

**FROM ZERO O'CLOCK TO A LIBRARIAN:  
EXPLORING THE SYMBOLS PORTRAYED IN *THE  
MIDNIGHT LIBRARY***

**THESIS**



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PORTRAYED IN *THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY*

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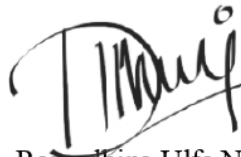
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## ABSTRACT

Citrasari, M. H. (2023). *From Zero O'clock to A Librarian: Exploring the Symbols Portrayed in The Midnight Library*. English Literature Department, Faculty of Adab and Humanities, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya. Advisors: (I) Dr. Abu Fanani, S.S., M.Pd., (II) Ramadhina Ulfa Nuristama M.A.

The research goal is to investigate the symbolism in the novel *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig. The novel is about a depressed woman named Nora Seed who attempts to kill herself at midnight. However, between life-and-death state, she arrived at a library and met the librarian, Mrs. Elm. In this library, Nora visited many alternative lives of hers and regained the spirit to live again. Two problems are examined in this paper: (1) How are the symbols portrayed in the novel, and (2) How does the symbol support the plot of the story in the novel?

This study utilizes a qualitative approach since the result will be descriptive rather than numerical. Aside from Symbolism theory to identify the symbols, New Criticism theory is included to analyze the intrinsic elements of the novel, specifically the plot. The researcher reads the novel several times to gain a deeper understanding and then highlights the details that matter. Later, the researcher classifies the findings to analyze them.

This paper discovers that there are four symbolisms in this novel, namely: (1) midnight, which symbolizes the end and the beginning of Nora's life; (2) the Midnight Library, which represents Nora's interests; (3) The books in the Midnight Library symbolize the dreams that Nora pursued, and (4) The librarian represents Nora's wise side. Additionally, the symbols support the plot by representing the story's situation (midnight) and using thematic symbols (the books, the library, and the librarian). Furthermore, this study may be helpful, particularly for English literature students and people fascinated with learning about symbolism and literary analysis.

**Keywords:** symbolism, library, librarian, midnight.

## ABSTRAK

Citrasari, M. H. (2023). *Mulai dari Pukul Nol Malam sampai Seorang Perpustakawan: Mengeksplorasi Simbol yang Digambarkan dalam novel The Midnight Library*. Program Studi Sastra Inggris, Fakultas Adab dan Humaniora, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya. Pembimbing: (I) Dr. Dr. Abu Fanani, S.S., M.Pd., (II) Ramadhina Ulfa Nuristama M.A.

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisis simbolisme dalam novel berjudul *The Midnight Library* karya Matt Haig. Novel ini bercerita tentang seorang wanita depresi bernama Nora Seed yang mencoba bunuh diri pada tengah malam. Namun, dalam keadaan antara hidup dan mati, ia tiba di sebuah perpustakaan dan bertemu dengan pustakawannya, Nyonya Elm. Di perpustakaan ini, Nora mengunjungi banyak kehidupan alternatifnya dan mendapatkan kembali semangat untuk hidup kembali. Ada dua masalah yang akan dikaji dalam studi ini, yaitu: (1) bagaimana simbol-simbol digambarkan dalam novel dan (2) bagaimana simbol-simbol tersebut mendukung alur cerita pada novel.

Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif karena hasilnya akan disampaikan dalam bentuk deskriptif dan bukan dalam bentuk angka. Selain teori Symbolism untuk mengidentifikasi simbol-simbol, teori New Criticism juga digunakan untuk menganalisis unsur-unsur intrinsik novel, khususnya plot. Peneliti membaca novel tersebut beberapa kali untuk mendapatkan pemahaman yang lebih dalam, kemudian menyoroti detail-detail yang penting. Kemudian, peneliti mengklasifikasikan temuan-temuan tersebut untuk dianalisis.

Hasil penelitian ini menemukan bahwa ada empat simbolisme dalam novel ini, yaitu: (1) tengah malam yang melambangkan akhir dan awal kehidupan Nora; (2) Perpustakaan Tengah Malam yang melambangkan berbagai minat Nora; (3) Buku-buku di Perpustakaan Tengah Malam melambangkan mimpi yang digapai Nora, dan (4) Perpustakawan yang melambangkan sisi bijak Nora. Terlebih lagi, simbol-simbol tersebut hadir sebagai bentuk dukungan pada alur cerita dalam bentuk representasi kejadian dalam cerita (tengah malam) dan menggunakan simbol sesuai tema novel (buku-buku di Perpustakaan Tengah Malam, Perpustakaan Tengah Malam, dan perpustakawan). Selain itu, penelitian ini mungkin berguna terutama bagi mahasiswa sastra Inggris dan bagi orang-orang yang tertarik untuk belajar tentang simbolisme dan analisis sastra.

**Kata Kunci:** simbolisme, perpustakaan, perpustakawan, tengah malam.



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# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter consists of the background of the study, research problems, research objective, significance of the study, and the scope and delimitations. Additionally, the definition of key terms is included to give a brief idea of the terms that frequently appear in this study.

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Any object that exists has its meaning. They may not be limited to a single definition when used as a concept or written down in literary work. Rather than perceive it in a literal form, it can be open to interpretation. A symbol communicates different ideas, whether an image or a word (Kramer, 2022). Knowing and understanding the signs may expand someone's knowledge beyond the literal meaning of an entity. For instance, a rose is naturally a flower that grows in the dirt. However, the rose can be associated with romantic scenes as it is commonly used as a gift for loved ones, making the rose symbolize love and affection. On the other hand, if someone puts more of their attention to the thorn in a rose, they may believe that a rose represents something that is considerably beautiful yet dangerous. This phenomenon is called symbolism.

Symbolism is frequently used in analyzing a literary work such as a novel. Symbolism in a literary work can help the writer convey complex ideas while delivering them to the reader more straightforwardly. The novel's symbols generally appear in words, figures of speech, an action, or the presence of a character. The novel is a long fiction narrative work typically published in book

form. It has a range of 50,000 to 100,000 words in length. Quoted from Cuddon (2013), a novel is a “form of story or prose narrative containing characters, action and incident, and, perhaps, a plot” (p. 478). The term "novel" is commonly used in the broadest sense to assign any extensive work of fiction (Holman, 1985, p. 298). The English *novel* is primarily an invention of the eighteenth century. The *novel* is an English word that is derived from the Italian word *novella* (from the plural of Latin *Novellus*, a late variant of *Novus*, meaning "new"), which tells "a short, compact, broadly realistic tale popular in the medieval period" (Burgess, 2022; Holman, 1985, p. 299).

The novel can fall under the category of fiction. Holman (1985), in *A Handbook of Literature*, defines fiction as “narrative writing drawn from the imagination of the author rather than from history or fact” (p. 184). Farner (2014) acknowledges that fiction is a work of imagination that cannot be verified as true or false, in contrast to non-fiction, which is based on facts and is meant to provide the truth (p. 8). In addition, Thomas Roberts (1972, in Farner, 2014, p. 10) claims, “a book is a fiction by intention if its writer has knowingly made it factually untrue but also warned his readers he has done it.” Farner (2014) breaks down Roberts' definition of fiction into three premises: 1) The events are not exact replicas of actual ones; 2) The writer admits they are not; and 3) He (the author) warns the reader that they do not resemble the actual ones (p. 12). The claim is precise to help the reader to comprehend that the fictional narrative does not accurately depict real-life events.

Holman (1985) believes that all novels are fictionalized representations of life or experience, but the genre is just as flexible as life and experience have

shown to be. In serious fiction, individuals perform crucial parts in the said world. The universe that becomes a significant stage for something like this varies substantially from author to author. A writer's universe could exist solely within the depths of the human mind, like on the haunting deck of a whaling ship; it can be the rigid social structure of an aristocratic society in a big city or an African jungle; or it could exist as the idealized framework of a Utopian dream. Moreover, the same unlimited variety of perspectives can be used to examine humans in their purest form. A character may be the novel's main focus, nearly to the exclusion of the incident or plot. A novel can be a sequence of occurrences threaded together like beads on a string, as is typical in picaresque novels; it may be well plotted, with a structure that is as concrete and specific as one found in a tragedy; may aim to portray life's intricacies with the detached objectivity of a scientist, as in Naturalism, or it may attempt to replicate the unconscious flow of emotions through image, language, and syntactic adjustments, as in a novel written in a stream-of-consciousness style. It also can either be episodic, loosely structured, epic in scope—what is referred to as "panoramic"—or it may be firmly connected like a well-constructed play, delivering its content in an orderly dramatic fashion—what is referred to as "scenic." (Holman, 1985, p. 299).

The novel used in this research is *The Midnight Library*, written by Matt Haig. Matt Haig is an English author born July 3, 1975, in Sheffield, England. Aside from being an author, he is also a journalist. He has written eight novels, twelve children's books, and seven non-fiction books ("Matt Haig," 2023). His works are often categorized as speculative fiction. Speculative fiction is generally a fiction category that involves the escape from reality into the imaginative

realms, identical but not limited to fantasy, alternate history, science fiction, supernatural fiction, utopian and dystopian fiction, and so on ("Speculative Fiction," 2023).

One of Matt Haig's novels, *The Midnight Library*, was published by Canongate Books on August 13, 2020. The Washington Post, The Boston Globe, and The New York Times bestseller bestowed this novel as a bestseller. *The Midnight Library* tells about a 35-year-old British woman named Nora Seed who was feeling miserable about her life and considering meeting her dead-end life. Still, later, she was given a chance to live the life she might have had if she had made a different decision. The story goes from Nora attempting to kill herself by overdosing on antidepressants at midnight. Still, she woke up in a library under the charge of Mrs. Elm, her school librarian. The library was between her life and death, filled with many books showing her how she would have been if she had made other choices. For instance, Nora married her fiancé in one life, but it was not how she expected. In another life, she fulfilled her dream as a glaciologist researching in Svalbard, Norway. Another one, she became a swimming athlete.

