

Psychosexual Analysis of Homosexuality in Michael Cunningham's *By Nightfall*: Freudian Perspectives on Desire and Struggle

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Abstract

The title of this thesis is *Representation of Homosexuals in Michael Cunningham's "By Nightfall"*. This thesis focuses on analyzing the character's homosexual experience and how the character struggles to survive with his choices in *By Nightfall* by Michael Cunningham. By using the theory of psychosexual proposed by Freud (1905) to analyze psychosexual and homosexual expressions as well as to reveal the struggles of the characters in Michael Cunningham's novel *By Nightfall*. This thesis uses descriptive-qualitative method and literature research from novels and several articles, books, and journals related to this thesis. The results of this study indicate that sexual desire in the novel *By Nightfall* by Michael Cunningham is described by expressions and experiences through the romantic relationships of the characters in his life related to homosexual desires. Furthermore, the character's struggle reveals the activities carried out to fulfill his sexual desires to the point of recognition to everyone.

Keywords: *Psychosexual, romantic, struggle of homosexuality.*

A. Introduction

Homosexuality has recently become a very frequently discussed issue. In Indonesia itself, many homosexuals experience public rejection. For example, as cited on detiknews.com what happened on May 3, 2022, 2 teenagers were making out at the Wow cafe, so they reported it to the police. The case has received attention from various parties because it disrupted public order. This will always be a topic of conversation because homosexuality itself is considered a psychological problem for someone who develops it inappropriately. Homosexuality which is bridged by psychological problems has causes in many aspects of one's life. Someone who has thoughts will provide a good psychological condition as well. So the tendency to experience abnormal sexual development will be very small. This provides a gap for scientific to study psychology as an analysis of the human psychic condition which is very complex, in its development is known as psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis is a method which in its application looks at personality organization and dynamic personality. Freud (1921) define that many mental disorders are caused by memories that we have repressed and therefore remain outside of our awareness.

Regarding the soul of consciousness, Freud described it as an iceberg where the part that is visible on the surface of the water is the smallest part namely the tip of the iceberg, which is psychologically is part of the conscious mind which is located slightly below the surface of the subconscious and most of it is part of the conscious mind. It is located at the bottom of the water, which is psychologically the subconscious.

The subconscious as which is the deepest part of humans can shape one's personality. Freud in Windasari (2018) divides personality consists of three systems or aspects, namely: Id, ego, and superego. In order to study and understand the human personality system, Freud tried to develop a personality model that is interconnected and creates tension between them. Therefore, in a healthy human being, the three personality systems will work continuously and in harmony to form good mental health. This mental health factor can help the process of human self-development to become a good person and have a healthy soul. So, for human who has good development of personality, they also can reach a good development of sexuality.

The process of developing sexuality is important because children can appreciate and be more responsible for their respective roles of sexuality. In its development, if there is an imbalance between personality development and sexuality development, it can cause sexual deviation. This can be said because it is not in accordance with the sexual development that should be experienced by humans because the type of human sex from birth is different from what it should be when they are adults. This was highlighted by Freud because the sexual urge for him is the main force behind human behaviour. Individual development is strongly influenced by a significant component, namely the development sexuality.

The development of sexuality for Freud divided into three stages: infantile, latency, and puberty. The Infantile stage consists of three phases, namely the oral (sexual pleasure from the mouth), the anal phase (the pleasure of holding stool), and the phallic phase (sexual development of genital function). The latency stage is referred to as the silent phase, because curiosity about sexuality has decreased, this is because children are preoccupied with their sex life and their playtime. While the puberty stage is the stage where impulses begin to reappear if this condition takes place correctly then the child will reach the genital phase, so that he is able to develop mature sexuality. However, the phallic stage and the genital phase are very crucial.

During the phallic phase and the genital phase, the child is expected to be able to responsibly control libido. In this phase also because it is centered on the satisfaction of the genital area, children are expected to be able to adjust to sexual urges and physical changes. So if in the development of sexuality in that phase there is fixation, it can cause a person to have sexual urges and identifications that deviate from what they should be, or can be said to be homosexual.

