

## **Id, Ego, and Superego of the Character Naoko in Haruki Murakami's Novel *Norwegian Wood***

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### **Abstract**

The paper aims to analyze the main character, Naoko, in Haruki Murakami's novel *Norwegian Wood* based on Freud's theory of id, ego, and superego. The type of data used in this study is qualitative data. The primary source used in this study is the *Norwegian Wood* novel written by Haruki Murakami. To obtain the data related to support the discussion, the library research and content analysis method is implemented. The data analysis approach used in this study is Freud's personality theory of the id, ego, and superego. The results of this study indicate that there are forms of id, ego, and superego in Haruki Murakami's *Norwegian Wood* novel which are reflected by the character, Naoko. Through the analysis of the id, ego, and superego, the personality, behavior, and internal struggles of Naoko can be explained.

**Keywords:** Haruki Murakami; *Norwegian Wood*; Character's Psychology; Sigmund Freud

### **1. Introduction**

Haruki Murakami is a Japanese author known for his surrealist, unique writing style, peculiar for a Japanese writer. (Burkeman, 2018). Millions of copies of his books had been sold worldwide as of 2014 (Brown, 2014). *Norwegian Wood*, a novel he wrote in 1987, is one of his most significant literary works. The aesthetic of the distinctive yet realist environment of *Norwegian Wood* is influenced by Kafka's work and The Beatles' controversial song of the same name (Tanner, 2020). The novel hit a nerve in Japanese culture, catapulting Murakami to international prominence (Lindquist, 2001). The novel is a sentimental tale of grief and sexual awakening, narrated in the perspective of a Japanese man named Toru Watanabe, who is unexpectedly overcome by grief after hearing an orchestral rendition of "*Norwegian Wood*" by the Beatles.

He remembers the 1960s when life-changing things occurred in his life. Kizuki and his girlfriend, Naoko, are Toru's high school best friends. Despite having to third wheel, Toru is beyond thrilled to be their warden. However, Kizuki's unexpected suicide distorts Toru's ideal situation. Kizuki's death make a significant impact on both Toru and Naoko. Since then, Toru notices death's presence everywhere, whilst Naoko believes a piece of herself has been eternally lost. Later throughout the story, both characters become closer, as they begin to spend their Sunday afternoon walking and conversing, yet their conversation never refers to Kizuki. Throughout the story, he develops relationships with two women, the soft but depressed Naoko and the extroverted, energetic Midori he met at university.

This paper focuses on the psychological analysis of Naoko's character. To understand and analyze the topic, Sigmund Freud's theory of id, ego, and superego is employed. The theory of

psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud strives to understand individuals based on their past experiences with an emphasis on consciousness, preconsciousness, and unconsciousness (Freud & Strachey, 1991). *Norwegian Wood*, all of Toru's decisions revolve around Naoko as the emotional center. (Tanner, 2020). Toru receives a letter from Reiko in which she informs him that Naoko had sneaked away into the woods and hung herself, despite having intentions to move in with Toru.

The explanation of Naoko's unexpected death remains a mystery in the novel. Thus, this paper aims to study Naoko's struggle with depression, utilizing Freud's theory of personality's theory of id, ego, and superego, to identify Naoko's internal struggles in the novel.

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1. Data and Data Sources**

The primary data for this paper is Vintage Book's English version of Haruki Murakami's novel *Norwegian Wood*, translated by Jay Rubin. The library research and content analysis approach are utilized to acquire data to support the discussion in order to identify the underlying intrinsic and psychological elements in the novel.

The library research method, according to Sugiyono (2008), is used in a specific study where the researcher collects data from books, manuscripts, and other literary forms relevant to the research object. Identifying and accessing sources that provide information or personal/expert opinion on a research subject is part of this process. (George, 2008).

### **2.2 Method of Data Collection**

The data collection is interpreted through content analysis by annotating and quoting relevant passages about the topic in the novel *Norwegian Wood* by Haruki Murakami.

### **2.3. Method of Analyzing Data**

To analyze the character Naoko from the novel *Norwegian Wood* by Haruki Murakami, a descriptive analysis through the lens of Freud's psychoanalysis theory, particularly using his theory of id, ego, and superego is used to present the results.

## **3. Result**

### **3.1. Main Characters of the Novel**

#### **3.1.1. Toru Watanabe**

Toru Watanabe is the novel's main character. He is described as reserved and insecure. Toru relocates from Kobe to Tokyo to attend university shortly after the suicide of Kizuki. Watanabe's viewpoint is shaped by distancing himself from people to avoid being hurt. Toru says he wants to live with "passion," but he only finds peace in loneliness. He wishes to learn how to be a decent man but is so

terrified of what it would imply in his life that he frequently fails to do what is right. Even in the future, he is still preoccupied with his longing for past moments and sentiments.