When Nora finally found a life where she was genuinely happy, she came back to the Midnight Library unwanted. She asked Mrs. Elm to bring her back to the said happy life. Unfortunately, the library collapsed, and the clock began to tick as usual. Mrs. Elm informed Nora that she is conceivably dying in her real life. After numerous lives she had tried, Nora developed her will to live again and rushed to write 'I AM ALIVE' in the book of her root life. Subsequently, the Midnight Library perished, and Nora digested that she was near her death. She

crawled to seek help from her neighbors and eventually reconciled with the people around her.

*The Midnight Library* is chosen as the subject of this study because the novel is relatively new, which means it still has a small amount of research. The story carries the issue of regrets and how Nora wanted to detach herself from her current life because every move she made was a disappointment. After finishing reading the novel for the first time, the researcher was intrigued by the symbolisms and their meaning in this novel. For example, Mrs. Elm, the librarian who guided and assisted Nora in the Midnight Library and helped her reflect on herself, symbolizing Nora's wisdom. Thus, she decided to use it as her research objective. In terms of popularity, this novel obtained over one million ratings, approximately one hundred fifty thousand reviews, and scored 4.01, according to Goodreads. The researcher also finds the novel's story line remarkably impressive because it reassures her that life is unpredictable.

## 1.2 Problems of the Study

In line with the background above, the problems of the study are formulated as follows:

1. How are the symbols portrayed in *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig?
2. How does the symbol support the plot of the story in the novel?

## 1.3 Objectives of the Study

In line with the problems of the study above, this study aims to

1. To analyze the symbols and discover their meaning in *The Midnight Library* novel.
2. To examine the forms of support from the symbols to the plot of the story in the novel.

#### 1.4 Significances of the Study

Hopefully, this research can help readers understand the symbolism in literary works. Theoretically, the author hopes this paper will be able to enlarge the knowledge of literary work from the novel *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig. In respect to practical significance, this paper feasibly can provide the readers with some insight regarding symbolism and its practice in the literary work. The researcher expects this paper to be a helpful reference for future studies regarding symbolism or any scholarly research related to the novel *The Midnight Library*.

#### 1.5 Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this research is a literary study of the novel *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig. The limitation of this study is the symbolism depicted in the book *The Midnight Library*.

#### 1.6 Definition of Key Terms

These definitions clarify the essential terms potentially related to this research.

***Overdose*** is an excessive dose of drug consumption that causes a person to lose consciousness (Azmiyati et al., 2014, p. 142).



**Glaciology** is the scientific study of ice in all forms, including the ice in the atmosphere, lakes, rivers, oceans, and the ice on and beneath the ground. Commonly also known as the study of glaciers (Allaby, 2013, p. 250).

**Philosophy** is a field of study that requires an attempt to think deeper into things than expected, such as investigating the underlying attitude, looking for a point of view, and determining the ideology (Billington, 2003, pp. 3–4).

**Coma** is an eyes-closed state of deep unconsciousness, often transitory and indefinitely or prolonged (Huff & Tadi, 2023).

**Depression** is a typical mental illness characterized by low energy, lack of focus, guilt or low self-worth, loss of interest or pleasure, depressive mood, and disturbed sleep or eating (Kumar et al., 2012, p. 37).



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## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

This chapter highlights the theories related to the topic of this study.

Theories and previous studies are a relevant part of the research, considering that it is a fundamental step before a researcher analyzes the problem. Since this study is about symbolism, the researcher will elaborate on some theories and previous studies.

#### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

##### **2.1.1 Symbolism**

In the broadest sense of its definition, symbolism is "the use of one object to represent or suggest another." Another meaning refers to symbolism in literature as "the use of symbols in writing" (Holman, 1985, p. 520). Womack (2005) concedes that societies use symbols to convey particular beliefs and social systems and represent elements of their culture. Therefore, symbols possess meanings related to each individual's cultural background. As an outcome, a symbol's meaning is learned by culture rather than being inherent in the symbol itself. Moreover, symbols can be images, words, or behaviors with more than a single level of meaning. It is often used to convey a concept that is too complex to put into words (Womack, 2005, pp. 1–2).

The term "symbol" is originally derived from the Greek verb *symbollein*, which means 'to throw together,' and it is the noun *symbolon* that means 'mark,' 'emblem,' 'token' or 'sign' (Cuddon, 2013, p. 699). Cuddon (2013) also mentions several examples of symbols, such as a dove that symbolizes peace, scales that

indicate justice, a rose that embodies beauty, a lion that symbolizes strength, the cross that represents Christianity, and so on (p. 699). In addition, an action or gesture can be symbolic as well. Several movements or gestures might be suggestive; for instance, clenching a fist means holding anger; raising arms means surrender; beating the chest means regrets; and many more (Cuddon, 2013, p. 699).

Furthermore, a symbol is "a visual image or sign representing an idea – a deeper indicator of a universal truth" (Dorling Kindersley Limited, 2008, p. 6). They believe that the utilization and understanding of symbols improve society's lives. Once people observe signs as the representation of truths and more profound issues, they proceed to enhance the realization of the dual nature of existence. For instance, a simple ladder is a tool to climb and "a reminder of the spiritual climb towards self-awareness or a higher truth." In addition, symbolically perceiving these objects enables people to live "harmoniously" since it increases their awareness of daily life and universal truth (p. 9).

Ernest Jones (1918) proposes six attributes to define a "true symbol." First, a symbol is a representation or a replacement for another notion in which it acquires an additional purpose from the context that is not a part of the symbol itself. Second, a symbol resembles the core element by sharing some characteristics. The affiliation could be internal or external. However, an insignificant connection with the underlying factor may frequently have relevance in perception, especially in the unconscious. Third, while the concept of being symbolized may be quite abstract and complex, symbols are often sensory and concrete. As a result, the sign usually compresses and shortens whatever idea it represents. The fourth

characteristic is that both ontogenetically and phylogenetically, symbolic forms of thought are the more primitive, meaning a retreat to a more straightforward and earlier stage of mental development. Therefore, they are more frequent in circumstances that encourage such a reversion, such as weariness, drowsiness, physical disease, neurosis, and madness, and, most importantly, in dreams, where conscious mental life is almost absent. Fifth, in most contexts, a symbol represents an idea largely concealed, secret, or reserved. Most of the time, the person using the sign isn't even aware of what it means. The last attribute is that so-called symbols resemble wit in that they are created spontaneously, instinctively, and, in the broadest sense, unconsciously (pp. 183–184).

Alternatively, Perrine (1974, in Fadaee, 2011) affirms that "a literary symbol means more than what it is. It is an object, a person, a situation, an action, or some other item that has a literal meaning in the story but also suggests or represents other meanings." Additionally, Perrine lists several cautions that a reader should notice for symbolical interpretation, including: 1) The story must hint that a detail should be interpreted symbolically. Therefore, repetition, emphasis, or position can all be used to recognize symbolic events; 2) The entire narrative context must create and reinforce the meaning of a literary symbol. It suggests that the definition of a symbol can be discovered within the text rather than outside of it; 3) An object must indicate a purpose distinct from its literal meaning to qualify as a symbol; and 4) A symbol can have more than a single meaning (Fadaee, 2011, p. 20).

It is worth noting that symbols are often related to semiotics. Much of the history of philosophy and psychology has acknowledged the value of signs and

signification. To put it simply, semiotics is the study of signs. The word "semiotics" itself is derived from an Ancient Greek word σημειωτικός (*sēmeiōtikós*), which means 'observant of signs' from σημεῖον (*sēmeîon*) 'a sign, mark, token' (Liddell & Scott, n.d.). The Greeks believe that 'signs' appeared in nature and 'symbols' in the world of culture ("Semiotics," 2023).

Ferdinand de Saussure, the founder of structuralism, is the famous figure behind semiotics. Structuralism inspired the development of semiotics. Many of critics' and readers' most treasured assumptions were challenged by structuralism, including the notion that a literary work simultaneously reveals the author's thoughts and personality and conveys some fundamental truths about human life. Structuralists assert explicitly that the author is no longer alive and that literary discourse has no truth function (Carter, 2006, p. 41).

"Signifier" and "signified" were both created by Ferdinand de Saussure. Words, in his opinion, do not correspond directly to things. In other words, no apparent relationship exists between a word and the item it refers to. 'Signifier' and 'Signified' are the two components of words as signs. The 'signifier' is what is written or said, and the 'signified' is considered when the term is written or pronounced. Meaning is understood by considering a word's place in a system of relationships, such as a sign system, instead of how it relates to something. Traffic lights serve as the most prevalent illustration of this principle, with red denoting "stop," yellow denoting "get ready," and green denoting "go." Semiotics or semiology, associated with structuralism, studies such as sign systems (Carter, 2006, pp. 42–43).

In the novel *The Midnight Library*, the researcher found several details that may lead to symbolism, such as the midnight time, the library, the books, and the librarian.

#### **2.1.1.1 Library**

Nora woke up in a library in her coma. This correlates to the meaning of the library itself in general. A library is where the collection of documents, books, or media is eligible for use. It also provides various kinds of spaces for studying individually or within groups ("Library," 2023).