However, the struggle to be homosexual certainly has many problems. One of them is the view of heteronormativity that still exists in the community. Sexual desire for the same sex is still wrong and abnormal. Rejection and exclusion are often experienced by everyone who has a sexual desire for the same sex. Their struggle seems to be more intense to understand those around them that sexual desire is a private sphere. So they can come out and live their lives by having same-sex sexual desires. Coming out becomes

the end point of their struggle to fulfill their rights where they become more confident and able to live as a homosexual couple. The homosexual problems happened in real life and was depicted in some literary works such as novels.

A novel has two supporting elements, namely intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Intrinsic elements build the story from within, while extrinsic is the author's view that is influenced by the author's environmental conditions. So there are many issues that can be written. One of them is the issue of different sexual desires in this case homosexuality.

Homosexuality was depicted in the novel *By Nightfall* by Michael Cunningham. *By Nightfall* was published in 2010 by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. Michael Cunningham is a writer who won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, as well as the PEN Faulkner Award in 1999 for one of his novels. This novel tells about the anxiety of sexual desire possessed by the main character named Peter Harris who has an uncommon feeling for his wife's brother named Mizzy. In his complex life, he questions whether gender and sexual desire are affected by some of the problems he has faced throughout his life. This strangeness started when he saw Mizzy naked in front of him.

Based on the explanation above, the writer is interested in conducting a study regarding homosexual problems, entitled Representation of homosexuality in Michael Cunningham's "By Nightfall" by using theory from Freud (1905) to uncover the psychosexual. The focuses of this study are the homosexual problem and how do they express to further evaluate the struggle for sexuality that is experienced by the characters of the novel "By Nightfall" by Michael Cunningham.

Becomes such an interesting topic, there are researches who have analyzed the same issue. The first was conducted by Sari and Mulawarman (2021). They used the theory of psychosexual development by Freud (1921), it was found that changes in sexual orientation are dramatically represented by the main character which was caused by her traumatic experience in childhood. Then the next research was carried out by Kastanja (2020), she used the psychoanalysis theory (1905) to analyze the issue. Based on the analysis, it discusses ideas about sexual deviation that is not normal as a result of the rights and freedoms of life that were deprived since childhood. Furthermore, Rarasati (2014) using the same theory with the two researcher, she found that impacts of closeness raised a homosexuality feeling. It has many rejections from the heteronormative society. This research has similar issue to analyze, which is psychosexual development using the theory of Freud (1905). The difference between the three previous researches with this research is the object and the focus of research. This research uses the novel *By Nightfall* as its object, and focuses on how homosexual represented and describe their struggle with their sexual orientation.

B. Method

The data were taken from the novel *By Nightfall* which was published in September 2010. Data collection was carried out in several stages, starting from read the novel as whole several times to better understand the story in depth. Then, the researchers tried to highlight the important sentences and dialogues to facilitate the process of identifying the

problems. After that, the researchers analyzed the visual imagery of the movie posters. Finally, the researchers categorize the data obtained from the novel then arrange them into several types based on its classifying and developing data. The psychosexual development and the struggle of the character were analyzed by using the Freud (1905). The researchers used qualitative approach in this research. The approach was chosen because this research analysed and explored the phenomenon that comes from human problems, in this case human problem in understanding homosexual issue. This approach was chosen also because the data in this research were presented in descriptive analytic that is more concerned with what than how or why something has happened (Nassaji, 2015)

C. Findings and Discussion

There are fifty data found from “By Nightfall” novel based on psychosexual development and the struggle from heteronormativity view, with details the representation of homosexuality, the researcher found that there are 32 data, namely 17 Peter’s homosexual expression towards Mizzy and 15 Mizzy’s homosexual expression towards Peter. Meanwhile, there are 18 data for their struggle with their sexual orientation. These data were analyzed using Freud’s theory.

1. Representation of Homosexual

The representation of homosexual found in the novel are divided in two parts. These two parts are Homosexual experience and expression towards each main characters.

