after she learns a lot of things when she is between life and death. These three parts are connecting each other which explains the process of Nora's character development in Matt Haig's *the Midnight Library*.

### Nora's Character at the Beginning of the Story.

In the early of the story, it is shown that Nora is a 35-year-old woman who lives alone and survives with little purpose in life. Nora works at String Theory, a music store, as a store clerk and sometimes she gives piano lessons to a customer. She works well, does a good job, and also has no intention to move out of her job. It is not because she is too comfortable and really loves her job, but because she is too afraid to try new things. Nora lives full of fears about what will happen in the future and she always worries about everything in her life. She even worries about things she has not even tried. So, she messes up her own life.

#### a. Petty-Minded

Early in the story, Nora is described as a petty-minded person. She always worries about everything that happens in her life. If things do not go according to her plan, she always concludes the reasons with negative thoughts. This is shown in the following quotations:

Mr. Banerjee, "I have some good news. I don't need you to collect my pills anymore."

That was it. No one needed her. (Haig, 2020:30)

The quotations above are shown how Nora responds to the news that Mr. Benerjee brought. Nora thinks that she is not useful anymore. She feels useless and there is no reason to live in this world. What Mr. Benerjee wants to say to Nora is, that he does not want to bother Nora. Mr. Benerjee does not want to put Nora in trouble by taking the medicine for him all the time. But Nora thinks that she is useless and no one needs her and her help anymore. Nora thinks that maybe nobody cares about her or her existence anymore. Her existence seems to matter no more to anyone or even herself.

Nora's habit of summarizing things with is narrow mind is strengthened by her habit of comparing herself and her life with the lives of others. She feels that the others' life is good and more perfect than the life she is living. Her thoughts that are full of negative things make her feel that everything she is doing is wrong and will lead her into bad things. That is once again proved by Nora by thinking that everything she is doing was a mistake.

#### b. Pessimistic

Besides being petty-minded, Nora is also described as a pessimistic character. It can be seen from how she does not dare to try new things around her. Nora does not even have the courage to make any decisions because she is afraid of the results she will get later. Nora is always so pessimistic about everything she is doing and everything that might be happened or will be happened to her. For example, Nora has been staying at her job for a long time. She has been doing a lot of stuff and always tries to do a good job at string theory, including giving piano lessons for her customers. She has not even decided to move or quit from her current job. It is not because she really loves her job, but because she does not have any other choice. Nora's pessimistic attitude is indicated by the following quotations:

<sup>11</sup> "I don't think your problem was stage fright. Or a wedding fright. I think your problem was life fright." Ravi said, (Haig, 2020:25)

... Nora didn't know. She'd been petrified of motherhood. The fear of a deeper depression. She couldn't look after herself, let alone anyone else (Haig, 2020:26).

In the above quotations, it is pointed out that Nora is always afraid to try and do a lot of things. Nora's pessimism is intertwined with her petty-minded mind. The negative energy keeps her thinking negative and eventually turns her into a pessimistic person who lacks the courage to try new things. Ravi, her brother's friend, also realizes that in fact, what Nora is afraid of is just afraid to live her life. Nora's fear always comes because she is not confident about herself or her life. She always worries about her future and her past too. Nora worries about the outcome or the result of what she is doing and she is afraid of what will happen in the future. Nora always worries if everything will not go according to her plan, she worries that the results later will not be as good as her wishes. Her constant concern keeps her negative thinking and makes her even more depressed and feels stressed.

#### c. Ungrateful

Nora is the one who never feels grateful for what she has had. She is always complaining about what happened to her life. Whenever Nora feels that her life is bad or sucks, she tries to compare herself with others. She will compare her life to others' life. But when she looks at the lives of others, she feels that she is the only one who is unlucky in this world. Nora feels that people around her are luckier because they can do the things they wanted and can have the time to enjoy their life and enjoy themselves.

<sup>5</sup> She went on Instagram and saw everyone had worked out how to live, except her. She posted a rambling update on Facebook, which she didn't even really use anymore (Haig, 2020:31).

