

Article

An Analysis of Libby Day's Personality in Gillian Flynn's Dark Places Novel

Analisis Kepribadian Libby Day dalam Novel Dark Places karya Gillian Flynn

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Citation: Warjaya, W.; Alamsyah An Analysis of Libby Day's Personality in Gillian Flynn's Dark Places Novel. J Riset Soshum 2025, 2(1), 24–30. <https://doi.org/10.70392/jrs.v2i1.2430>

Received: 6 April 2025

Revised: 5 May 2025

Accepted: 8 May 2025

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ISSN: 3047-6208

Abstract

This study aims to explain how the Id, Ego and Superego are portrayed in the main character in the novel Dark Places by Gillian Flynn using Sigmund Freud's psychological theory. This method uses qualitative and the data was taken from the narrative and dialogue related to Libby Day as the main character in the novel. The findings of this study showed that the portrayal of Libby Day as the main character has an unbalanced psychological aspect. The Id in itself is described as more dominant with 10 data than the other two psychological aspects, namely the Ego and Superego, each of which has 3 data. This dominant Id aspect triggers her to be lacking empathy, self-centered, often stealing and cheating when facing difficult situations where the imbalance will have a negative impact on herself and others. However, behind that, it is portrayed that there is still an ego in her that is willing to open her old wounds in order to get money and clear the bad name of her brother who was slandered, and gradually her Ego develops into a Superego where she didn't want her family to experienced difficulties because of her.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis; Sigmund Freud; Id; Ego; Superego

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan bagaimana penggambaran Id, Ego, dan Superego pada tokoh utama dalam novel Dark Places karya Gillian Flynn dengan menggunakan teori psikologi Sigmund Freud. Metode penelitian ini menggunakan kualitatif dan data ini diambil dari narasi dan dialog terkait Libby Day sebagai tokoh utama dalam novel. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa penggambaran Libby Day sebagai tokoh utama memiliki aspek psikologi yang tidak seimbang. Id pada dirinya digambarkan lebih dominan dengan jumlah 10 data dari dua psikologikal aspek yang lain yaitu Ego, dan Superego yang masing-masing memiliki 3 data. Aspek Id yang dominan ini memicu dia menjadi tidak memiliki empati, hanya mementingkan diri sendiri, sering mencuri dan menipu saat menghadapi situasi sulit yang mana ketidakseimbangan itu akan berdampak

buruk pada dirinya sendiri dan orang lain. Namun, dibalik itu digambarkan masih ada sedikit Ego dalam dirinya yang rela membuka luka lamanya demi mendapatkan uang dan membersihkan nama buruk saudaranya yang difitnahnya, dan lambat laun Egonya berkembang menjadi Superego di mana ia tidak ingin lagi membuat keluarganya mengalami kesulitan karena dia.

Kata Kunci: Psikoanalisis; Sigmund Freud; Id; Ego; Superego

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is a reflection of human life in the real world. The object of a literary work is usually born based on the author's thoughts. The literature mirrors and expresses life that is even more ambiguous [1]. Literature is created from the circumstances surrounding which affect the personality and mind of the author, and literature itself has created a more imaginative focus that arises from the author's thoughts and the author's psychological condition [2]. Furthermore, literature has a very close relationship with one another, human life, and another branch of science closest to literature in psychology, both of which are born from the human mind [3]. That means human psychological aspects are always present in a work of literature. One of the sciences that developed literature with psychology is psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis is a field of science that studies human behavior and personality in a literary work [4]. Sigmund Freud was one of the people who developed this discipline. Tyson (2006) defines psychoanalysis is a study science that uses a lot of points of view, such as how to think, how to communicate, and how to solve problems. In other words, psychoanalysis examines more deeply about human personality in a literary work. In psychoanalysis, there is a psychological aspect in humans. Referring to Freud (7), the personality theory is generally divided into three systems the Id, Ego, and Superego. The id represents desires and instincts, the ego balances reality and desires, and the superego focuses on moral standards and societal norms [5]. Likewise, the Id used similar with the defense mechanism which refressess mind to the subconscious [6].

The role of the psychological aspects is essential for human control [7]. In this case, the literature contains psychological aspects mentioned because there are characters who build stories in it. One of the literary works that contains psychological aspects is the novel *Dark Places*.