The term "library" was derived from the Latin word '*liber*.' At the same time, '*bibliotheca*' is the Latinized Greek word that originated from the word for 'library' in the Greek, Russian, and Romance languages (Feather & Sturges, 2003, p. 371). Feather and Sturges (2003) believe that the fundamental idea of a "library" has become embedded in the way people view the world and approach its issues (p. 371). Additionally, there are numerous parallels between how the social memory organizes, stores, and retrieves the information required for survival in its primary role as a social memory and how the human memory does the same. The historical study of libraries and related fields points to the fact that the urge to preserve, the appreciation of collecting, and the compulsion to exert influence have been significant factors in the creation and growth of the library notion throughout human history (Feather & Sturges, 2003, p. 371).

#### **2.1.1.2 Librarian**

The following symbol is the librarian. When Nora entered the Midnight Library, she met a librarian named 'Mrs. Elm' whose appearance and name are identical to her school's librarian. She directed Nora on how to survive in the

Midnight Library. Conventionally, a librarian is a person who works in a library to deliver the library's service to its visitors. This includes providing information, library programs, or instruction on information literacy to the users ("Librarian," 2023).

The librarian's job desk can vary depending on the kind of library they work in. Pressley (2009) affirms that a school librarian's duties include working with students, acquiring books that enrich the curriculum, and occasionally teaching classes. The purpose of the school librarian is to grow students' literacy and make them love reading (p. 12). Academic librarians' job is approximately the same as school librarians' but with more complex research needs. They collaborate on research projects with undergraduate and Ph.D. students and gather resources on various topics, from introductory literature to scholarly communication for the faculty's research needs (Pressley, 2009, p. 12).

On the other hand, there is a public library where the librarians mainly offer resources and services to anybody in the surrounding area. Public librarians' jobs differ and can vary from reading stories to toddlers to assisting people with their family background individually to organizing training sessions on research for small businesses. Public librarians aim to focus on public service and witness their impact directly on local society (Pressley, 2009, pp. 12–13).

### **2.1.1.3 Midnight**

The protagonist, Nora Seed, decides to end her life almost in the middle of the night. This resonates with the characterization of the time she died. The time from when the sun starts to set till it rises again is known as the night; it is a period of complete darkness. Standard elements of night or dusk in Greek and



Roman poetry include solitude, sleep, dreams, a starry sky, a bright moon, as well as occasional festivities. In several works of literature, the night is typically associated with some bizarre activity, such as practicing magic. In other literature, the night may be associated with danger or death (Ferber, 1999, pp. 135–136). Midnight is a sequence of the night that is commonly associated with when the clock hits 00:00, and it is considered a new day. Midnight is the transition of time from one day to the next day. It also remarks the day's beginning and end ("Midnight," 2022).

#### **2.1.1.4 Book**

Feather and Sturges (2003) claim that a book has the function to record any information in writing form or attached images on its pages (p. 41). To distinguish books and other written media such as pamphlets, UNESCO attempted to define a book as "a non-periodical printed publication of at least forty-nine pages, exclusive of cover pages" at their conference in 1964 (Feather & Sturges, 2003, p. 41). In addition, Kilgour (1998) considers a book as "a storehouse of human knowledge intended for dissemination in the form of an artifact that is portable—or at least transportable—and that contains arrangements of signs that convey information." That information may be stories, myths, songs, or realities; the signs could be human speech or graphic displays of things like maps, musical notes, or photographs (p. 3).

#### **2.1.2 New Criticism**

Poetry was important to the New Critics because they saw it as a quasi-religious defense against barren scientific thinking. Reanimation of an alienated

environment is feasible. Poetry can be unaffected by the widespread materialism in the present day. A poem was a self-evident, distinct thing. It could not be stated in any other way than how it was, not even by paraphrasing. Each part of a poem was in harmonious balance with all other aspects, resulting in the coherence of the whole. Poems were viewed as objects, separate from their authors and surroundings (Carter, 2006, pp. 26–27).

However, New Criticism did not consider the poem wholly detached from reality. In other words, it wasn't purely formalist, which would have focused solely on an isolated entity's form. It was thought that the poetry somehow incorporated the outside world into itself. In actuality, New Criticism focused on contradictions and ambivalence that could be found in the text (Carter, 2006, p. 27).

During the middle decades of the 20th century, New Criticism emerged as a prominent formalist movement in literary theory, exerting significant influence over American literary criticism. The name of this movement is derived from John Crowe Ransom's book *The New Criticism*, published in 1941. The book was inspired by the combination of I. A. Richards, T.S. Eliot, and Yvor Winters' ideas (Holman, 1985, p. 349).

Dramatic Situation, Tone, and Intention are three components of Richards' ideas used to examine a poem or any other literary work. The environment, the characters, and the poem's actions all help create the dramatic situation. Dramatic Situations are typically unstable, which means the storyline is ever-evolving or inconsistent. The tone is an aspect of the characters, setting, and language. Intention, according to Ransom, is comparable to what could be referred to as its

logical thesis. Although intentions may not always be obvious, Ransom continues, intentions are what the critic interprets as the poem's meaning. At the same time, it is evident that each reviewer has a unique intention (Ardianto, 2016, pp. 12–13).

According to T.S. Eliot, poetry must be impersonal. As he said, literature is, first and foremost, poetry; it is an independent and complete subject. He upholds that poetry should be an escape from the self as he quoted, "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality" (Carter, 2006, p. 23). In his essay *Hamlet and His Problem*, T. S. Eliot successfully makes connections between textual terms, Lady Macbeth's mental condition, and personal experience to describe emotion in the character of Hamlet. This approach is referred to as objective correlative theory. Using this method, the character's feeling is conveyed by showing rather than describing. In the view of formalist critics, this notion would cut off the link between the author and the character and unify the emotion in the literal works. This is consistent with the new critique theory's philosophy (Ardianto, 2016, p. 13).

Yvor Winters is referred to as the finest at interpreting a poem's structure by John Crowe Ransom. Yvor Winter asserts that a poet does not truly understand the intention of a poem before beginning to write it. This is due to the poet's attachment to local and specific things, such as experience and knowledge, which goes beyond the poem's primary writing intention. According to Winters, the poem's beauty lies in the author's effort to convey his experience to the reader. The true significance is, therefore, for his consciousness. Yvor Winters, one of the best due to his dedication to ethical poetry, also refrained from letting his moral

convictions eclipse the poem. One of the characteristics of the new criticism theory method is to avoid emotions when examining literary texts (Ardianto, 2016, p. 13).

Holman (1985) believes that the term typically refers to every aspect of contemporary criticism, emphasizing the artwork as an individual entity. It recognizes a distinct mode of expression within the artwork that contrasts with, or at the very least diverges from, the languages utilized in science or philosophy. This approach involves carefully analyzing the artwork through close examination (p. 349). These critics have focused chiefly on identifying the intrinsic value of literature, proving that value to perceptive readers, and defending it from various forms of criticism they claim is deeply rooted in contemporary ideology (Holman, 1985, p. 350).

Furthermore, Ardianto (2016) highlights that to understand how a piece of literature functioned as a self-contained, self-referential aesthetic object, New Criticism is a theory that emphasizes attentive reading, particularly poetry (p. 13). He claims that the New Criticism theorist regards criticism oriented toward analyzing poets or other literary works aside from the text as irrelevant. It is against the rules to examine a literary work from the author's perspective because doing so would taint the text's objectivity. Keeping the literary work's meaning from the reader's sense of emotion is essential. The New Criticism has occasionally been called an "objective" approach to literature since it strongly emphasizes strict textual analysis and sees the text as a masterfully created, organized thing with formal, detectable patterns. The belief and assertion that the

meaning of a text can be determined objectively is more common among New Critics than others (Ardianto, 2016, p. 13).

Additionally, theorists contend that the earlier literary critics overly focused on the author's personal and psychological state and the historical and cultural background, which gives rise to this new theory. Despite their differences, they generally concur on viewing literary works as a totality and as signs of an aesthetic whose subjective nature is lost once the literary work is complete.

According to New Criticism theorists, the only way to understand the essence of a literary work based on its true meaning is to analyze composition and structure.

The New Criticism concludes with a discussion of how art differs from daily existence and how literary creations differ from science discourse. Some literary works are not based on logic and statements but rather on irrelevant details that are required or desirable, with imagination as the primary element. The New Critic defines and analyzes the meaning of literature by describing the distinctive shape of each literary work and by looking at the system that makes every element perform together (Ardianto, 2016, p. 13).

Since New Criticism is mainly concerned with the intrinsic features of its work, this section will put more details on the intrinsic elements of the novel.

According to Morrell (2006), intrinsic elements are divided into characterization, plot, and place or setting (p. 6). The way an author depicts a character, including their appearance, personality, and spoken language, is known as characterization.

The process of character development involves capturing the inner life of the characters, along with creating character arcs and conflicts, as well as satisfying desires and backstories, and the plot is defined by a sequence of events, failures,

and obstacles that highlight the character's journey while maintaining strict control over the story's pacing. The setting is when every scene contains both the location and details necessary to understand the action in the plot (Morrell, 2006, p. 6).

### **2.1.2.1 Plot**

One of the intrinsic elements of fiction is the plot. Aristotle in Holman (1985) believes that the plot is the foundation feature of narrative that presents in the beginning, middle, and end (p. 396). Plot is commonly defined as the sequence of events that happen in a story. The plot is built upon any significant occurrence that has important consequences. Things that the characters do think, feel, or say result in a difference later in the plot (Dibell, 1988, pp. 5–6).