Peter's interest in Mizzy's physique is acknowledged by saying that Mizzy's body is very good which makes him like it. Physical characteristics of a gay person who they think are sexy always seem to be the main thing bearer emotional seemness. Peter's id is shown by that which he likes Mizzy. Peter stated that most of his interest in being gay was about the buttocks which is a very beautiful physique. Peter can't see a good reason why his physiognomy can't read the nature of Mizzy's face because he has seen Mizzy's perfect physique.

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Peter watches him go, his supple back and the small, perfect spheres of his ass. Whatever’s gay in Peter is probably mostly about ass, the place where another man is most vulnerable, childlike; the place where his physiognomy seems least built for a fight. Nice ass, little brother. (Cunningham, 2010, p.91)

The sexual attraction to Mizzy that makes him emotionally close is Peter's imagination of the art he covets. Peter has always been in awe of Mizzy's perfect physique. He glanced intently at his aristocratic nose, fine black hair, and pale forehead.

All of which Peter was very fond of and it was not natural for a man to pay close attention to another man, liking the physical to get a sexual image. ...*As he glances (unobtrusively, he hopes) at Mizzy's solemn profile, his aristocratically hooked nose, the shock of dark hair that trembles on his pale forehead.* (Cunningham, 2010, p.139). However, his beautiful physique of Mizzy always has a specific interest in Peter.

Amidst the boredom of Peter with Rebecca, Mizzy appears. Peter's admiration for Mizzy's body influences Peter's sexual desire. Mizzy's body, which Peter considers like Rebecca's when he was young, he misses, illustrates the reason that physically Mizzy provides a variety of sexual attraction for Peter. However, Mizzy who had been touched and seen naked by a man instead showed a reaction that was not surprising and didn't look uncomfortable as if it was something that didn't bother him. Whereas for most humans, the bathroom like the body is a private space that other people should not disturb. This is the first reason Peter has a strange sensation or different imagination every time he sees Mizzy because he has touched Mizzy's body.

Right. The solid square plates of his pectorals, the V of his hips; here is the small dark bristle of pubic hair, the pink- brown jut of his dick.

"Hey," he says cordially to Peter. Being seen naked by Peter does not render Mizzy even remotely uncomfortable. (Cunningham, 2010, p.29)

Peter's acknowledgment that he had gay DNA in junior high school, led to unfavorable psychosexual development. In adolescence, which is in a silent phase, it admits that it has an attraction to the same sex. This abnormal psychosexual development can then influence his sexual attraction as an adult. *Okay, there's gay DNA in the family, and he whacked off with his friend Rick throughout junior high, and sure, he can see the beauty of men..* (Cunningham, 2010, p.65). From this statement Peter acknowledges that since he had a Gay DNA he can see the other side of men's body which is abnormal for common men.

The discomfort of a husband- wife relationship will reduce the desire for each partner. This is very important to note because every human being has the desire to have a comfortable relationship, it could be that couples who do not get comfortable will even look for other alternatives to fulfill their sexual desires.

The attraction of Peter's sexual desire is influenced by his relationship with Rebecca which is not harmonious. This must have made Peter very frustrated by the thought of the dark tingling in his blood and the shame he felt about the world. Peter feels that what he is experiencing is strange, seeing that his gender is just floating and can't give him the space to realize his mistakes. Jung (1961) citing from Freud's opinion states that a person's problems can affect his psychology. Peter's unstable desire for sexual attraction can lead to him being of the same sex. Peter's interest in Mizzy is also recognized by his friends because beauty itself is manifested in Mizzy.

Queer for you, boy, alone in the world, as if you were a gender unto yourself. Peter has a dark tingling running through his blood, an intoxicating shot of embarrassment—finally, something illicit...he is briefly, terribly in love with Mizzy, with Mizzy himself... (Cunningham, 2010, p.83)

While for Mizzy, the representation of his homosexual expression can be seen since his childhood. Mizzy who is a lonely child at home since childhood because their middle-

aged parents are getting busy with their work so they can't accompany Mizzy to play at home. Mizzy is 10 years old and his mother is 60 years old, his mother is very busy with work and at that age, educating young children has not been optimal. Mizzy is always lonely at home. The distrust of Mizzy always made him uncomfortable in living his life until he grew up.