Gillian Flynn's *Dark Places* was first published in 2009. This novel tells us about the main character named Libby Day, a thirties woman whose life is far from happy, and her life always depends on people's mercy. However, all of that was not the result of her fault. No one told Libby that when she was a child, she had to watch her mother and sisters being slaughtered by her elder brother. As a result, her personality became very unstable in her thirties, her days were still in the shadows of the events of that day, and childhood trauma affected her personality. Living through the mercy of people in the form of allowances and royalties for her books, she can no longer do so because it is finished. She must find her own money to live life. She is then forced to dig up the memory of the day the murder took place after receiving an offer of money from a club that loves sadistic stories about what really happened that day. Departing from that, she meets her eldest brother, who is in prison due to the murder and slowly begins to discover what really happened on the night of the murder. This study offers a novel perspective by connecting Freudian psychoanalysis with modern trauma and mental disorder discourse, particularly relevant in today's context where mental illness affects millions including over 19 million Indonesians according to Riset Kesehatan Dasar 2018. By examining how Libby's trauma disrupts her psychological balance and identifying specific moments where the Id, Ego, and Superego conflict, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how unresolved trauma and internal conflicts manifest as psychological abnormalities in literary characters and the importance of addressing these issues within academic, familial, economic, and social contexts [8].

Because of the idea in the previous paragraph, the researcher chosed *Dark Places* by Gillian Flynn's novel to be analyzed because this novel won the Black Quill Award for Dark Genre Novel of The Year (2010), which shows a powerful

psychological aspect that plays in it. In analyzing the psychological abnormality of aspects of the characters, the researcher used Sigmund Freud's psychological theory, which has three elements namely Id, Ego, and Superego to describe how the imbalance of existing psychological elements will trigger abnormalities in Libby's character in the novel *Dark Places* by Gillian Flynn. The main objective of this research is to portray how the internal conflict between these three components contributes to Libby's psychological development and behavioral deviations, as well as to examine how these imbalances affect her interactions and decisions throughout the narrative. By focusing on this analysis, the study aims to deepen the understanding of character construction in literary works through a psychoanalytic lens.

The primary goal of this research is not only to examine Libby Day's psychological condition but also to raise awareness about mental health through literature. It aims to break the stigma, encourage empathy, and promote psychological literacy by illustrating how deeply rooted trauma and repression affect individuals over time. Through this analysis, the study also hopes to offer meaningful insights for educators, students, and general readers in understanding the intersection between literature and mental well-being, thus highlighting literature's role as a reflective and therapeutic medium for addressing mental health issues in society.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research methodology and psychoanalysis approach to analyze the psychological aspects of the characters Libby Day in the novel *Dark Places* by Gillian Flynn which was published in 2009, published by Shaye Areheart Books with a length of 349 pages, and obtained from abebooks.com. The research methodology is descriptive and focuses on in-depth understanding of the issues that occur in individuals and society [9]. The data sources used in this study are related narration and dialogue, which are in the form of words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs in novels [10].

The researcher used qualitative research and the novel *Dark Places* as the main instruments in data collection. To analyze the data, the researcher followed three steps; data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing [11]. Data reduction involves selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming data in transcriptions. The researcher categorized narration and dialogue containing psychological aspects of Sigmund Freud's study. Second, data display is the process of arranging data to generate a conclusion, and the researcher displayed data in the descriptive text to make it easier to draw conclusions. Third, conclusion drawing is a step that processes existing data into a conclusion, searching for evidence showing how each aspect of psychology plays a role in the main character of Libby Day's personality.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This sub-chapter presents the answer to the research questions, which are to identify how is the main character of Libby Day portrayed in the novel *Dark Places*? To answer the research questions, researcher directly looked for evidence of Libby Day's psychological aspects in this novel through related narration and dialogue. The researcher explains it descriptively using psychoanalytic theory developed by Sigmund Freud. This sub-chapter contains findings and discussion, which will later discuss the data findings in the study. In order to show and explain the causes of each action taken by Libby Day, which then became the data for this study, a characterization of Libby Day's character is needed. By analyzing the actions and thoughts through the lens of Freud's psychoanalytic theory, the researcher is able to provide a deeper understanding of the complex psychological motivations driving her behavior throughout the novel [12].