Griffith (2011) breaks down a plot into three points. First, the plot is the work itself, and the readers read the work that its events already arranged by the author from the first to the last page. Second, the events in the plot are inevitably connected by cause and effect; it could be the conflicts between the characters, the characters with their surroundings, and the characters with their inner selves. The last is how the author delivers the train of events to engage with the readers' intellectuality and emotions. Authors employ various techniques, including pace, intense conflict, surprise, rising action, climax, hidden information, and clues to upcoming events (p. 51).

In addition, Ryan (2008) affirms that the plot exists in the narrative on two levels: the plotting of the author, who constructs the storyline, and the plotting of the characters, who establish goals, make plans, schemes, conspiracies, and attempt to arrange events to their advantage. Both the author and the characters exert power through their plots: the author controls the reader, who has to travel

through a particular experience, while the characters control other characters and the unpredictability of life. Nevertheless, on some occasions, the author's objectives diverge from those of the characters. The author must force the characters to take specific actions to make the reader feel a certain way, such as intense suspense, curiosity, or emotional involvement. However, acting this way challenges narrative logic because it is not in the characters' best interests or inconsistent with their personalities (p. 56).

A traditional and well-known plot pattern was found by a German playwright and novelist, Gustav Freytag, in 1863 (Griffith, 2011, p. 52). He formed the plot structure into five: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. Those five structures will be explained below.

### **1. Exposition**

*Exposition* is commonly recognized as the introduction. In this plot section, the author generally provides the beginning information, typically sets the tone, creates the setting, introduces the characters, and adds details essential to understanding (Pratama & Desnaranti, 2022, p. 364). The exposition of the novel *The Midnight Library* is the flashback of Nora and Mrs. Elm playing chess in the school's library during Nora's high school until nineteen years later, Nora felt her life had no meaning.

### **2. Rising Action**

*Rising action* or complication is a circumstance where the dramatic action concerned with the complexity of that action begins with a scene outlining an event, increases in interest/power as the opposing factions or ideas clash, and then proceeds to the climax (Pratama & Desnaranti, 2022, p. 364). The rising action in



the novel *The Midnight Library* ensues when Nora takes an overdose and wakes up in the Midnight Library. This phase lasted until Nora was exhausted from the numerous alternative lives in the Midnight Library and had no regrets until she realized she had not appreciated Ash's kindness yet, at which point the library brought her into a life where she and Ash married as well as had a daughter named Molly.

### **3. Climax**

The *Climax* is usually a turning point that will decide the protagonist's fate. The crisis marks the turning point when the rising action reverses and becomes the falling action (Pratama & Desnaranti, 2022, p. 364). The turning point in the story occurred when Nora unwillingly returned to the Midnight Library from her perfect life with Ash. The clock's continuation to tick was later described as a hint that the Midnight Library was beginning to fall apart and Nora ought to leave to be able to return to her initial life alive.

### **4. Falling Action**

*Return* or *Falling Action* is usually brief. Things went generally in this stage and became less intense as the most significant problem was settled in the *climax* section (Pratama & Desnaranti, 2022, p. 364). This novel's falling action includes the moment Nora awakens from a coma in critical condition. She crawled into her neighborhood to seek aid and ultimately passed out just as Mr. Banerjee called for an ambulance.

### **5. Resolution**

The last is *Catastrophe*, generally known as *Resolution*. It includes the events from the end of the falling action until the story's actual ending and resolves all

the problems (Pratama & Desnaranti, 2022, p. 364). The resolution of this book is noted as taking place after Nora reconciled with her brother and reconnected with Izzy. In the last chapter, Nora also goes to see Mrs. Elm, and they play chess to ponder how neither life nor chess has a foreseeable conclusion.

## 2.2 Previous Studies

The previous studies in this research are essential to review the focuses in the novel *The Midnight Library* that have already been studied before. The researcher found several studies related to *The Midnight Library* novel. Thus, the researcher will also write down the review from the previous studies she has seen.

Inka Zahwa Sabrina (2022) conducted the first previous study in her undergraduate thesis titled *Self-Efficacy Development of Nora Seed in The Midnight Library by Matt Haig*. Her investigation brings up the issue of Nora Seed's self-efficacy in the novel by comparing Nora's behavior before and after her self-efficacy development. She used the theory of New Criticism and qualitative research methods to analyze the findings. The conclusion of her study shows that Nora succeeded in developing her self-efficacy after what she had been going through in the novel. Three of the four sources considerably impacted Nora Seed's self-efficacy development, according to the examination of sources potentially affecting self-efficacy and how they affect Nora's self-efficacy development. Performance successes, verbal persuasion, and emotional excitement comprise the three sources. These three sources of self-efficacy are support, personal experience, and the ability to control negative emotions.

The second previous study is about the depression that Nora Seed possessed. Kusumaningrum (2021), in her paper named *The Depression of Nora Seed as Reflected in Matt Haig's The Midnight Library*, investigated the symptoms of Nora's depression and how she coped with her depression. The study reveals that Nora had the following symptoms of depression: a depressed mood, negative feelings toward oneself, loss of humor responses, little self-examination, low hopes, self-blame and self-criticism, uncertainty, paralysis of will, avoidance, suicidal thoughts, increased reliance on others, trouble sleeping, fatigability, an idea of feeling worthless, the delusion of crime and punishment, the deception of poverty, and hallucinations. She nevertheless made an effort to get through her sadness by choosing music, embracing a person's point of view, forgiving her parents, realizing that trying to please people was nonsensical, deleting her unpleasant social media posts, and lobbying for human connection.

The third study came from a journal article by Farhan Rozadi (2022) entitled *The Impact of Post-Trauma on Personality Development in Matt Haig's The Midnight Library: A Psychoanalytic Study of Character*. Rozadi examined how the post-trauma experiences influenced Nora's personality development. He implemented the New Criticism theory to analyze Nora's trauma and alienation. The result of the study uncovers that Nora's childhood was much controlled by her parents, and she lost her parents during her teenage years, which made her think that she failed them as their child. Nora also had difficulties deciding something and always believed that every decision only resulted in disappointment.

Another study from a journal article by Novi Fatati Syihamun Nahdiyah (2022) entitled *The Influence of Society Committing Suicide in The Midnight*

*Library novel by Matt Haig*. Using the descriptive qualitative approach in her paper and applying the theory of suicide by Emile Durkheim, Nahdiyah identified the social factors that impacted Nora to commit suicide. This study confirms that two factors affected Nora's urge to kill herself: egoistic and fatalistic, including people around Nora who did not have good relations with her, and the standardization of society just added more significant pressure on Nora's life.

The fifth previous research from a journal article titled *Personality and Self-Actualization of the Main Character in the Novel The Midnight Library by Matt Haig: Abraham Mashlow's Humanistic Psychology Theory*, authored by Wardani and Friends (2022). They aimed to describe Nora's personality and self-actualization based on the theory of humanistic psychology by Abraham Maslow. This study employs the descriptive qualitative approach. The result of this research is divided into two: personality and self-actualization. Nora's character includes a sensitive, compassionate, and solid or challenging nature. The second finding is Nora's self-actualization. The four goals encompassed Nora's self-actualization, encompassing the yearning to accept oneself, the desire to put up with other people and their circumstances, the wish to improve performance, and the motivation to stay alive.

The previous studies above help provide the researcher with new insights to work on this research. As far as the researcher is concerned, there is no study about symbolism in *The Midnight Library* novel yet. Therefore, this research about symbolism in *The Midnight Library* contributes to expanding the literary studies of the book *The Midnight Library*.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHOD

This part of the research deals with the methodology of this research, which is later divided into three sub-chapters: research design, data collection, and data analysis.

#### 3.1 Research Design

The researcher utilizes qualitative research methods in this study.

Qualitative research methods rely on the descriptive approach, which means the result of this study will be shown in explanatory form instead of a numerical format. Braun and Clarke (2013) in Merriam & Tisdell (2016, p. 6) differentiate between quantitative and qualitative as simple as "the most basic definition of qualitative research is that it uses *words* as data [...] collected and analyzed in all sorts of ways. Quantitative research, in contrast, uses *numbers* as data and analyzes them using statistical techniques." Rather than finding cause and effect, predicting, or demonstrating the distribution of particular attributes among a population, qualitative research pays attention to unveiling the phenomenon's meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 5–6).

Stake (2010) believes that the qualitative approach generally leans on human perception and understanding. He lists a few characteristics of qualitative research, including interpretive, experiential, situational, and personalistic aspects (p. 15). The interpretive nature of the qualitative approach is that the research focuses on the meanings of human affairs as observed from many angles. The researchers appreciate intuition and are at ease with alternative interpretations.

While on-site observers leave some attention open to spot unanticipated events, the qualitative technique also recognizes that findings and reports are the result of interactions between the researcher and the subjects (Stake, 2010, p. 15).

The second characteristic is that the practical nature of the qualitative method suggests that the research is empirical and field-based. Participants' observations are given more weight than their feelings, and the report is in line with the idea that reality is produced by humans. It also aims to be naturalistic by not interfering or making arrangements to gather data (Stake, 2010, p. 15).

The third distinguishing feature of the qualitative approach is that it is situational. It implies that it is focused on things and activities, each in a different set of circumstances. It emphasizes the idea that every location and period has a distinctiveness that works against generalization; it is holistic rather than elementalistic and not reductively analytic; it rarely emphasizes direct analogies in its designs; and the details on its contexts are provided (Stake, 2010, p. 15).

Last but not least, qualitative research is personalistic. It is sympathetic and works to comprehend each person's viewpoints. It values diversity and prefers uniqueness to similarity. It looks for individual viewpoints, frames of reference, and value commitments. More frequently than etic (introduced by researchers), problems are often emic (coming from the people). Natural language is preferred over elaborate structures even in interpretations. The researchers act ethically by protecting human subjects from harm and intrusion. The main instrument of research is frequently the researcher (Stake, 2010, p. 15).