This triggers an inappropriate psychosexual development in the phallic stage. Where at this stage psychosexual development is expected to understand the identification of his sexual identity correctly. While his brother also rarely gets attention because they are also busy with their own activities. ... *The girls came when they could, but they were starting lives of their own.* (Cunningham, 2010, p.43). Rebecca, Julie, and Rose have started their own lives outside the city so ten-year-old Mizzy is left at home and alone with no one to play with.

Mizzy's reaction was instead to feel guilty by smiling at Peter after makes out with him. This thing for Mizzy was a practice he had grown up with his male friends, but he did it because all he thought about was makes out with Peter. *Mizzy pulls back and offers a charmingly abashed smile that has to have been practiced over the years. ...And yet. Is Mizzy offering himself?* (Cunningham, 2010, p.90). Peter who was surprised by Mizzy's attitude like that also did not give a response that rejected or disagreed with Mizzy's actions. Peter thinks Mizzy is offering himself to Peter.

Pleasant sensations are expected from a romantic relationship which will produce a delicious sensation. Satisfaction in carrying out several manifestations of sexual desire can make the relationship more harmonious. Sensation as in same- sex relationships is something that every couple wants. Peter and Mizzy do a romantic activity and receive a wonderful and also comfortable sensation that makes their relationship even closer. It can be seen from the data *The kiss didn't last long. It was passionate, passionate enough, but not exactly, not entirely, sexual. Can two men kissing have been comradely? That's how it felt, to Peter.* (Cunningham, 2010, p.137). Peter himself didn't think about what Mizzy has done to him, he enjoyed it. Although in himself he thought that it was wrong when two men having a romantic relationship.

Based on the quote above, it is greatly strengthened by the quote below which Mizzy admits is the beginning of his interest in Peter. Mizzy's id shows that he has liked Peter since he was small and often sits on Peter's lap. That feeling makes him comfortable with the same sex. Mizzy confessed that he had a passion for Peter since he was once in Peter's lap and was read the story of Barbarian which is a book for children's learning in America. *"I've had a thing for you since I was a little kid," ... "The very first time you came to the house. I sat in your lap and you read Babar to me. Did you think it was completely innocent?"* (Cunningham, 2010, p.137). Well since that Mizzy had a special feeling to Peter which is abnormal for common men.

2. Struggle of Homosexual

The struggle is done to gain independence from their views on their sexual desires. How Peter and Mizzy who have sexual desires change and love each other are going through various things and coming out with their unstable sexual preferences. Their struggle to

fulfill their different sexual desires is by coming out by admitting it to others because of the emotional closeness they feel to that person.

The strange feeling that Peter feels when he meets Mizzy appears as a response to his feelings which are still rejecting his homosexual desires. It is normal a stage for people who are still in the early stages of sexual attraction to the same sex. Peter wants to touch Mizzy's face which for him is not an erotic thing just about his interest. His desire to make physical contact with Mizzy by touching Mizzy's face considers his interest to be said to be a sexual attraction that he must fulfill. *Even so, he couldn't do that. Peter has a terrible urge to touch the boy's face. Just to touch it... (Cunningham, 2010, p.65).* This is because Peter can still control his sexual attraction logically.

The involvement of a person's emotional side in his partner allows someone to think clearly and use his logic rather than fulfilling what he calls pleasure. Although Mizzy is a figure he craves starting from his masculine physique which is very clearly visible when he is naked. Peter in this case still has enough logic and emotional side so that he has not been able to force his homosexual desires to be fulfilled. The relationship between him and Mizzy who is his brother-in-law is very unnatural, especially since they are both males.