3.1 The Id of Libby Day

The first psychological aspect is the Id, which is reflected in the main character of this novel, namely Libby. Libby has a nature that is indifferent to everything. Libby's Id always encourages her to act solely to seek personal enjoyment and gain, without caring about the losses or impacts that may arise for other people. The id, as one of the basic characteristics of humans, fundamentally only follows the urge to satisfy desires without considering social or moral norms [13]. For Libby, personal satisfaction is the main priority, even if that means ignoring or even harming other people. The lack of a strong

moral filter or self-control makes her tend to be impulsive and selfish, without thinking about wider consequences. In this context, the Id can become a very dominant force, dominating an individual's thought processes and actions, regardless of moral or normative considerations that could hinder it.

Data 1.

"Years ago, to exploit my twenty-fifth birthday, a publisher of self-help books asked me to write about how I'd conquered the ghosts of my past. I had in no way conquered much of anything, but I agreed to the book anyway, talking over the phone with a woman in New Jersey who did the actual writing."
(Flynn 12)

The data above shows the action when Libby Day accepted the offer of a writer who wanted to publish a book about her life story and published under her name, who managed to survive the dark story of her past until she was twenty-five years old.

In this case, the data reveals Libby Day doesn't care about anything as long as she can make a profit. In this action, Libby indirectly manipulated people who sympathized with her through the book, which tells of her own life experiences. The main motivation behind this action was Id Libby's drive to fulfill her desire to make money, even though she had to sacrifice her own integrity and violate the moral values held by society. By focusing on personal gain, she consciously ignores ethical and moral considerations, showing how dominant the power of the Id is in directing her actions. In the process, Libby embraces extreme egoism, placing her needs and desires above all else, even if that means harming others or sacrificing basic moral principles.

The finding that Libby Day's character in the novel shows the dominance of Id power by ignoring moral values for personal gain provides a significant contribution to the study of character personality in literary studies, especially in the psychoanalytic approach. This finding underlines how fictional characters can reflect the psychological complexity of real people, and show the tension between instinctive drives and social norms [14].

3.2 The Ego of Libby Day

The second aspect of the psychological aspect of character is Ego. The function of the Ego is as a bridge between the Id and the, or between existing drives and moral aspects [15]. The Ego acts as a mediator that helps the character navigate the conflict between desires and existing norms. By considering the effects of actions taken, both on themselves and others, characters can make more rational decisions. The relationship between Ego and Id in Libby Day has slowly improved after she met her brother who was in prison. In her interactions with her brother, Libby may have gained new insight into the consequences of her actions and learned to evaluate her decisions more maturely. In this way, Libby's Ego may have become stronger at controlling the impulses of her Id, allowing her to make wiser decisions and consider their impact more fully. This repair of the relationship between Ego and Id marks significant character development, indicating progress in her psychological journey.

Data 2.

"I want \$1,000."

"I could give you \$700."

"Seven hundred's fine then," I said. (Flynn 22)

Libby Day gets a job offer to go to a group that wants to find out the truth about her family's murder. Then Libby Day asked for a thousand dollars, but the group offered seven hundred dollars and Libby Day agreed to the offer.

The data above illustrates how Libby Day's Ego is able to act as a bridge between her desire to get money and the existing reality, even though the amount she earns does not fully meet the expectations of her Id. Even though she previously set

a price of one thousand dollars to go to Kill Club, her Ego allows her to adjust her expectations to the reality at hand. Despite not earning the amount of money she wanted, Libby was still able to decide to go to Kill Club due to her financial needs. In the process, her Ego helps her to evaluate the situation more rationally, recognizing that getting some of what she wants is still better than getting nothing. Thus, her Ego acts as a mediator that helps Libby to adjust her desires to the existing reality, so that she can make more balanced and realistic decisions. This shows progress in her character development, where her Ego is increasingly able to control the impulses of her Id and make better decisions.

This finding confirms the role of Freud's psychoanalysis as an important tool in understanding the inner complexity of characters [16]. By utilizing the concept of Ego in character narratives, this study opens up the understanding that fictional characters are not just imaginary entities, but can be representations of real human inner conflicts that are relevant in various social and cultural contexts. This finding also confirms strengthens that in a literary approach, the depiction of characters with adaptive abilities to social and economic realities can be a symbol of human responses to external pressures. In the context of Libby Day, her decision to continue to come to the Kill Club even though she did not get paid as expected shows that characters in literature can reflect the dilemmas faced by individuals in real life, such as compromise, value negotiation, and moral considerations.