The above quotation proves that Nora is an ungrateful person. It indicates how Nora feels that the movements that are made and occurred in others' lives are always moving faster. She feels that she is the only one who has no improvement in her life. She becomes more and more confused and begins to feel no gratitude for her existence and what she had again. Nora does not understand that life and problems or trials of life as an individual will be different. She does not see how people are experiencing their problems, and she only sees that from one side, which is from the outside. So she feels that she is the only one in the world who has problems in life so she always complains and does not feel grateful about her life at all.

**d. Dispirited**

In Matt Haig's *the Midnight Library* novel, Nora is also described as a dispirited person. In her life, she has become a negative, pessimistic, and ungrateful person. And it makes her feel even more depressed and makes her stressful.

At one time, in her days, Nora feels that bad things are coming into her life continuously, every day. She lost her cat and she is dismissed from where she worked. Her side jobs as a piano teacher and medicine taker for Mr. Benerjee have also been replaced by someone else. So she feels that her life is completely useless and a mess. She feels that no one needs her or her help anymore. Nora has lost everything that gives her reasons for being in the world and keep survive her life. For all this time, Nora has survived to keep living her life continuously despite the pressures and trials of life that she felt or endured. Losing things that makes a reason for her to stay alive, makes her feel that she also loses her chance to live a good life and to be useful. One of the reasons for her to live her life is to take care of her cat, but her cat died and it is found by a man on the side of the road. She tries to do a good job in her working place so that she can get a good salary from that even though her salary is not enough to pay her rent sometimes. But now Nora is also dismissed from her job, which makes her lose her income.

What Nora feels right now has been the line of her life. It is enough for her to survive. She does not want to try to be worthwhile or to have the life that she thinks is perfect again, because in her opinion, the more she tries, the more she will fail in her life. Nora becomes desperate, so she begins to decide to end her life.

<sup>4</sup> She knew only one thing with absolute certainty: she didn't want to reach tomorrow. She stood up. She found a pen and a piece of paper.

It was, she decided, a very good time to die. (Haig, 2020:32)

The above quotation shows how Nora really wants to end her life because she thinks that if she does, she will not worry about the things of her future life. Things that she thinks will possibly bring badly for her. She decides not to think about tomorrow anymore because she is desperate and does not want to try new things. That shows how Nora is a dispirited person.

**e. Self-Blameful**

In her life, Nora feels that she has nothing left to hold on to and that she has nobody else by her side, even just to exchange news. Even Nora lost her cat and feels so sad about it. For all of the bad things that happen in her life, Nora always blames herself and thinks that she is the one who makes her life becomes worse.

Nora blames herself again, feeling that she is the most useless person in the world. Everything she does always feels like a mistake to her. She feels that no matter what she tries, it will not work. Her mind is filled with the illusion of failure in life.

<sup>1</sup> “In fact, I’m sure it would be a relief. I’m not useful to anyone. I was bad at work. I have disappointed everyone. I am a waste of a carbon footprint, to be honest. I hurt people. I have no one left. Not even poor old Volts, who died because I couldn’t look after a cat properly. I want to die (Haig, 2020:69).”

The above quotation shows that Nora is a self-blameful person. She blames herself for the death of her cat. She blames herself for not being able to take good care of her cat, even when in the reality, her cat is died because of the disease her cat had been born. Nora considered herself to be the most to blame because in her life she is the one to take control. She is the one who takes steps and decisions. Therefore, every failure she gets is her fault. So, it also makes her have no courage to make up her mind or try new things either.

#### **Apparent Death on Nora’s Character**

After what Nora had experienced in her life, she chose to end her life because she refused to continue. She's afraid to go through tomorrow. Actually, death is never going to be the answer to every problem. After Nora decides to end her life, she hopes that she will be free of all the problems and anxieties of her life. But after Nora tries to end her life, Nora wakes up in a place that looked like a library. Nora also notices someone that looked similar to her past school librarian, named Mrs. Elm.