Peter still doesn't want to have sex with Mizzy, but something is thrilling about downing a shot of vodka with another man who happens to be naked. There's the covert brotherliness of it, a locker-room aspect, the low, masculine, eroticized love-hum that's not so much about the flesh as it is about the commonality. (Cunningham, 2010, p.90)

As a form of partner affection, making out is included in the category of non-penetrative sex which serves to stimulate sensation in receptors located on or around the reproductive organs. Doing a romantic thing with a sense of comfort provides a guarantee for the harmony of the couple's relationship so that sexual desire can be influenced by how a person behaves with his partner. They are comfortable with doing it, even though they know that it is not normal or unusual to making out with another man. Furthermore the word "still" indicates that in the future Peter still can do a sexual relationship with Mizzy. The more romantic Peter and Mizzy together and the more daring to do things to fulfill their sexual desires, resulted in the closeness between them getting closer and based on mutual comfort.

In the homosexual developmental stage, the initial stage that must be passed is the identity confusion stage where at this stage the self-disclosure begins when the individual becomes aware that his thoughts, feelings, and behavior are contrary to the way he was taught to see himself (as heterosexual). In addition to the various views of heteronormativity that occur in society, it causes homosexuals to become restless about society's disapproval of themselves. Peter and Mizzy realize that they should not have a love for each other as lovers because it is wrong and can destroy their family. This anxiety is felt by Peter every time he should be angry with Mizzy for doing a romantic thing to him and it gives the impression that his homosexual desire is getting stronger, even though he still wants to resist that desire. *He says, "We can't. I'm probably the only man in the world you can't make out with. Well, me and your actual father."* (Cunningham, 2010, p.138). Peter says that he is like Mizzy's father who Mizzy can't love because it is

unjustified. This reason was chosen by Peter to reject Mizzy's love that was already so strongly felt.

For Mizzy, who admits that she has loved Peter since childhood, in his view, living together Peter as a couple is impossible. Mizzy dating with Peter by doing a romantic thing which he really craves, but he believes that he can't fully fulfill it because they really shouldn't be able to. His desire to making out with Peter on the beach at that time was considered natural and normal so that they could making out as comfortably as a heterosexual couple. *"I want to have kissed you on a beach. Don't be so dramatic."* Peter says, *"I don't think I can pretend it was nothing."* (Cunningham, 2010, p.140). Marrying Peter was also his wish but it was something they couldn't possibly achieve. Even so, Mizzy really loves Peter.

Mizzy's inability to resist keeping a secret relationship with Peter unnoticed by Rebecca makes him suffer greatly. Therefore he decides to run away from home because he is very with Rebecca who continues to make love to Peter, someone Mizzy loves very much. *..This boy, this new version of young Rebecca... this living work of art, is declaring his love.* (Cunningham, 2010, p.155) Mizzy, who is considered by Peter as a real representation of art and also the rebirth of a young Rebecca's body, actually declares his love for Peter.

Couples want to be together with their partners all the time without anyone bothering them. If this cannot be fulfilled, sometimes it will cause jealousy. Like the attitude described by Mizzy who is very jealous of Rebecca because she can't be with Peter as a couple. *"I was being defensive. For God's sake, Peter, we were about to go inside and have dinner with my sister. I couldn't exactly fall into your arms on your doorstep, could I?"* (Cunningham, 2010, p.155). Mizzy wants to cuddle with Peter like a heterosexual couple and not because Rebecca is getting in the way. Like when Mizzy wanted to make out with Peter but on the contrary, but Peter was making out with Rebecca. That's what actually prompted Mizzy to leave the house and that's what he said to Peter while saying goodbye.

While for Peter this moment is one of the part from their struggle. This is reinforced by Peter's statement about the gay character or soul in him which was recognized by him since childhood. He has gay DNA and his brother is also gay. As a teenager, Peter could feel the beauty of a man's body. Like seeing men swimming in the pool and a young waiter at Babbo. The beauty of the male body always has its sensation for Peter, so that is also one of the reasons for Peter's sexual desire for Mizzy. Peter, who feels he has gay DNA, becomes more and more influential as he grows up with the experiences he has.