3.3 The Superego of Libby Day

The final psychological aspect in the structure of the human mind is the Superego. The Superego is a psychological element that arises as a result of assessing aspects of morality and manners [17]. In the context of a novel, characters cannot always fulfill their own desires because there are other characters with different interests. Therefore, the Superego plays an important role in making decisions that not only consider individual interests but also their impact on others. The Superego functions as the guardian of morality and ethics, emphasizing the importance of acting in accordance with the moral standards prevailing in society. The characters in the novel need to have this psychological aspect to maintain balance in their personality.

Data 3.

Ben Day: "Libby, you can't win this game. I tell you I'm innocent, that means you're guilty, you ruined my life. I tell you I'm guilty ... I don't think that makes you feel much better, does it?"

Libby Day: "He was right. It was one reason I'd stayed immobile for so many years." (Flynn 295)

Libby Day, who visited her older brother in prison for the umpteenth time to clear her brother's name from the murder, is arguing again. and when her brother said that no matter what happened, Libby Day would still lose because from the start Libby Day gave false statements in court and put her brother in prison and as a result of that Libby Day also agreed with her brother's words and ended the questions she asked.

From the quote above, it can be seen that Libby Day felt regretful and immediately gave up her intention to ask about this again, wanting her relationship with her sister not to become more strained. These actions also show that Libby is starting to realize that she has been lying to herself in believing that she is innocent of her brother's incarceration. She realized that her actions had negatively impacted their relationship. Furthermore, Libby's behavior in stopping her questions to her brother reflects the influence of the Superego which is based on the principle of morality, which follows moral values about how to be someone who understands and respects her brother whom she has put in prison. By ending her questions, Libby shows a commitment to morality and family relationships that is greater than her personal desire to know the truth. In this context, the Superego functions as a moral guardian that encourages Libby to act according to her moral principles, even if that means admitting her mistakes and repairing her relationship with her brother. Thus, Libby's actions reflect character growth and commitment to higher moral values.

The findings on the role of the Superego in the formation of Libby Day's attitude and character development provide significant contributions to the development of literary studies, especially in the approach to literary psychology. Libby's

transformation that began to be realized through the influence of the Superego provides a concrete example of how morality can be a turning point in character development. This provides an opportunity for readers and literary researchers to examine that characters in fictional works are not only driven by external conflicts, but also by internal ethical dynamics that reflect the process of learning and psychological maturity [18]. In addition, another important finding is that literature can be a reflective medium for the importance of emotional accountability and admitting mistakes as a form of psychological maturity. Libby Day is an example of a character who is not static, but experiences significant internal shifts along with the encouragement of the Superego. This opens up space for study that character development in literary works often reflects the process of inner healing and ethical growth.

As a whole, the above findings strengthen the position of literary studies as an interdisciplinary field of study capable of depicting human psychological reality. By analyzing characters through moral and psychoanalytic lenses, this study not only enriches the understanding of literary texts, but also broadens the scientific horizon in understanding humans through fiction.

4. CONCLUSION

After analyzing the depiction of the role of psychological aspects in the character of Libby Day in the *Dark Places* Novel by Gillian Flynn through the lens of psychoanalysis theory, the researcher concluded that the psychological aspects in Libby Day were not balanced between the Id, Ego, and Superego.

Libby Day's dominant Id causes her to be illogical, immoral, unethical, selfish, demanding, suspicious, and distrustful of others. Libby Day's biggest Id is that she often steals and deceives other people for her own satisfaction. In this case, the dominant Id makes her direct most of the actions she takes to be based on lust without considering anything else which will then lead to taking actions that will harm herself in the future. Libby Day's Ego, on the other hand, reflects regret, reduced feelings of selfishness, feelings of worry, responsibility, awareness of surrounding circumstances, rational thinking, and readiness to cooperate. Her biggest Ego was when she was willing to open old wounds to get money and clear the bad name of her brother who she slandered. The last one is Libby Day's Superego, which was inspired by the character Ron Williamson, showing good behavior, sympathetic, stable, thinking more logically, sensitive to the surrounding environment, not prioritizing one's own interests, willing to apologize, and loving family. The biggest Superego that Libby Day has is her desire to no longer make her family experience difficulties due to her actions and even tries to defend them. Thus, Libby Day's character displays various aspects of the Id, Ego, and Superego within herself, dominated by the Id impulse and then becoming more balanced and controlled by the Ego and Superego aspects.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION: Wahyu Warjaya was responsible for data collection and analysis, while Alamsyah contributed by analyzing the data, reviewing the manuscript, and preparing supporting articles to reinforce this paper.

FUNDING: This study received no external funding.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: –

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: The authors state that no conflict of interest of this paper.

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