

AN ANALYSIS OF CONNELL WALDRON'S ANXIETY IN "NORMAL PEOPLE" NOVEL BY SALLY ROONEY

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ABSTRACT

This research presents an analysis of the anxiety experiences of Connell Waldron from the 266-page novel *Normal People* by Sally Rooney first published in 2018 by Faber & Faber. *Normal People* is a novel that tells a story about two people's relationships and lives. Connell Waldron, one of the main characters, suffers from anxiety that affects his behavior and actions, especially in his relationships. This research studies the anxiety experienced by Connell based on the anxiety theory from the psychoanalysis collection theories by Freud that consists of three types of anxiety which are reality anxiety, neurotic anxiety, and moral anxiety. This research uses qualitative methods to study the character Connell based on all three types of anxiety by Freud. The data is collected from dialogues and narrations from the novel and analyzed and discussed to get the research findings. The writer found that Connell experiences all of the three anxiety types. The results show that Connell's anxiety stems from external dangers like financial crises, internal psychological issues, and guilt from violating social expectations and morals.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Anxiety, Character

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menyampaikan sebuah analisis pengalaman kecemasan (anxiety) Connell Waldron dari novel setebal 266 halaman *Normal People* karya Sally Rooney yang pertama kali diterbitkan pada tahun 2018 oleh Faber & Faber. *Normal People* adalah novel yang bercerita tentang hubungan dan kehidupan dua orang. Salah satu karakter utama, Connell Waldron, menderita kecemasan yang memengaruhi perilaku dan tindakannya, terutama dalam hubungannya. Penelitian ini mengkaji kecemasan yang dialami Connell berdasarkan teori kecemasan (anxiety) dari koleksi teori psikoanalisis Sigmund Freud yang terdiri dari tiga jenis yaitu kecemasan realitas, kecemasan neurotic, dan kecemasan moral. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif untuk mempelajari karakter Connell berdasarkan ketiga tipe kecemasan oleh Freud. Data dikumpulkan dari dialog dan narasi yang diambil dari novel dan dianalisis serta didiskusikan untuk mendapatkan temuan penelitian. Penulis menemukan bahwa Connell mengalami semua jenis tiga kecemasan tersebut. Hasil dari analisis menunjukkan bahwa kecemasan Connell berasal dari bahaya eksternal seperti krisis finansial, masalah psikologis internal, dan rasa bersalah karena melanggar ekspektasi sosial dan moral.

Kata kunci: Psikoanalisis, Kecemasan, Karakter

INTRODUCTION

Literature is an art that can reflect the real world by expressing ideas, concepts, and stories that portray real-life matters. It is considered as a mirror of the world. As stated by Wellek and Warren (1949:10-11), literature is viewed as imaginative works that can express emotions and thoughts using language as the media. Addressed as imaginative, it means that it portrays the image of feelings and experiences in a human life. Bradbury (1998: xvii) also states that literature is a part of the advancement in understanding and learning of human life experiences in an imaginative way thus literature is linked with human and moral ideas. This means that to learn and understand literature is a way to learn and understand humankind.

Studying literature also can be done from a psychological perspective. Literature that mirrors real life contains characters that portray human feelings and traits which has a connection with psychology. This being said psychology itself is a scientific discipline for studying and understanding the state of mental and behavior in humans (Mischel, 2024). It has a strong connection because it is a method to study complex human behavior and personality that is also portrayed in literature. Complex behaviors and feelings can manifest in a form such as anxiety and this anxiety is oftentimes portrayed in literary characters. For anxiety itself, it is a concept in psychoanalytic that takes part in the personality development of

individuals. According to Freud (as cited in Feist and Feist, 2006, p. 33) anxiety is an unpleasant state with physical sensations that warn someone about a threat that endangers them. In anxiety, according to Freud, there are three types which are reality anxiety, neurotic anxiety, and moral anxiety.

Reality anxiety also known as objective anxiety is an anxiety that is similar to the feeling of fear. As stated by Feist and Feist (2006, p. 34) reality anxiety is described as an unpleasant feeling that is unspecific regarding dangers that could happen to individuals. This anxiety is triggered by dangers from the external world which means this anxiety comes from actual dangers or threats that could possibly endanger someone. The other type of anxiety, neurotic anxiety, is an anxiety arises from internal or unconscious threats which means it is located in the ego and originates from the id. Hall (1954, p. 64-65) also states this anxiety as a fear of the consequences of the ego's failure to prevent the id which leads someone to act based on the impulses. Then the other type of anxiety, moral anxiety is an anxiety that comes from the feelings of shame or guilt triggered by the conscience or the moral. Hall (1954, p. 68) stated that this conscience acts like a parental control based on the influence of parents in the form of punishment because of thoughts and acts that against the moral standards or the perfectionism of morals.