### **3.1.2. Naoko**

Naoko is Toru's initial love interest and childhood friend from Kobe. Naoko is described as beautiful, modest, shy, sensitive, and mysterious. Although Toru and Naoko form a close connection after meeting by coincidence in Tokyo, there are some issues they never address, like the suicide of Kizuki, Naoko's former boyfriend. Dealing with mental illness, Naoko undergoes a treatment in a sanatorium. In the quiet, unusual setting of the Ami Hostel, she begins her road to mental healing. Sometimes, Toru pays her visits and they engage in serious conversations. In the autumn of 1970, when she appears to be recovering from her problems, she hangs herself in the forest near the sanatorium.

### **3.1.3. Reiko Ishida**

Reiko is Naoko's friend at the sanatorium who develops friendships with Naoko and Toru. She has battled depression her entire life, causing her to "snap" and lose her mind multiple times. Reiko is described as joyful, talented, frequently vulgar, and provocatively humorous, with a pleasant, honest, pleasant demeanor but a dark, painful past. Despite her anxieties about living in the world and participating in life, Reiko is content and determined to share her gift of music with those she cares about.

### **3.1.4. Kizuki**

Kizuki is Toru's best friend and Naoko's former boyfriend who committed suicide during the final year of his high school. Kizuki can be considered a metaphorical character, that serves as a reminder to Naoko and Toru that people can commit suicide anytime.

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1. Naoko's Id Analysis**

The id, according to Freud, is the component of personality that is formed at birth and is the basis of physiological demands and desires, including aggression and libido (Carlson, 2010). The id operates on the pleasure principle, that demands a rapid gratifying of impulse and want. (Rycroft, 1968).

In the novel *Norwegian Wood*, Naoko's id is mostly represented by her sexual impulses and sexual encounter with Toru.

One of Naoko's most intense id is shown in Chapter 3, where Toru celebrates Naoko's 20<sup>th</sup> birthday in her apartment. Toru observes that Naoko talks more intensely than usual. However, Toru then later realizes that the topic of their conversation is nothing but trivial things, avoiding talking about painful topics, one of which is Kizuki.

It eventually dawned on me what was wrong: Naoko was taking great care as she spoke not to touch on certain things. One of these things was Kizuki, of course, but there was more than Kizuki. And though she had certain subjects she was determined to avoid, she went on endlessly and in incredible detail about the most trivial and insane things. (Murakami, 2000, p. 52)

However, as Toru reflects back on Naoko's conversation, he realizes that the communication block between them and the difficulty to express themselves become more serious. Toru told Naoko that he wants to go home, but Naoko does not listen and Toru let her talk herself out. Soon, however, Naoko stopped talking and cries.

Before I knew it, she had stopped talking [...] She has been trying to go on, but had come up against nothing. Something was gone now, and I was probably the one who had destroyed it. [...] One big tear spilled from her eye, [...] Once that first tear broke free, the rest followed in an unbroken stream. (Murakami, 2000, p. 53)

They both sit for a while and Toru waited for Naoko to finish crying. However, when it ends, to conceal this sadness, Naoko decided to have sex with Toru instead.

I slept with Naoko that night. Was it the right thing to do? That I cannot tell. Even now, almost twenty years later I can't be sure. [...] She was in a heightened state of tension and confusion, and she made it clear that she wanted me to give her release. (Murakami, 2000, pp. 53-54)

Later on after the sexual encounter, Naoko refuses to talk to Toru at all, leaving Toru confused. A week later, she disappears and moves out of her apartment. In this interaction, it is prevalent that her id outweighs her ego and superego. The pain that she tries to conceal is outweighed by her impulsive sexual desire instead.

#### 4.2. Naoko's Ego Analysis

The ego's reality principle allows the individual to postpone satisfying current demands while still functioning efficiently in the real world. (Schacter, 2011). After the death of Kizuki and witnessing her sister hang herself, Naoko's ego is defending her superego's desire for suicide caused by her depression and sadness. This ego is reflected by the defense mechanism she created in order to overcome her pain.

At the beginning of Chapter 3 of the novel *Norwegian Wood*, when Toru mentioned one of his memories of when he deepens his friendship with Naoko during his freshman year, Naoko displays the characteristics of the defense mechanism of repression. The defensive mechanism, according to Freud, ensures that what is disagreeable to the conscious mind. (Gregory, 2004) Both Toru and Naoko suppress their feelings, emotions, and speech to avoid talking about the past.