Confessing the person closest to you by telling the problem you have seems to be something that is really needed by homosexual people. Peter himself, by telling Uta about his feelings for Mizzy, which were very deep and romantic. Wood (2021) argues that the coming out process provides a greater degree of control than one should have over who knows what, where, when, and how about one's sexuality – and what can be said and done in relation to it. Peter, like other homosexuals, certainly knows that by telling a story he might get a negative judgment, but he may also feel comfortable and relieve anxiety.

Peter was still confused about whether he should tell Rebecca the truth. A secret that only Peter and Mizzy knew was whether he would tell Rebecca the truth. The secret is what causes Mizzy to want to move and get out of the house. How Mizzy is jealous of Rebecca who can be with Peter and Peter who harbors a love for Mizzy. Another reason is of course because Peter likes Mizzy and always fantasizes about being able to live with her as a couple. Mizzy has the physical form and charisma that Peter really expects sexually.

What should he say to her, what does he want to say to her? That all her efforts to produce a sanctuary for her little lost brother were undone by her besotted husband, who drove Mizzy away not with love but by keeping a secret? (Cunningham, 2010, p.167) As the fulfillment of his homosexual desires, Peter chose Mizzy's body as an art form that represents his desire related to sexuality. How Peter liked Mizzy so much that he, who had already lived his married life with Rebecca, chose to end his marriage. Rebecca had grown old and unattractive to Peter. Peter will choose Mizzy as his path in life, even though Rebecca will leave him. Peter will tell the truth that he will choose Mizzy.

Peter chose to agree to Rebecca's request earlier. Peter and Rebecca are going their separate ways. He started to tell Rebecca the truth about why he had changed recently. Tells about what happened between him and Mizzy. They talk about how Mizzy affects Peter's sexual attraction. *He kisses Rebecca, lightly, on her chapped lips. "Yes," he says. "I think we could try. I do. Yes."* He begins to tell her everything that has happened (Cunningham, 2010, p.170). Peter brave to tell Rebecca that he loves Mizzy and it causes an uncomfortable for Peter to continuing married life with Rebecca.

The data above also explains that Peter dared to try to agree to Rebecca's request that they would separate and prove Peter's sexual interest in Mizzy as a real representation of his art. This is done by Peter as a form of struggle that sexual desire is unstable and permanent so that he can love Mizzy even though they are the same sex.

D. Conclusion

After conducting research findings and analysis, the representation of homosexual in the novel *By Nightfall* by Michael Cunningham is described by several experiences and expressions that influence sexual desire. Peter experienced a change in his sexual desire to become a gay lover after experiencing a series of events in his life that affected his psychosexual development. In a silent phase during his teenage years, Peter admits he has gay DNA like his older brother. This influenced his thoughts on sexual desire as an adult, in which he became a same-sex enthusiast. This is also influenced by the Id that Peter has, which is strong enough to defeat his superego. He decided to choose Mizzy in the end and left his wife.

Mizzy experienced problems of poor psychosexual development which affected him as an adult. At the phallic stage, Mizzy experiences inappropriate development because she has no assistance from her family to understand her sexuality. Mizzy, who is in the phallic stage, is always left alone at home and has no friends to play with because of his

busy family can not understand how his sexual identity. This affected him when he grew up as a teenager who had a desire for the same sex. This is also influenced by Mizzy's id which has liked Peter since childhood because he often sits on his lap, defeating his superego. So he chose to like Peter which is the same sex.

Their struggle to fulfill their sexual desire always faces a very fundamental problem, namely the heteronormativity view prevailing in society. For those with them living together as a homosexual couple will destroy their family. This is also exacerbated by the attitude of the people around them who may not agree with same-sex relationships. But for Peter and Mizzy if they don't struggle with their sexual desires as a couple they certainly won't be able to be happy. Peter, therefore, admits to Rebecca that he has a sexual attraction to Mizzy and is in a relationship as a couple. His struggle with coming out explains that coming out gives him greater control over himself and his sexuality.

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