Connell Waldron, a character from Sally Rooney's novel *Normal People*, shows portrayals of a complex character with psychological issues of anxiety that affect his behavior and actions. The writer presents the analysis regarding the character Connell and his experience in anxiety based on the anxiety theory by Freud.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is conducted using qualitative methods, which collect the data from the dialogues and narrations from the novel *Normal People* by Sally Rooney. This method works by studying and analyzing the data based on the theory of anxiety by Sigmund Freud. The data is categorized into each type of anxiety and then analyzed one by one as a discussion of the findings of the research.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

In the novel *Normal People*, the main character Connell Waldron shows the experiences of three types of anxiety consisting of reality anxiety, neurotic anxiety, and moral anxiety. Then in this chapter, the writer presents the findings and the discussions of the three types of anxiety based on the data the writer has found.

Reality Anxiety

Based on Freud's theory reality or realistic anxiety is the fear of a specific danger and is defined as an unpleasant feeling involving a possible danger that could happen to individuals (as cited in Feist and Feist, 2006, p. 34). This anxiety could be triggered by environments, situations, and people. Below are the

findings of Connell's experience of realistic anxiety.

Connell went to leave but found himself trapped by a group of students talking loudly. When he tried to press his way through, one of them said:

Sadie : "Oh, hi Connell."

He recognised her, it was Sadie Darcy O'Shea. She was in some of his English classes, and he knew she was involved in the literary society. She was the girl who'd called him 'a genius' to his face back in first year.

Connell : "Hey, he said."

Sadie : "Did you enjoy the reading?"

He shrugged.

Connell : "It was alright."

He felt anxious and wanted to leave, but she kept speaking. He rubbed his palms on his T-shirt.

(chapter 15)

This dialogue is between Connell and Sadie, a friend of Connell from college. In this exchange of conversation, Connell meets Sadie by coincidence at an author's reading event when he attempts to exit the gathering. However, because of Sadie's presence, he cannot escape from this situation as Sadie keeps talking to him. In that situation, it can be seen that Connell is anxious and uneasy because the situation is against his desire to leave the event and also the interaction with Sadie. This is interpreted as a manifestation of realistic anxiety as the unexpected encounter between Connell and Sadie is considered a threat to Connell who doesn't desire the interaction and wants to avoid it.

Another data of reality anxiety is also found in Connell's dire situation regarding his financial status because his employer cut his work hours. This may affect Connell's safety because of his sudden financial crisis. This can be seen in the quotation below.

*"He could just tell her about the situation and ask if he could stay in her place until September. He knew she would say yes. **He thought she would say yes, it was hard to imagine her not saying yes. But he found himself putting off the conversation, putting off Niall's enquiries about it, planning to bring it up with her and then at the last minute failing to. It just felt too much like asking her for money.**"*

(chapter 11)

The narration above focuses on Connell's thoughts about his current situation. Connell who gets his work hours cut off, is unable to cover his rent and living costs which leads him to this uneasiness. He wants to ask Marianne to let him stay with her in her place, but he isn't sure about asking this. Connell is sure that Marianne would agree, but somehow, he isn't sure and starts dragging it off. This action of Connell may be caused by reality anxiety. He is anxious about his financial instability which is a danger coming from the external world. His avoidant behavior also indicates fear of rejection because of the feelings of being below her in terms of money which can be a cause for his anxiety.

Neurotic Anxiety

Neurotic anxiety which stems from someone's internal psychological issues

is not caused by an actual threat. In the Connell case, Connell's anxiety is revealed in how he feels anxious and fears the judgment of others especially from his friends. Connell is very concerned about being discovered that he has a relationship with Marianne because of their difference which is going to be a weird thing to do according to other people's eyes. Below is the narration that shows his anxiety.

Marianne : *"I like you so much."*

*Connell felt a pleasurable sorrow come over him, which brought him close to tears. Moments of emotional pain arrived like this, meaningless or at least indecipherable. Marianne lived a drastically free life, he could see that. **He was trapped by various considerations. He cared what people thought of him. He even cared what Marianne thought, that was obvious now.***

(chapter 3)

The narration above focuses on Connell's thoughts he spends his time with Marianne. She confesses that she likes him, but Connell feels restrained to reciprocate it because he needs to follow societal expectations. The fact that Marianne has a different reputation from him feels conflicting. He fears others' opinions and judgment for seeing someone acceptable to his social circle. He cares and desires for Marianne but he is restrained because restrained by his ideal of what is acceptable according to his social life and the people around him.