### **3.2 Data Collection**

This paper's data collection section contains data sources and data collection techniques that will be elaborated below.

### **3.2.1 Data Source**

The data source in this study is based on library research, whether the source is available in physical or digital form. This research data involved both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data source of this study is the novel *The Midnight Library* (2020) by Matt Haig. The researcher obtained the data from the book in written text form. Furthermore, the researcher examined the novel thoroughly, including the dialogues and narratives that indicate the symbolism in the story. In addition, the secondary data gained from the books, theses, journal articles, and other relevant sources support the primary data.

### **3.2.2 Data Collection Technique**

The researcher gathers the data through several steps as follows:

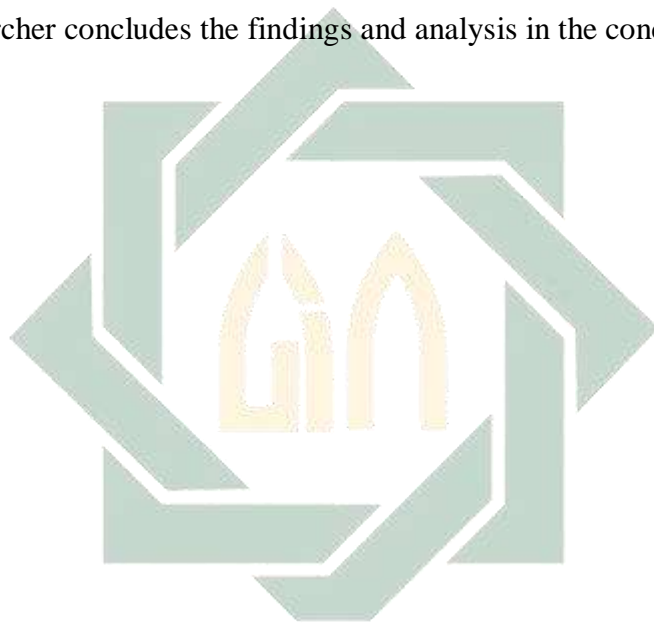
1. The researcher reads *The Midnight Library* novel approximately thrice to gain good comprehension.
2. The researcher highlights the symbols and the supporting details she notices in the novel.
3. Additionally, the researcher connects the occurred symbols with the novel's plot.
4. Furthermore, the researcher searches books, articles, journals, and other sources as secondary data sources.

### **3.3 Data Analysis Technique**



After gathering the data, the researcher will go through a few steps to analyze the data, such as the following:

1. The researcher connects the symbols to any related occurrences that Nora encountered.
2. The researcher interprets what the symbol means and how it is related to Nora's life.
3. The researcher reports the result in the analysis chapter later.
4. The researcher concludes the findings and analysis in the conclusion chapter.



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## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS

This chapter consists of the analysis of the symbols that occurred in *The Midnight Library* novel. The study includes the symbols and their function. The researcher found four symbols and their relation with the novel's conflict. This chapter will break down the findings in detail.

#### 4.1 The Symbols in the Novel

From Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library*, the researcher has found four significant symbols to be analyzed in this study. Two of them are displayed in the novel's title: "Midnight" and "Library." The rest of the symbols are a side character that plays a crucial role in Nora's life, Mrs. Elm, and an object that undoubtedly belongs to a library, the books.

##### 4.1.1 Midnight

Midnight is a time that marks the transition from one day to the next day. It is the end of the day, but at the same time, it indicates the beginning of the day. Nora had awful things coming to her, and she saw no good in her existence, so she decided to end her life at midnight.

The time was now twenty-two minutes past eleven.  
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, p. 23)

The paragraph above indicates the time of Nora's suicide attempt. It was almost midnight, 11:22 PM, to be precise. Nora felt that her existence was useless because she thought she had lost everything, and that was when she settled to end

her life. When Nora arrived at the Midnight Library, her watch stopped at 00:00:00, which began her adventure there.

First, Nora's root life loss was when her parents passed away. Her father died as a teenager due to a heart attack, and her mother died three months before her wedding.

She remembered the day her father died, when Mrs. Elm gently broke the news to her in the library. Her father had died suddenly of a heart attack while on the rugby field of the boys' boarding school where he taught. (Haig, 2020, p. 28)

Nora knew the news of her father's death from Mrs. Elm. She cried into Mrs. Elm's arms, and the librarian tried her best to comfort her. After her mother's death, Nora also left Dan, her ex-fiance, just two days before their wedding due to her horrible grief.

Though she had suggested that the date should be put back, it somehow never was, and Nora's grief fused with depression and anxiety and the feeling that her life was out of her own control. The wedding seemed such a symptom of this chaotic feeling, that she felt tied to a train track, and the only way she could loosen the ropes and free herself was to pull out of the wedding. (Haig, 2020, p. 39)

From the paragraph above, it can be known that Nora backed off from her wedding with Dan due to the grief that kept worsening, mixed up with the anxiety and depression that crept her up. She imagined that the wedding would add chaos to her life, and the only option she had to lose herself was to retreat from the marriage.

Moving forward to the recent timeline, Nora faced that her beloved cat, Voltaire, had died. It was found by Ash lying by the side of the road.

She stepped out onto the wet cracked paving slabs of Bancroft Avenue, hardly breathing, and saw the poor ginger-furred creature lying on the rain-glossed

tarmac beside the kerb. His head grazed the side of the pavement and his legs were back as if in mid-gallop, chasing some imaginary bird.  
'Oh Volts. Oh no. Oh God.' (Haig, 2020, pp. 5–6)

Ash found the poor cat lying on the street. He recognized that it was Nora's cat and brought it to Nora. He assumed that Volts might be hit by a car. The death of her cat is the first thing that Nora lost a day before she committed to killing herself.

Not long after that, Nora got fired from her working place, String Theory. She had been working there for twelve years and was fired because her boss assumed she had mental issues that made her constantly show her miserable expression. Another reason why Nora got dismissed is because her boss could not pay her anymore.

'No,' he said, defensively. 'This place used to just be guitars. String Theory, get it? I diversified. Made this work. It's just that when times are tough I can't pay you to put off customers with your face looking like a wet weekend.'  
'What?'

'I'm afraid, Nora' – he paused for a moment, about the time it takes to lift an axe into the air – 'I'm going to have to let you go.' (Haig, 2020, pp. 10–11)

Shortly afterward, she met her ex-bandmate Ravi while sheltering from the rain. Unfortunately, she got involved in a heated confrontation with him. Ravi gaslighted her for the disbandment of their band. Ravi told her that he barely got paid for performing in the pub, expressed his disappointment for not being able to perform in Malibu instead of Bedford, and pointed out that he could have been living a prosperous life with Ella. Their conversation reveals Nora is not on good terms with her brother, Joe. At the end of the conversation, Nora rebutted that Ravi's problem is accusing other people of his unlucky life.

'I don't think your problem was stage fright. Or wedding fright. I think your problem was *life fright*.'

This hurt. The words took the air out of her.  
 'And I think *your* problem,' she retaliated, voice trembling, 'is blaming others for your shitty life.'  
 He nodded, as if slapped. Put his magazine back.  
 'See you around, Nora.' (Haig, 2020, p. 15)

Nora had enough of Ravi's confrontation. Ravi blamed her for things he could not get due to the band's disbandment. In addition, hearing about his brother's condition from Ravi made Nora feel worse.

Shortly after, Nora lost her only piano student. She made her student wait outside her flat for an hour because she had an awful day and completely forgot that she had to teach a piano lesson that day.

'To be honest, Nora, he's been thinking about giving up altogether.'  
 'But he's so good.'  
 'He's really enjoyed it. But he's too busy. Exams, mates, football. Something has to give . . .'  
 'He has a real talent. I've got him into bloody Chopin. Please—'  
 A deep, deep sigh. 'Bye, Nora.' (Haig, 2020, p. 20)

From the dialogue above, Nora was distracted from her schedule because of the awful news she had got. She just realized that day she had a piano student to teach after receiving a call from Doreen. Doreen informed Nora that Leo, her piano student, was thinking about giving up his piano lesson due to the amount of school activities he had.

Nora had no one to talk to. She decided to text Izzy, her friend living in Australia, as her last hope. Izzy read her message within a minute, and Nora waited for her to reply. Hours had passed, and she did not get a reply from Izzy yet.

Her last hope was her former best friend Izzy, who was over ten thousand miles away in Australia. And things had dried up between them too. She took out her phone and sent Izzy a message.

*Hi Izzy, long time no chat. Miss you, friend. Would be WONDROUS to catch up. X*

She added another 'X' and sent it.

Within a minute, Izzy had seen the message. Nora waited in vain for three dots to appear.

[...] Whole hours passed by. She wanted to have a purpose, something to give her a reason to exist. But she had nothing. (Haig, 2020, pp. 18–19)

Nora wished Izzy to be her last hope to give her a reason to live. She texted her, but even after waiting for hours, Izzy had not replied to her message. This event convinced Nora that she had nothing as a reason to exist.

Mr. Banerjee, an older man living next door, even told her he did not need her to help with his medication.

'Oh,' he said now. 'I have some good news. I don't need you to collect my pills any more. The boy from the chemist has moved nearby and he says he will drop them off.'

Nora tried to reply but couldn't get the words out. She nodded instead.

[...] That was it. No one needed her. She was superfluous to the universe. (Haig, 2020, p. 21)

From the dialogue above, it can be inferred that the situation where Nora was not needed anymore ultimately made Nora feel useless.