We talked about whatever came to mind – our daily routines, our colleges; each a little fragment that led nowhere. We said nothing at all about the past. And mainly, we walked – and walked, and walked. (Murakami, 2000, p. 35)

I can't seem to recall what we talked about then. Nothing special, I would guess. We continued to avoid any mention of the past and rarely mentioned Kizuki. We could face each other over coffee cups in total silence. (Murakami, 2000, p. 52)

This ego, however, created a false sense of security as according to psychoanalytic theory, repression plays an important factor in many mental illnesses. (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1974).

Another form of defense mechanism created by Naoko's ego is illustrated by Toru in Chapter 3 of the novel, when Naoko turned twenty.

There was something strange about Naoko's becoming twenty. I felt as if the only thing that made sense, whether for Naoko and me, was to keep going back and forth between eighteen and nineteen. (Murakami, 2000, p. 50) [10]

In this passage, Toru recalls both his and Naoko's desire of wanting to stay in their late teens forever. Toru and Naoko's grief toward the suicide of Kizuki is so profound that they wish to remain frozen in time, rather than move on from grief and loss. This kind of behaviour is what Freud defines as regression (Freud & Strachey, 1991) [5], where Naoko redirects her ego a past persona rather than dealing with her unwanted urges differently.

### 4.3. Naoko's Superego Analysis

Naoko's form of superego lies in her desire of ending her life. Naoko has suffered from trauma as a result of her guilt over not knowing about Kizuki's suicide, which continues to assault her consciousness and eventually leads to somatic problems. (Miah, 2020).

Her trauma can also be speculated rooting in seeing her sister's suicide. Her guilt can be depicted in some of Naoko's letters and conversations:

When I'm lonely at night, people talk to me from the darkness. They talk to me the way trees moan in the wind at night. Kizuki; my sister; they talk to me like that all the time. They're lonely too, and looking for someone to talk to. (Murakami, 2000, p. 309)

“Nobody knew why she killed herself. The same as with Kizuki. Exactly the same. She was seventeen, too, and she never gave the slightest hint she was going to commit suicide. She didn't have a note, either. Really, it was exactly the same, don't you think?” (Murakami, 2000, p. 192)

“I was the one who found my sister dead,”[...]I took in every detail. Her face, too. I looked at her face. I couldn't help it. [...] So I just stood there, spacing out maybe for five or six minutes, a total blank, like something inside me had died.” (Murakami, 2000, pp. 193-195)

Throughout the conversations in *Norwegian Woods*' Chapter 5, on pages 191-195, Naoko poured her life story and background to Toru, revealing the trauma she had back before Kizuki's suicide. After her sister's suicide, and knowing that her father's brother also has a history of suicide, she accepts the fact that the thought of death and suicide is in her blood.

The Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute highlight Freud's views on suicide in his book *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), and *The Ego and the Id* (1923):

In melancholia, if there is conflict toward a lost object, the ego splits and part of the ego identifies with the abandoned object, causing anger for the object to remain and be directed at the

person's ego. In this manner, the person can assault himself or even kill himself to kill the confusing object. Later, in *The Ego and the Id*, Freud described a second mechanism for suicide in which the superego becomes so hostile to the ego that it abandons it and allows it to die. (Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute, 2014)

As previously stated, in the instance of Naoko, the lost/abandoned object can be represented by Kizuki and her sister, and her remorse over not knowing the reason for their unexpected suicide. Naoko's ego, while combating her desire to commit suicide by going to the sanatorium and receiving as much support as she can, eventually fails to withstand her superego and surrenders any progress toward overcoming her depression.

The conflict between Naoko's ego and superego may be seen in Reiko and Toru's discussion regarding Naoko when Toru requested Reiko to explain everything that led to Naoko's suicide.

Naoko seemed to be in such great spirits, [...] She looked a lot healthier than I had imagined and she was smiling and joking around and talking in a much more normal way than when I had last seen her. [...] Naoko told me that what she'd really like was for the two of us to get out of the sanatorium and go live together somewhere. (Murakami, 2000, p. 371)

In this conversation, Reiko portrays a happy and hopeful Naoko. However, it is apparent in the story that this happiness that Naoko portrayed is a facade to cover the fact that she is planning to commit suicide. As mentioned by Freud, Naoko's superego has become so harsh in its attack on the ego that it abandons the ego.

## 5. Conclusions

The analysis of Naoko's id, ego, and superego using Freud's theory of personality leads to a conclusion that Naoko is dealing with several internal conflicts. Naoko's id is primarily expressed through her sexual desires. The ego part of Naoko's character can be seen in her defense mechanisms, such as repression and regression, that she develops to manage her melancholia. Her superego component can be explored at the end when her ego can no longer battle Naoko's melancholia and decides to end it by committing suicide.

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