Nora has been through a lot in Midnight Library. She has tried various versions of life, which make her learn many things too. She learns many things and understands many things that she does not know before. This makes her realize various life lessons and the lessons of accepting herself. Nora experiences epiphany after she experiences apparent death between life and death. According to Joyce (in Perrine et al., 2018:145), Epiphany is a sudden realization experience by a character about a deeper understanding of a situation and circumstance in life in a story. Characters begin to recognize their lives and circumstances after they experience character development caused by the crucial situation that occurred in their life. Epiphany shows that the character in the story has learned and noticed something from their previous experiences, thus making them become the better version of themselves than they were before.

#### **a. The Lesson of Appreciating Life**

After everything that Nora has been through at the Midnight Library, Nora realizes how worthy is life. She realizes there is no perfect life. The life she is lived all this time is the best life ever. When Nora experiences some events in her apparent death, she learns and realizes something, such as the fact that life must go on without giving up, because it will also give a lot of lessons. This is shown in the following quotations:

<sup>2</sup> “The only way to learn is to live (Haig, 2020:115).”

The quotation above is Nora’s thoughts that she expressed when she tries one of the life in the Midnight Library. She realizes that by staying alive, she will know and understand many things. This is because when a person lives, that person will go through many things and experience many things that can make them a better version of themselves. After all, they have learned from their previous experience.



Nora's thoughts about the importance of life are encouraged by her awareness that in life, it is normal for them if they are faced with various trials and problems. There is always a way out of it all, and she can get over it if she does not give up and keep trying. She believes that there is always a way, though the way will not always be easy, but there will be many paths to walk.

#### b. The Lesson of Appreciating Herself

Self-appreciation is the most important aspect of life survival. After Nora learns the fact about life and learns the truth about all the reasons in her life, she stops degrading and blaming herself. Nora understands why her cat has died, so she no longer considered herself as the bad owner of a cat. Nora also begins to realize that she can be the best version of herself. She can achieve the possibilities of life. She only knows that in life she will have to work hard to get it.

<sup>13</sup> "She realized, at that moment, that she was capable of a lot more than she had known (Haig, 2020:159)."

<sup>10</sup> "Nora came to understand something ... You just had to never give up on the idea that there would be a life somewhere that could be enjoyed (Haig, 2020:207)."

The quotation above shows that Nora realizes and understands new things in life that she never knows before. Nora realizes that effort and hard work are rewarded. Everything can be accomplished with effort and hard work. She has to focus on what she wants to accomplish at that moment without having to think of anything else, so she can strive wholeheartedly and devote herself to it.

In the lives she has tried in the Midnight Library, Nora begins to learn how she should look at herself. Nora begins to accept herself completely and unburden herself by forgiving herself. She also begins to realize that there is no easy way of living. Everyone has their own difficulties in their life. So Nora thinks there is no need to compare her life with that of anyone else.

#### Nora's Character Development

Nora has learned a lot of things when she was in the Midnight Library, the place between life and death. Nora's experience to try a lot of kinds of life has gradually led her to change. Nora looks at herself differently and kindly. The reaction of Nora to death is different now. Nora, the one who really wants to die at first, now wants to be alive so bad. She wants to try out the possibilities that might be happened in her root life. After Nora realizes that her life is better, she becomes an open-minded, optimistic, grateful, and happier person.

#### a. Open-Minded

As Nora learned much from her experiences between life and death, Nora becomes a more open-minded person. She accepts everything in her life. She realizes that everything that happens in life is happening for a reason. Nora begins to react differently to death. She realizes that life is not that bad. Mrs. Elm can see that in Nora. In every opportunity she has to try various kinds of life, she has learned many things and has known many things that she has never known before. So she begins to see the meaning of life properly. This is corroborated by evidence that she started to delete her posts about suicide.

<sup>6</sup> A little later she deleted her suicidal social media posts, and – in a moment of sincere sentimentality – she wrote something else instead. She titled it "A Thing I Have Learned (Haig, 2020:268)."