Nora decided that she had no more reason to live. Even her social media was deserted, with no new notifications in sight. She considered that no one needed her. It was settled. She wanted to give up on her own life.

The time was now twenty-two minutes past eleven.

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 perfect time to die. (Haig, 2020, p. 23)

Midnight symbolizes the end of Nora's life and the beginning of Nora's journey in the Midnight Library.

'The point is there is a strong possibility that your old life is over. You wanted to die, and maybe you will. And you will need somewhere to go to. Somewhere to land. Another life. So, you need to think hard. This library is

called the Midnight Library, because every new life on offer here begins now. And now is midnight. It begins now. All these futures. That's what is here.' (Haig, 2020, p. 40)

Mrs. Elm explained that Nora's old life was probably over, and the Midnight Library is where every new life began. If Nora wanted to die, she might die, but before, she had to pick up another life to land.

It also may indicate the beginning when Nora woke up in her real life when she completely changed her mind and did not want to die anymore.

Will my life be miraculously free from pain, despair, grief, heartbreak, hardship, loneliness, depression? No.  
But do I want to live?  
Yes. *Yes*.  
A thousand times, yes. (Haig, 2020, p. 290)

The quotation above remarks that after Nora woke up in her real life, she finally accepted that she just needed to be one person. She could not magically free herself from pain but wanted to live.

#### 4.1.2 The Midnight Library

A library is a place where documents, books, and other media are collected. It is a place to access more information or to seek further knowledge. It has various collections of books and media. In this case, the library symbolizes Nora's multiple interests.

Nora was acknowledged as an intelligent student by Mrs. Elm because she could impress the librarian with her knowledge.

'Coldness and wetness don't always go together,' Nora told her. 'Antarctica is the driest continent on Earth. Technically, it's a desert.'  
'Well, that sounds up your street.'  
'I don't think it's far enough away.'  
'Well, maybe you should be an astronaut. Travel the galaxy.'  
Nora smiled. 'The rain is even worse on other planets.'



'Worse than Bedfordshire?'

'On Venus it is pure acid.'

Mrs Elm pulled a paper tissue from her sleeve and delicately blew her nose.

'See? With a brain like yours you can do anything.' (Haig, 2020, p. 2)

The dialogue above shows Nora's interest in science. She knew that Antarctica is the driest continent on Earth and that there is pure acid rain on Venus. Mrs. Elm praised her that she could do anything. She had pretty knowledge since she preferred to spend her break time during school years in the school library. One of the reasons was due to the mockery she got.

When Nora was a teenager, his father encouraged her to become skilled at swimming. She even won the National Swimming Championships at the age of fourteen.

'From an early age you were encouraged to swim,' said Mrs Elm.

'Yes.'

'Your dad was always happy to take you to the pool.'

'It was one of the few things that had made him happy,' Nora mused.

She had associated swimming with her father's approval and enjoyed the wordlessness of being in the water because it was the opposite of her parents screaming at each other. (Haig, 2020, pp. 88–89)

Nora admitted that swimming is one of the few things that made his dad happy, and she encouraged him to swim. However, she had to back off after winning several championships because she felt 'seen' and did not want it. After she gave up on swimming, her relationship with her father was almost completely broken.

Nora was also interested in philosophy. Later in college, she studied philosophy and got a degree in philosophy. She studied Aristotle and kept her philosophy books from her university days.

'You're a very well qualified person, Nora. Degree in Philosophy . . .'

Nora stared down at the small mole on her left hand. That mole had been through everything she'd been through. And it just stayed there, not caring. Just being a mole. 'Not a *massive* demand for philosophers in Bedford, if I'm honest, Neil.' (Haig, 2020, p. 9)

The quotation above implies that as much as Nora was interested in philosophy and obtained a degree in philosophy, she could not find any job related to philosophy in Bedford. Thus, she worked at String Theory, a music shop, as it was one of the closest to her other interests. One of Nora's interests is music, and she can play a music instrument like piano.

#### 4.1.3 The Books in The Midnight Library

A book is commonly identified as numerous paper pages fixed inside a thicker material cover. It is a medium to convey information in writing or image. Since books are one of the sources of knowledge for most people, the reader presumptively gains understanding after reading them. Books in this novel represent Nora's dream that she could not accomplish in her root life and the pursue of her dreams in the Midnight Library, hence why Mrs. Elm allowed her to try out the life she might have experienced in the form of a book.

The first book Nora opened was a life where she accomplished her dream of marrying Dan, and they owned a pub in the countryside in England. Unfortunately, she quickly discovered that Dan had cheated on her when Dan questioned her trust in him.

'One stupid mistake?' she echoed.  
 'Okay, two.'  
 It was multiplying.  
 'Two?'  
 'I was in a state. You know, the pressure. Of this place. And I was very drunk.'  
 'You had sex with someone else and it doesn't seem you have been seeking much . . . atonement.' (Haig, 2020, pp. 58–59)

Nora discovered from this life that people changed, or she thought that Dan possibly disguised his negative tendencies, and Nora was unaware of it.

Nora let out a deep exhale. 'Dan wasn't like that.'  
 'People change,' said Mrs Elm, still looking at the chessboard. Her hand lingered over a bishop.  
 Nora re-thought. 'Or maybe he was like that and I just didn't see it.' (Haig, 2020, p. 65)

Nora is deeply disappointed with Dan for that alternative life. She fulfilled one of her desires to marry Dan but was unsatisfied with the result.

In another book, Nora jumped into a life where she moved to Australia with Izzy. After searching, she did not meet Izzy anywhere but in the headline news online. It turned out that Izzy died in a car accident when she was on her way to attend Nora's birthday party.

'What happened to Izzy?'  
 Nora realised she had just asked the question out loud.  
 Jojo looked confused. 'Izzy? Your old friend Izzy?'  
 'Yeah.'  
 'The one who died?'  
 The words came so fast Nora could hardly absorb them.  
 'Um, what?'  
 'The car crash girl?'  
 'What?' (Haig, 2020, p. 83)

After knowing that Izzy died in this life, Nora learned that she could choose choices, but not the outcome.

Being a glaciologist was one of Nora's youth goals. Therefore, she continued her journey at the Midnight Library and eventually arrived at this life.

She was in shock. But it was a slightly different kind of shock than the others on the dinghy assumed. It wasn't the shock of having been close to death. It was the shock of realising she actually wanted to live. . .  
 To be part of nature was to be part of the will to live. . .  
 But once you sense that vastness, once something reveals it, hope emerges, whether you want it to or not, and it clings to you as stubbornly as lichen clings to rock. . . (Haig, 2020, p. 138)

She happened upon an intense encounter with a polar bear in her current existence. She also realized how much she genuinely wished to be alive after this accident.

Additionally, she became acquainted with Hugo, a person transitioning between similar lives, and gained insights from him. He arrived in this life five days before Nora.

'Oh. Yeah, well, that might be bad. But it might not be. You do realise there are infinite possibilities here? . . . It's about an *infinite* number of universes . . . The thing you have to remember is that this is an opportunity and it is rare and we can undo any mistake we made, live any life we want. Any life. Dream big . . . You can be anything you want to be. Because in one life, you are.' She sipped her coffee. 'I understand.' (Haig, 2020, p. 155)

Hugo shared that people were in similar situations to him and Nora, or he called them 'sliders,' he met. Those 'sliders' were all adults in their thirties to fifties who wanted to do things differently, and they all had regrets on their own. Some of them wanted to be dead but also dreamed of living differently. Hugo encouraged Nora to dream big with her life, which has infinite possibilities.

Tired of sliding from one life to another, Nora asked Mrs. Elm for advice. Nora recalled the moment when she had not yet appreciated Ash's kindness, so she wanted to visit a life where she was single and said yes to a coffee date with Ash.

'So where else in your root life have you felt that? Kindness?' Nora remembered the night Ash knocked on her door. Maybe lifting a dead cat off the road and carrying it in the rain around to her flat's tiny back garden and then burying it on her behalf because she was sobbing drunkenly with grief wasn't the most archetypally romantic thing in the world. But it certainly qualified as kind, to take forty minutes out of your run and help someone in need while only accepting a glass of water in return. She hadn't really been able to appreciate that kindness at the time. Her grief and despair had been too strong. But now she thought about it, it had really been quite remarkable.

'I think I know,' she said. 'It was right there in front of me, the night before I tried to kill myself.' (Haig, 2020, p. 299)

Soon after, she appeared in a life where she married Ash and had a daughter named Molly. She felt happy in this life as everything is considerably better than her root life.

This seemed pretty good.

Almost *annoyingly* good.

A good life with a good daughter and a good man in a good house in a good town. It was an excess of good. A life where she could sit down all day reading and researching and writing about her all-time favourite philosopher. (Haig, 2020, p. 244)

This joy, however, was temporary as she was forced to head back to the Midnight Library due to the library beginning to catch fire. Mrs. Elm explained that the fires occurred because she finally realized how much she wanted to live.

'It all makes sense. You came back here this time not because you wanted to die, but because you *want to live*. This library isn't falling down because it wants to kill you. It's falling down because it is giving you a chance to return. Something decisive has finally happened. You have decided you want to be alive. Now go on, *live*, while you still have the chance.' (Haig, 2020, p. 277)

After peeking into several 'alternative' lives, Nora conclusively understood that she just needed to live the dash instead of trying to understand life.

She remembered the anti-philosophy of Mrs Elm in the Midnight Library. 'You don't have to *understand* life. You just have to *live* it.' (Haig, 2020, p. 295)

From the quotation above, it can be implied that Nora memorized what Mrs. Elm said to her during her journey in the Midnight Library and forwarded the phrase to her brother, Joe.