Another finding of neurotic anxiety in Connell's character is the reaction of panic which is one of the neurotic anxiety manifestations. This reaction of panic

occurs with physical symptoms that are felt by the one experiencing it and also may be visible to others. Below is the narration that shows a panic reaction that happened to Connell.

"Before term ended he had to give a class presentation on the Morte Darthur, and while he spoke his hands were shaking and he couldn't look up from the printouts to see if anyone was actually listening to him. His voice wavered several times and he had the sense that if he hadn't been seated, he would have fallen to the ground."

(chapter 9)

The narration mentioned tells Connell's experience of panic reaction when he is giving a presentation in a class. He experiences symptoms such as shaking, avoiding eye contact, wavering voice, and feeling faint. As mentioned before, this is a manifestation form of neurotic anxiety. This may also be influenced by his internal psychological issues such as fear of being judged by his classmates which signals him a warning of threats because of the possibility of not passing the standards of others.

Moral Anxiety

Moral anxiety is a feeling of guilt and shame that comes from the temptation to violate the superego. This anxiety formed because of the conflict between ego and superego. It is triggered by the conscience which leads to shame and guilt. In the case of Connell, he experiences moral anxiety that is mostly related to his relationship with Marianne and societal expectations. The narration below shows this experience of moral anxiety.

*"They all erupted in laughter. Connell closed his locker and walked out of the room carrying his schoolbag limply in his right hand. He heard the others calling after him, but he didn't turn around. When he got to the bathroom he locked himself in a cubicle. **The yellow walls bore down on him and his face was slick with sweat. He kept thinking of himself saying to Marianne in bed: I love you. It was terrifying, like watching himself committing a terrible crime on CCTV. And soon she would be in school, putting her books in her bag, smiling to herself, never knowing anything. You're a nice person and everyone likes you. He took one deep uncomfortable breath and then threw up.**"*

(chapter 5)

The narration below is part of a situation where Connell's friends gather and have a conversation in school about the incident from the fundraiser event. On that night Connell takes Marianne home because an older guy harassed Marianne. Viewing Marianne as someone who is weird and disliked by them, Connell's friends tease and make a joke about Marianne to Connell. They are joking that Connell should take her to the Debs and asking him about their relationship or what happened that night. In this narration, Connell escapes from his friends to the toilet. He feels shameful and guilty which may be caused because he feels like his feelings toward Marianne are against what his social circle expects from him. This expectation may be viewed as a norm of what is acceptable, and being together with Marianne means violating that

norm. However, this guilt also exists because he feels like betraying Marianne for not properly standing up for their relationship and for the fact that she isn't aware of how awful he is as a person. After all, he is afraid of violating the norms and being judged by his friends.

Below is another experience of moral anxiety in Connell's character. This anxiety is triggered by negative thoughts that violate the morals of Connell as moral anxiety stems from the temptation to violate the superego of someone.

*"She comes to sit down with him and he touches her cheek. **He has a terrible sense all of a sudden that he could hit her face, very hard even, and she would just sit there and let him. The idea frightens him so badly that he pulls his chair back and stands up. His hands are shaking.** He doesn't know why he thought about it. Maybe he wants to do it. **But it makes him feel sick.**"*

(chapter 9)

This narration focuses on Connell's thoughts and is connected to a conversation between Connell, Marianne, and Marianne's friend. Before this narration, Marianne's friends ask him about the idea of having multiple partners and she directly asks him about her joining in between him and Marianne. Connell cannot answer her properly because this unexpected question caught him off guard. Marianne then refuses but she says to Connell that she would agree to her friend's offer if Connell want to. This triggers Connell to the realization that

Marianne might do anything for him if he asks for it or allows him to do anything to her. The sudden thought that he can hit Marianne and she would be alright with it makes him sick and dizzy. He experiences physical symptoms such as shaking and feeling sick. This experience is a manifestation of moral anxiety as he is thinking about thoughts that violate the superego.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the data from the novel related to Connell's character and the experience of anxiety, the writer found that Connell experiences all of the three types of anxiety consisting of reality anxiety, neurotic anxiety, and moral anxiety. Connell experiences reality anxiety that stems from his fear of undesired interaction and financial instability which are dangers that comes from the external world. For neurotic anxiety, the writer found that Connell's anxiety reveals in how he greatly suffers from his own internal issues such as fear of judgment from other people and panic reactions. Then for the moral anxiety, the writer found that this anxiety reveals in how he is restrained to the social norms and also his own morals. As for the suggestions, the writer would like to suggest to deeply study about this theory and if there is any that is interested in analyzing the same object, the character of Connell Waldron, taking another psychological issue experienced by him such as his inferiority issues or attachment issues can be a more complex and interesting topic to be studied,

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