The above quotation proves how Nora has completely changed her way of thinking, especially about death. She begins to erase everything related to death because she does not

want to remember it anymore. She wants to change herself to see only the good in her life. It is because she has learned a lot about life, and she is ready to live a better life and live a better self.

She also begins to see the little things around her, like, that everyone has their own life. What is certain is that there are still many people who care about her. An example is her brother, Joe, and her best friend, Izzy. Nora knows the reason why her closest people don't talk to her often is that they are both busy. And this is proven when Nora gets a message from Izzy telling Nora that she is still very busy, she misses Nora and will tell Nora after all her work is done.

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**b. Optimistic**

After her apparent death, Nora begins to see the possibilities that she can reach in life. She can see that there are great possibilities that can be reached. She can see hope in his life and make it survive.

**1** Yesterday I knew I had no future, and it was impossible for me to accept my life as it is now. And yet today, that same messy life seems full of hope. Potential. (Haig, 2020:269)

The quotation above shows how Nora begins to see hope in her life. She begins to be an optimistic person and willing to try whatever is in trying. This is because she has already begun to see the great possibilities in his life.

**c. Grateful**

In Nora's life, previously she was a person who couldn't be grateful and kept complaining about something that happened to her. However, after she experienced many things while she was in between life and death, she turned into someone who could respect herself more. She became more grateful for everything that happened to her.

**2** We don't have to do everything in order to be everything. Because we are already infinite. while we are alive we always contain a future of multifarious possibility (Haig, 2020:268).

The quote above shows how Nora started to become a person who is grateful for her life. She no longer complains about anything that happens in her life. For example, if she has worked hard and still can't get something, she will be more sincere about it and think that there are still other possibilities that can be achieved in her life. Nora looks at her life on a more positive side and begins to realize that the negative thoughts which she is always thinking are a barrier to her becoming the best version of herself.

**d. Happy**

Nora is now starting to see the good in her life. Nora is being more confident with her life and she is living a full of happiness in her life right now. Nora starts to appreciate that in all her life, there must be various trials to come. Everyone also has difficulties and problems in their own life. So Nora decides to love herself more for who she is. From all of the changes that Nora has experienced this time, she is more able to enjoy her life and can live her life with positive thoughts and live a happier life. As Nora sees the positive things in her life, she becomes the happier person alive. Nora is happier and more hopeful than ever. She now sees that everything in her life is more inspiring.

<sup>1</sup> She could have been all those amazing things, and that wasn't depressing as she had once thought. Not at all. It was inspiring. Because now she saw the kinds of things she could do when she put herself to work (Haig, 2020:261).

The quotation above shows that Nora already knows how to enjoy her life. She no longer considers all the problems that come to her life as pressure, but she sees them as a motivation and inspiration for her and others to do things better. She knows that life will be easy to live if she continues to try and be grateful for what is in her life. So, she strives to be the best version of herself and starts to see things around her on a positive side. She can see the beauty in life. She even appreciated the beauty of the color of flowers that she has never noticed before. The beauty she sees is influenced by the change in her more open mind, so she can measure anything by thinking that every definite occurrence has a reason. So now Nora can live a happier life.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis above, it can be concluded that Nora, the main character <sup>2</sup> in Matt Haig's *the Midnight Library*, has a dynamic type of character, where the character can change at the end of the story. So, the <sup>23</sup> character of Nora at the beginning of the story and at the end of the story is different. In the analysis, the writer finds out that at the beginning of the story, Nora is described as a dispirited, petty-minded, pessimistic, ungrateful, and self-blameful person. Nora's character give more pressure on her. So she feels stressed and depressed which make her finally kill herself to end her life. After that, Nora experiences apparent death in Midnight Library where she actually is between life and death. There are a lot of things that make her realize the fact that she has not known before, and she also learns a lot there. She begins to realize the true meaning of her life. So, after that, the writer finds out that Nora's apparent death influences Nora's character development. At the end of the story, the writer finds out that Nora becomes an open-minded, optimistic, grateful, and happier person after she experiences something big in her life which is when she is between life and death.

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