#### 4.1.4 The Librarian

In Nora's root life, Mrs. Elm was her school librarian and comforted her when Nora's father died. To Nora's surprise, the librarian in the Midnight Library looked precisely like Mrs. Elm, and the librarian figure nodded to her when Nora was making sure it was Mrs. Elm that she was seeing despite the fact her attitude is a bit different from Mrs. Elm she initially knew.

Mrs Elm had her arms folded. Though she looked identical to the Mrs Elm Nora had always known, her manner was definitely a little more brusque. It was Mrs Elm but also somehow *not* Mrs Elm. It was quite confusing. (Haig, 2020, p. 40)

Mrs. Elm in the Midnight Library represents Nora's wiser self. "Mrs. Elm" several times assisted Nora in reflecting on herself, calmed her down, and guided her to the Midnight Library. Being a guide means being wise and careful in driving the visitor. There are several life lessons Nora got from Mrs Elm.

When Nora got overwhelmed after she opened *The Book of Regrets* and was confused about which decision she wanted to undo, Mrs. Elm explained the purpose of entering this Midnight Library.

'The point is there is a strong possibility that your old life is over. You wanted to die and maybe you will. And you will need somewhere to go to. Somewhere to land. Another life. So, you need to think hard. This library is called the Midnight Library, because every new life on offer here begins now. . .' (Haig, 2020, p. 40)

From the quotation above, Mrs. Elm, as the librarian, explained the purpose of the Midnight Library. Knowing the sense of a place, especially if it is a strange one, is essential as Nora might be lost and unable to return to her root life if she did not understand how the Midnight Library works.



Mrs. Elm inspected Nora when she left the life where she married Dan. She said that life was indeed unpredictable. Furthermore, she asked how she felt, and Nora answered that she still wanted to die.

'So,' wondered Mrs Elm, looking at Nora. 'What are you feeling?'

'Like I still want to die. . .'

'Want,' she told her, in a measured tone, 'is an interesting word. It means lack. Sometimes if we fill that lack with something else the original want disappears entirely. Maybe you have a lack problem rather than a want problem. Maybe there is a life that you really want to live.' (Haig, 2020, pp. 65–66)

After hearing Nora's answer, Mrs. Elm then gave her a lecture that she did not yearn to die because, according to Mrs. Elm, *want* is a word that means "lack." Thus, Mrs Elm assumed that Nora had a life that she wanted to live and not just dying.

The distinction between being discovered lying on the road and being struck by a car was made clear to Mrs. Elm after she visited a life where Nora kept Volts indoors.

'But he was hit by a car.'

'There is a difference, Nora, between dying in a road and being hit by a car. In your root life Voltaire lived longer than almost any other life, except the one you've just encountered, where he died only three hours ago. Although he had a tough few early years, the year you had him was the best of his life. Voltaire has had much worse lives, believe me.' (Haig, 2020, p. 69)

Mrs. Elm gave Nora an understanding that her cat had a heart disease since he was born and could not be cured. Nora thought about it again; she did not find any scars on Volt's body, and Mrs. Elm probably was suitable. Nora felt better when Mrs. Elm reassured her she was not an awful cat owner.

Nora felt stuck in her life and as though she was going nowhere. Mrs. Elm persuaded her to continue living since it was the only way to learn. She sufficiently prompted Nora to reveal her desire to be successful in her future life.



Mrs. Elm reminded Nora of a time when she was pursuing swimming because she had no idea how to measure what it meant to be successful. Nora quit swimming then because she did not want to be seen, but Mrs. Elm reminded her not to underestimate the importance of small things.

'Why did you quit?' asked Mrs Elm.

'As soon as I started winning swimming races, I became *seen* and I didn't want to be seen. . . They didn't mean it as a compliment. I was shy. It was one of the reasons why I preferred the library to the playing field. It seems a small thing, but it really helped, having that space.'

'Never underestimate the big importance of small things,' Mrs Elm said. 'You must always remember that.' (Haig, 2020, pp. 88–89)

Mrs. Elm reminded Nora not to underestimate the impact of the small things.

In this case, the library might seem small to Nora, but the library bridged her to be knowledgeable.

Nora returned to the Midnight Library after experiencing a life where she became a glaciologist.

'. . . It seems that you have spent all your life saying things that you aren't really thinking. This is one of your barriers.'

'Barriers?'

'Yes. You have a lot of them. They stop you from seeing the truth.'

'About what?'

'About yourself. And you really need to start trying. To see the truth. Because this matters.'

'I thought there were an infinite number of lives to choose from.'

'You need to pick the life you'd be most happy inside. Or soon there won't be a choice at all.' (Haig, 2020, p. 160)

Mrs. Elm realized that Nora's attitude towards dying had changed. She clarified to Nora that she no longer wanted to die, and Nora had so many barriers that prevented her from unraveling the truth in herself. The border is that Nora focused on the outside sand, measuring the happiness and success from

accomplishment. Thus, Mrs. Elm advised picking a life where she could be pleased.

Finally, when Nora returned to the Midnight Library after sliding into her last alternative lives, the library was on the edge of breaking down. Mrs. Elm urged and guided Nora on how to get out of the library as soon as possible. She elaborated that Nora regained the wish to be alive again.

'It all makes sense. You came back here this time not because you wanted to die, but because you *want to live*. This library isn't falling down because it wants to kill you. It's falling down because it is giving you a chance to return. Something decisive has finally happened. You have decided you want to be alive. Now go on, *live*, while you still have the chance.'

'But . . . what about you? What's going to happen to you?'

'Don't worry about me,' she said. 'I promise you. I won't feel a thing.' And then she said what the real Mrs Elm had said when she had hugged Nora back at the school library on the day her dad had died. 'Things will get better, Nora. It's going to be all right.' (Haig, 2020, p. 277)

From the quotation above, Mrs. Elm said to Nora that the flames in the Midnight Library were because Nora gained the wish to live. She also encouraged Nora to live and assured her that things would be all right.

#### **4.2 How the Symbols Support the Plot**

The researcher has identified the support of the symbols to the plot from the previously listed signs. The story starts when Nora has a horrible day that makes her feel worthless, and attempts to kill herself at midnight. Instead of instantly dying, Nora set foot in a strange library known as the Midnight Library.

Nora met Mrs. Elm, the librarian in the Midnight Library, and she guided Nora to understand what this library means and how to use and behave in the library and assisted her in reflecting on herself. The library was entirely of alternative lives of Nora Seed, and Nora had the chance to live what she had

dreamed of. When Nora discovered a life where she thought of a perfect life, she forcibly returned to the library. The Midnight Library soon crumbled, and her watch began to tick again as a sign that she was in a dangerous state in her root life, as well as Nora finally wanting to be alive again. Mrs. Elm immediately ordered her to leave the library by writing "I AM ALIVE" on a blank page. Nora woke up in an ill condition and collapsed while looking for aid. After she got proper treatment in the hospital, she peacefully reunited with her surroundings.

From the plot chain above, most symbols and their connection to the plot are shown in the rising action. Furthermore, the elaboration will be revealed in the following subsections.

#### **4.2.1 Representing the Situation of the Story**

One form of support from symbols in the story is by representing the story's situation in the novel. Midnight is the only symbolic representation of the condition of the story.

##### **4.2.1.1 Midnight**

Midnight represents the end and the beginning of Nora's life after her coma. This correlates to a time in her root life when Nora attempted to kill herself.

She looked at the digital display of her watch.

00:00:00

Midnight, as the clock had told her.

She waited for the next second to arrive, but it didn't. Even as she walked closer to the building, even as she opened the wooden door, even as she stepped inside, the display didn't change. Either something was wrong with her watch, or something was wrong with time. In the circumstances, it could have been either. (Haig, 2020, pp. 25–26)

In the novel, the scene of Nora deciding to commit suicide is done at midnight. By this setting of time, Nora undoubtedly tried to end her root life and

begin her adventure in the Midnight Library. It aligns with the symbolic meaning of the midnight in this novel.

#### 4.2.2 Using Thematic Symbols

Another form of support for existing symbols is that the signs come from the novel's theme. The library, the books, and the librarian are part of Nora's environment during her unconscious state in this novel. Thus, using thematic symbols is one of the way of the symbols supporting the plot.

##### 4.2.2.1 Library

The library signifies Nora's enthusiasm for some objects. She was interested in becoming a glaciologist, studying philosophy, swimming, and participating in musical activities. She woke up at the Midnight Library in her coma state.

First, Nora became a glaciologist who was doing research in Svalbard. In this life, she thought her 11-year-old self would be proud and looked forward to an adventure. Becoming a glaciologist was her youth dream, prompted by Mrs. Elm.

'Why do glaciers pulsate?'

'What?'

'This is your area of study. It's why you're here, isn't it?'

'The science isn't entirely settled on the matter.'

'Okay. Bien. Name me one of the glaciers around here. Glaciers have names. Name one . . . Kongsbreen? Nathorstbreen? Ring any bells?' (Haig, 2020, p. 145)

From the dialogue above, it can be seen that Nora finally fulfilled her dream to become a glaciologist. However, she did not understand several things when Hugo asked her because it was not her life.

Second, Nora slides into a life where she is a successful Olympic swimmer.

Even though becoming a swimming athlete was her dad's ambition, it was one of the few things that made him happy.

Nora then googled 'Nora Seed'.

Her Wikipedia page (she had a Wikipedia page!) informed her that she had indeed made it to the Olympics. Twice. And that she specialised in freestyle. She had won a gold medal for 800m freestyle, with a ridiculous time of eight minutes and five seconds, and had a silver for 400m.

This had been when she was twenty-two years old. She had won another silver medal when she was twenty-six, for her participation in a 4 x 100m relay. It got even more ridiculous when she read that she had briefly been the world record-holder for women's 400m freestyle at the World Aquatic Championships. She had then retired from international competition. (Haig, 2020, p. 95)

The paragraph above proves that Nora succeeded in a life where she became a swimming athlete. Nora's popularity measures her success in this life by owning a Wikipedia page and winning some championships.

Third, Nora lived a life where her former band, The Labyrinth, did not disband and became a famous band currently doing a world tour. Playing in a band was also one of her sources of happiness.

She reached the keyboard, sat down on the stool and brought the microphone a little closer.

'Thank you, São Paulo,' she said. 'We love you.'

And Brazil roared back.

This, it seemed, was power. The power of fame. Like those pop icons she had seen on social media, who could say a single word and get a million likes and shares. Total fame was when you reached the point where looking like a hero, or genius, or god, required minimal effort. But the flipside was that it was precarious. It could be equally easy to fall and look like a devil or a villain, or just an arse. (Haig, 2020, p. 167)

The paragraph above is evidence that Nora succeeded in another life. She was doing a world tour with her band. In this life, Nora's success is measured by the fame her band gained.

In the fourth life, Nora married Ash and had a daughter named Molly in one of her alternative lives. While being a mother, she wrote a book about her favorite philosopher, Henry David Thoreau. She felt happy; according to her, this is the 'perfect' life.

This seemed pretty good.

Almost *annoyingly* good.

A good life with a good daughter and a good man in a good house in a good town. It was an excess of good. A life where she could sit down all day reading and researching and writing about her all-time favorite philosopher. (Haig, 2020, p. 244)

A little different from the other lives where Nora aimed for successful lives defined by fame and medals. In this life, Nora was content with everything she had. Thus, she decided that this life was the perfect life.

Through this setting, Nora fulfilled her interest to a certain degree in her alternative lives, similar to how a library provides various kinds of media and books that can fill the visitor's curiosity.

#### **4.2.2.2 The Books**

The books symbolize Nora's life lessons from her alternative lives. Since a book is a medium to save information and knowledge, the reader can explore the topics in a book by reading it. Nora jumped from one life to another after opening the books in the Midnight Library.

The first lesson Nora got was from the life where she married Dan. She found out Dan cheated on her and returned to the Midnight Library with an expression of disappointment.

Nora let out a deep exhale. 'Dan wasn't like that.'

'People change,' said Mrs Elm, still looking at the chessboard. Her hand lingered over a bishop.



Nora re-thought. 'Or maybe he was like that and I just didn't see it.' (Haig, 2020, p. 65)

Seeing Nora disappointed, Mrs. Elm assured her that people would change.

On Nora's second thought, she might have overlooked Dan's foulness. It was the first lesson to Nora that life is unpredictable.

The second lesson was from a life where Nora moved to Australia with her best friend, Izzy.

Mrs Elm smiled, wryly. 'It just shows you, doesn't it?'

'Shows me what?'

'Well, that you can choose choices but not outcomes. But I stand by what I said. It was a good choice. It just wasn't a desired outcome.' (Haig, 2020, p. 86)

When Nora realized she could not find Izzy for some time, she discovered from a news portal that Izzy died in a car crash when she was on her way to Nora's birthday party. From this life, Nora learned that she could make any choice but not decide the outcome.

The last but not least lesson was when Nora returned to the library after visiting the previous alternative life. The library caught fire because Nora realized she wanted to live more than die. "She didn't want to die. And she didn't want to live any other life than the one that was hers. The one that could be a messy struggle, but it was her messy struggle. A beautiful messy struggle." (Haig, 2020, p. 280).

A realization hit Nora amidst the rapid fire that devoured the library. She realized that even though her life was full of chaos and a mess, she accepted that she just wanted to live her own life and not the others.



After reading a book, the reader typically can grasp the contents of the book. Through these books, Nora gained some lessons from her alternative lives that opened her to a new perspective.

#### 4.2.2.3 Mrs. Elm

Mrs. Elm in the Midnight Library represents Nora's wise side in herself. As a librarian, Mrs. Elm should be thoughtful and careful to help the visitors. After seeing the undesired expectations from her alternative life, Nora went through mental breakdowns and shock several times.

After visiting the life where Nora married Dan, Mrs. Elm asked how Nora was feeling, and she answered that she still wanted to die. Mrs. Elm then articulated that "want" means "lack," and Nora did not want to die.

'So,' wondered Mrs Elm, looking at Nora. 'What are you feeling?'

'Like I still want to die. . .'

'Want,' she told her, in a measured tone, 'is an interesting word. It means lack. Sometimes if we fill that lack with something else the original want disappears entirely. Maybe you have a lack problem rather than a want problem. Maybe there is a life that you really want to live.' (Haig, 2020, pp. 65–66)

From this dialogue, Mrs. Elm assures Nora that there might be a life that Nora wants to live. Nora thought her life with Dan was what she wanted, but it was not. Mrs. Elm convinced Nora that it was just one of her possible lives while there were infinite possible lives.

The second life lesson was from a life where Nora kept Volts inside the house. However, Nora still found him dead, but she found it under the bed this time.

'Well, you don't see yourself as a bad cat owner any more. You looked after him as well as he could have been looked after. He loved you as much as you loved him, and maybe he didn't want you to see him die. You see, cats *know*.

They understand when their time is up. He went outside *because* he was going to die, and he knew it.' (Haig, 2020, p. 69)

Nora protested to Mrs. Elm that the life she just got into made no difference from her root life. She had a dead cat. Mrs. Elm explained that Volts had restrictive cardiomyopathy that caused his heart to go at a young age. After hearing the explanation, Nora did not feel like she was a lousy cat owner anymore.

Finally, the last insight was when the Midnight Library fell apart. Nora wanted Mrs. Elm to return her to her perfect life or any life that is close to be perfect, but it was impossible, and that ideal life was not hers to begin with.

'It all makes sense. You came back here this time not because you wanted to die, but because you *want to live*. This library isn't falling down because it wants to kill you. It's falling down because it is giving you a chance to return. Something decisive has finally happened. You have decided you want to be alive. Now go on, *live*, while you still have the chance.' (Haig, 2020, p. 277)

Mrs. Elm clarified that the fire occurred because Nora wanted to live instead of dead. In this scene, Mrs. Elm also makes Nora realize she no longer wants to die.

Mrs. Elm was there to accompany Nora. She made her evaluate herself and her perspective. Through these acts, Nora gained new insight into life and gathered her will to live again.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This chapter delivers the conclusions after analyzing symbolism in *The Midnight Library* novel. Moreover, the researcher also includes some suggestions to develop future research.

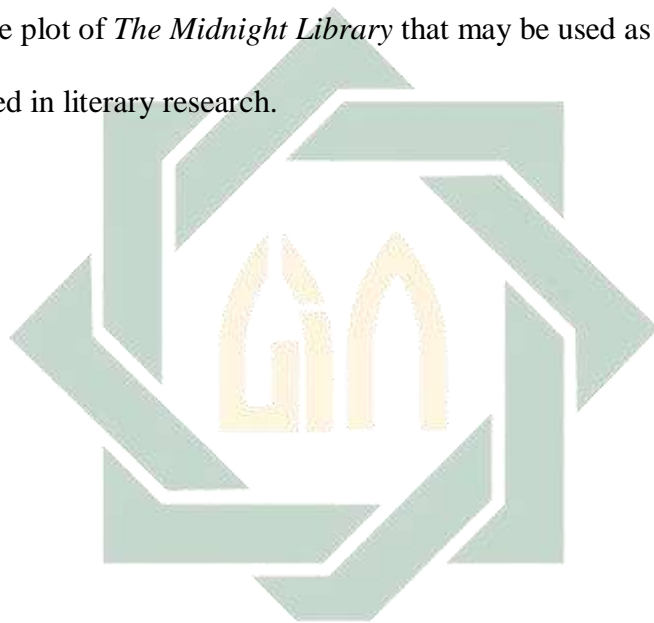
#### 5.1 Conclusions

This paper applies the theory of New Criticism to examine the symbolism and the connection between the symbols and the plot in the novel *The Midnight Library*. From the first findings in the previous chapter, it can be mentioned that there are four symbols: midnight, the library, the books, and Mrs. Elm. As for the symbolisms, midnight symbolizes the end and the beginning of Nora's life; the library represents Nora's interests; the books indicate the lesson Nora had learned from her life in the Midnight Library; and Mrs. Elm represents Nora's wisdom.

Furthermore, the second finding is about the relation between the symbols and the plot. Since this study discovered four signs, there are also four relations to the story. The first connection is from midnight, which signifies the setting time of Nora's suicide attempt. The library, as the second connection, indicates that Nora was finally able to live on her interests in the Midnight Library. The third connection is the books denoting Nora's enlightenment about life from her alternative energies. Last but not least is Mrs. Elm, a librarian who helped and accompanied Nora during her journey in the Midnight Library.

## 5.2 Suggestions

From the conclusion above, this research mainly focuses on the novel's symbolism and intrinsic elements, precisely the plot. For future English Literature students, this paper can study the relationship between symbols and the message of the story. Since *The Midnight Library* novel is relatively newly published, another subject of literary research may aim to investigate the magical realism elements in this novel. Lastly, this study provides information regarding symbolism and the plot of *The Midnight Library* that may be used as a reference to people interested in literary research.



UIN SUNAN AMPEL  
S U R A B A Y A

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